



The Holy See

REETING OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO ITALIAN TENNIS AND PADEL FEDERATION

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Saturday, 6 May 2023*

[[Multimedia](#)]

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I thank the President of the Italian Federation for his words, and I greet all of you who are taking part in the first International Tennis and Padel Symposium. You have come from over thirty countries, with a good representation of instructors, children and young people. The two days of your meeting will focus precisely on the area of education and formation. A tennis or padel instructor is not only a teacher of techniques, but is also, and I would say above all, an “educator”. I encourage you to continue to give attention to this educational dimension. Today I would like to offer you a simple reflection based on your own practical realization, as athletes, that a good game results from the right balance of offence and defence. The same is true for the work of education: it calls for the right combination of risk and prudence. How do we make this marriage between risk and prudence? It is not easy!

A good tennis or padel player – and this is true for any sport – cannot always simply attack or take risks; he or she must also know how to mount a defence. Certain qualities, and much practice, are needed for both these things. A teacher who concentrates solely on offence, or on defence, leaves the student “exposed” on the other flank. We do well to reflect on this comparison, and the similarities between athletic training and the education of the person.

A good educator knows how to balance risk and prudence. We take a risk, for example, when we

allow children to have a new experience that they have never had before. We do not know how they will react, but we believe the experience will help them to grow. This is what it means to take a risk. Needless to say, the risk should always be proportionate and every child accompanied. He or she should feel free, but at the same time not completely alone. Those parents or educators who want to protect children by trying to prevent any unexpected eventuality, or to fix every problem that may come up, do not help children to grow. That is not prudence, but rather a combination of fear of reality and a certain possessiveness with regard to the child. It is not good.

True prudence, on the other hand, is like a good defence; it is always positive, never negative. Defence, we can say, is another form of offence. Prudence in the work of education is essential for evaluating situations properly, keeping in mind the potential of each boy or girl. Educators should especially train young people to persevere, not to give up, and to try their best to respond to even the most difficult shots, since a quick and agile response can lead to a recovery that will catch the other player off guard, because it comes unexpected.

Then too, I would mention what I consider most important of all: the fact that tennis is a game; padel is a game. Their educational value lies precisely in the way the game is played. Everyone should be encouraged to enjoy sport for its own sake, for the excitement, enjoyment and recreation it brings. This is the gratuitousness, the spirit of gratuitousness with which we must play. Competition is healthy if it is all part of a “game”. Once competition becomes everything, various forms of self-assertion take over and end up ruining sports, so that it becomes no longer educational, but exactly the opposite. There is one thing that in sport -- whether in tennis or padel or any sport -- we must never lose: amateurism, the amateur dimension. When we engage in sport for other interests, not for the gratuitousness of amateurs, we lose its beauty, we lose its “symphonic” dimension and sport becomes a business. Always keep this in mind: let my tennis, let my padel, always be amateur, amateur; don't lose this dimension.

Dear leaders, teachers and students, thank you for being here in such great numbers. I encourage you to keep pressing forwards, always balancing risk and prudence, offence and defence! From my heart, I bless all of you and your families. And I ask you, please, to remember to say a prayer for me.