

## **IN MY FAVOR**

*Manuel A. Alindogan, Jr*

Physical education classes were never my turf. In fact, to move away from the physically demanding classes, I opted to take up Recreation Quiet courses. If I had my own way, I would have wanted to pursue a quiet PE class during college as I was neither physically inclined or indulged which I am until now. Perhaps I could trace this physical weakness to my childhood. As a child, I was so car sick that throwing up became the norm every time my family traveled to Sorsogon from Bulacan for our annual summer holidays beginning the third grade. The roads that snaked across upland regions were all challenging, beating me to intermittent bouts of fatigue throughout the entire journey. It must have been my weak lungs that triggered nausea and vomiting according to my mom. It was genetic.

Since I could not complete my PE requirements with quiet courses only, I took up table tennis and folk dancing under compulsion. Even then, I had troubles with muscle and eye coordination when serving and hitting the ball so it would not fall off the table or fall on the wrong table quadrant. It was mainly a matter of control and speed. Dancing was even more complicated due to steps that should always be in sync with the rhythm and body movement full of precise grace and magical candor.

In our PE hall that had wooden but sparkling, shiny floor, a creaky sound was heard and felt by students each time a dance class was in motion. I thought the building would collapse with the sheer number of students playing table tennis, doing ballroom dancing and jazz, shooting and spiking ball, and showcasing gymnastics. Fortunately, the structure had, for the most part, endured the passage of time and technology. From this facility and period emerged the brightest star of them all, named Lydia de Vega, who was practically unknown and hidden on campus except for PE professors who took her under their wing and developed her into a larger-than-life persona. Apart from the same school, the parallelism between me and Lydia ends in purely geographical terms. I am a native of Obando, which used to be a part of Meycauayan, where she is from. Lydia is shapely sculpted and toned with a most-sought-after physique that became the barometer of succeeding female athletes. I was skinny as a child and now nearing my senior year, is a cross between nutritionally thin and tender muscularity despite my more-than-average height. I could not imagine myself being an athlete as my perception is shrouded by the fact that athletes, more than anything else, are physical beings. Probably in another space and time, I could become a sportsman by subjugating my body to excruciating pain to pull off through, over, and past bodily limits. However, my threshold of pain, at the moment, is quite low and I do not see this condition changing any time soon.

Since table tennis was my very first PE university class, my family decided to put up a table exclusively devoted to ping pong for some neighbors and us to play in our yard. Summer saw us all sweaty, flexing our muscles, agility, and mental aptitude for this game in various periods of the day, but usually starting in the late mornings and resuming just a little prior to dusk. Mostly in these competitions, I felt an intense desire to win at all cost, utilizing hand, table, and ball strategies to defeat opponents but never won any. I must admit that I am not fit for any strenuous programming and manipulation. Athletes follow a certain mold but such molds are both generic

and specific to suit the best sport genre. Would it be safe to state that winning is destiny-bound? Preparations matter a lot in any sport competition, that begins in physical and mental nutrition, and culminates in spiritual and moral quotient but it is common knowledge that even the best athletes fail and whatever premise we put forward for the loss is never enough to compensate for any form of comprehension. This universe conspiracy theory manifested in an interschool bowling competition I joined as a faculty member of a school of theology in a bowling lane at the intersection between Roosevelt and Congressional Avenue past EDSA many years ago, in the late 90s. I was compelled to join to express my solidarity with students, colleagues, and administration. It was more of benevolence from my end. It turned out that medals would be distributed after the contest to my utmost ignorance. This was my initiation into bowling. No idea on how the game was played. Neither about scoring and how does one win. From all mother of surprises, I was proclaimed the second runner-up over more than a dozen participants. I brought the medal home and from time to time, would caress it as a token for this achievement but years after would be lost in Ondoy's deluge. The only way to prove this victory is by scavenging photos in the admin office if such documents still exist. For now, I still fully trust my memory.

I just came to the event empty-handed physiologically and psychologically but the heavenly bodies decided in my favor. The feeling was euphoric but fleeting. Who would have thought that a frail being like me would end up a winner in the most unexpected period, place, and program? Pre-pandemic times saw me and two close friends bowling again merely for fun in either a big mall or a smaller center in Rizal province over scheduled weekends. I could throw 2 strikes at the most per game but often fell short of the scores of my friends. I never won. My singular past victory was tempered by favorable circumstances that God permitted, which no longer holds true today.

It cannot be denied that one's theological leaning has the most profound impact on a beginning, a mid-level, and a seasoned athlete. It starts with an audible calling but not hallucinatory, a calculated direction, and a lifelong equipping to fulfill the mission, believing that God is on the side of sportsmen and women over evolutionary game dynamics and practice. This conceptual framework is based on the notion that success in its diverse implementations must be willed by God and all other factors are subordinate, including monetary gains. The irresistible calling must be omnipresent as without this element, giving up becomes an early option even with finances as the prime consideration of most novice and professional athletes since money merely brings limited satisfaction. Money cannot buy vocation.

What comes into this play between God and athletes? Probing into God's mindset is quite tough and could lead to all sorts of cultic interpretations but images such as an interdependent spirit, a humble network, and a palpable confidence must not be ignored. In this sense, favor becomes a reality to anyone and everyone, be it an athlete or not.

I have not engaged in any sport recently due to quarantine restrictions but swimming is at the top of my mind. In freshman high school, I got ill because of my weak lungs that I was prescribed to take Sustagen, a food supplement that tasted more like bitter liquid during my time. Until now, I suffer from weak lungs periodically although I presently live in a mountainous terrain with pockets of thin forests where I usually walk for an early morning exercise routine. In time, I look forward

to swimming, bowling, and table tennis again. Never mind winning. I was already a winner. No need to prove this all over again.