

How sports is like religion

Michael Serazio
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With organized religion in decline in the U.S., what is filling the void? asked Michael Serazio. The Baltimore Ravens. The Red Sox. The Miami Heat. And so on. Even in our increasingly secular country, people still crave the sense of tribal belonging and mass transcendence that they once found in churches and temples. And “if you look hard at sports, you can’t help but see the contours of religion.” Today, the cathedrals are called Wrigley Field, Madison Square Garden, and the Superdome; there, fans with allegiances that often date to their forefathers fill the pews, don the revered team’s sacred vestments, and melt into a collective identity. At the game, at bars, or in living rooms, we experience ecstatic exaltation when “we” triumph, and collectively mourn our losses. We even imbue relics like players’ jerseys, autographs, and Curt Schilling’s bloody sock with iconic significance. Through sports, we fill in the empty places in our lives. We identify with something larger than ourselves. The salvation our devotion provides may not be everlasting—but it sure looks like religion to me.