

Jesus was a good sport

WORDS Grant Morgan

If you were a principal at a school and Jesus applied for a teaching job, what subject would you give him?

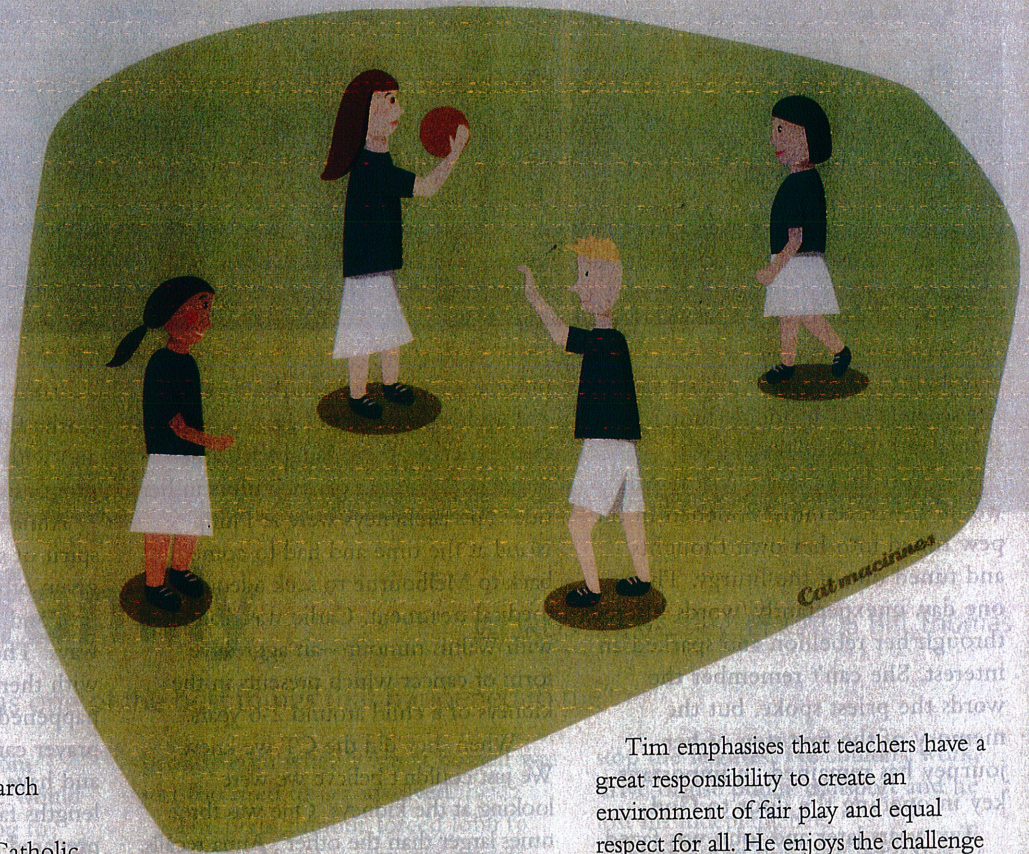
Religious education is the obvious choice, but what about literature, or drama? He certainly knows how to hold an audience. Or perhaps a completely different subject, one where his students could learn from direct experience, a subject sometimes overlooked as a way of teaching Christian values.

Tim Lynch teaches physical education (PE) at a Brisbane primary school. The 30-year-old is also studying towards a PhD on Queensland's newly released Health & PE (HPE) curriculum. Through his research he encountered the work of Thomas Groome, a modern Catholic educationalist. Tim sees a connection between Groome's list of eight Catholic values and the aims of the HPE curriculum. It affirms his teaching approach: students can be taught Christian values through participating in PE and sport. Tim wants this connection to be acknowledged by more people.

But how do Christian values relate to playing sport? Tim believes that all life experiences have the potential to lead us to God, that we learn best through movement and that sport models life. Students who participate in sport are more resilient to life's hardships. They learn how to celebrate victories in a humble way, to be

gracious in defeat, to accept that some things are out of their control.

'Sport has a spiritual element to it', Tim says. He explains that students can experience this through participation, where they are so involved in the play they are 'carried beyond' their physical bodies, but it can also be through spectating. Some elite sportspeople display humility by acknowledging God after their performance. Australian cricketer Matthew Hayden is a good example; he crosses himself whenever he scores a century. Other athletes kiss the ground or look to the heavens after crossing the finish line.



Tim emphasises that teachers have a great responsibility to create an environment of fair play and equal respect for all. He enjoys the challenge of modifying games and rules so everyone can join in. 'Make it fun, think through the mind of a child', he says. The focus of fiercely competitive students can be redirected towards cooperating and sharing. Giving your best is not only about trying your hardest, but about being open to change so everyone can contribute and develop their talents.

In the end, Tim believes it's about the transfer of learning. If students are happy and healthy, they respect themselves. If they respect themselves, they are more likely to respect their team-mates, the opposition and the umpire. They will carry the values they learn on the sporting field with them to the classroom, and home to their families.