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Vatican comes up to bat with own cricket team, may field female squad

Carol Glatz Catholic News Service | Oct. 15, 2013
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The Vatican is about to launch its own cricket club and will field a women's squad if it finds enough players.

"It may be that instead of watching players who go out to play with cricket caps on, we're going to have a series who play with veils on as they bat up," said John McCarthy, a former cricket player and Australia's ambassador to the Holy See.

"We are looking for Sri Lankan, Indian and Pakistani sisters who have played cricket, and if they're found, they certainly will be invited to join the cricket club. There is certainly no intention not to have a women's cricket team at the Vatican," he told reporters Tuesday.

The New South Wales' native came up with the idea for an official Vatican Cricket Club before he began his post at the Vatican in 2012.

The idea, he said, is to field a team of international players who are priests, seminarians, religious and lay Catholics working or studying in Rome or at the Vatican.

There are many seminarians in Rome who not only want to play cricket while they're here, he said, but they also want to give the game an added ecumenical or interreligious dimension.

"There are many players who are here in Rome who would like to see, for instance, the Vatican play the Church of England at cricket," he said.

Cricket, which is played in innings with a small ball and flat bat, is the national game of England. It had been introduced to the British colonies, like the West Indies and India, and spilled over into bordering nations.

Because it is so popular in such a diverse array of countries -- like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, South Africa and Australia -- cricket "covers many religions and ethnic groups," the ambassador said.

Cricket, therefore, can offer a unique opportunity for positive interreligious encounters with groups that are not as devoted to other sports, he said.

"The Vatican could play the Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Tamils," he said. A Vatican interreligious tourney would generate a lot of interest with those who are "faithful to the church and people faithful to cricket in various areas of the world."

McCarthy said the Vatican Cricket Club is being established in cooperation with the Pontifical Council for Culture.

A competitive cricket series will kick off in mid-November and be similar to the Clericus Cup soccer tournament, which involves teams of priests and seminarians studying in Rome. The ambassador hopes that next year, a team representing the Vatican could begin playing others next year.

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