

What Does It Mean To Play For an "Audience of One"?



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Decades ago, Athletes in Action—and subsequently other organizations—began talking at camps to collegiate and professional level athletes about playing with an “Audience of One.” The phrase is intended to help Christian players remember that everywhere in life—even in a stadium full of people—“we live and move and have our being in Him,” and it’s His pleasure we must pursue above all else.

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Easier said than experienced, of course, since it's normal to get caught up in the evaluation of the many audiences that surround us each day—the friends, family, coaches, social media followers, fans, etc.—but ultimately, there's only One whose opinion about us really matters.

More recently, Carson Wentz created his own “AO1 Foundation” whose mission is to “demonstrate the love of God by providing opportunities and support for the less fortunate and those in need.” He and other members of the Philadelphia Eagles made a video to highlight the phrase and how it motivates them to live.

“What does AO1 mean to us? It means that we are playing for an Audience of One. When the lights go on and all eyes are fixed on us, our eyes are fixed on Him: Jesus, the creator of the universe. It's not just a slogan, it's a lifestyle. Living for Him, playing for Him, and giving Him all the glory. Win, lose, or draw—I play for an Audience of One. What about you?”



Like any well-tread and popular Christian phrase, through the years AO1 has come to mean many different things to many different kinds of players, all at different levels of Christian maturity and understanding.

Here's what competing mindful of an "Audience of One" does and doesn't mean:

It DOESN'T mean playing "for God," as though we are performing for Him, trying to earn His applause or favor by being successful in our competition.

It DOES mean playing "with God," constantly aware of His presence in the midst of the game, competing completely focused on the job at hand while also completely aware that He is everywhere with us.

It DOESN'T mean receiving some sort of additional competitive blessing that others on the field cannot access. God as your primary audience does not mean He is predisposed to make sure you win or always come out on top of the competition.

It DOES mean that no matter what happens on the scoreboard in a particular game, God's kingdom priorities keep the game in perspective, allowing you to be disappointed in a loss and excited in a win without losing sight of other priorities.

It DOESN'T mean you don't care what anyone else thinks about you or that you suddenly become immune to the criticism of parents, coaches, fans, or others.

It DOES mean that the criticism of others stays in its place and can be absorbed into the fuller identity categories declared true about you by God. Your inevitable failures as a competitor have no bearing whatsoever on your true identity as a child of God, and this truth alone allows a person to exhale in the midst of competitive stress.

It DOESN'T mean we you'll never struggle with in game anxiety or that you become immune to the effects of adrenaline and circumstantial stress, nor does it mean you cannot feed off the crowd or ride the momentum created by game situations.

It DOES mean that since you have access to a motivation that transcends the

immediate circumstances of the game, you can also experience a peace that transcends understanding in the midst of whatever the game brings. You can learn to choose to let God's presence override the immediate presence of everyone and everything else, winning or losing, playing or sitting, and give maximum effort no matter what is happening.

It DOESN'T mean that you are perfect in your performance, words, or lifestyle, nor that you have to acquire the victory of some standard of living before you can claim playing for an Audience of One. It certainly doesn't mean that claiming it before competition makes you immune to sinful behavior during the game itself.

It DOES mean that before you declare it to the world through a body tattoo or writing it on your clothes, that you should have attempted to understand what it means theologically. It means that AO1 moves from being a cliché—a mantra you heard someone else say that you repurpose on game day—to actually working through what it means to walk humbly with God moment-by-moment, day-by-day, trusting Him in spite of our imperfections and failures along the way.

It DOESN'T mean that you no longer care what your coaches, teammates, school or organization think about you or your performance, or that you're not fully committed to your team.

It DOES mean you can play with complete freedom because only God's opinion of you really matters. Jesus made this plain in Luke 12 when he exhorted his listeners to rearrange their fear priorities, saying, "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear Him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell."

It DOESN'T mean that if you write "AO1" somewhere on your body or uniform during the game that you will receive special in-game powers.

It DOES mean that you might write a focal point on your body or uniform somewhere to help you remember who you are playing "with" all game long.

It DOESN'T mean that we never feel lousy about ourselves when we perform poorly and make critical mistakes in games.

It DOES mean we have the opportunity to play with a genuine freedom that comes from finding our identity not primarily in being an athlete, but in being a child of God, adopted into the family of the One we know is always watching. His love toward us depends on who He is, not on our performance; therefore, this identity never changes for you, no matter how you're portrayed in other's imaginations.

[Click here](#) to learn more about playing with an Audience of One and the Athletes in Action Ultimate Training Camp

