

Spring 2017

back pages

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF CHRISTIANS IN SPORT



LOOK WHAT GOD DID WHEN STUDENTS MET UP TO PRAY

INSIDE

Never too old to make a difference
Lycra, it turns out, is a necessary evil
Gospel growth in the beautiful game

WHAT'S INSIDE

Welcome to your new Back Pages magazine. Thank you for all the ways you support the work. We hope what you read inside will inform and inspire you. This issue highlights how God is at work among students, that age is no barrier to sports mission and much more.

Ed Mezzetti
Back Pages Editor
City of York Athletic Club,
St Thomas' Church, York



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Our Mission

To reach the world of sport for Christ.

Our Vision

Christians everywhere living out their faith in sports clubs and teams.

Churches everywhere engaging with their local sports communities.

Sportspeople everywhere having the opportunity to hear the good news of Jesus.

Key: Youth Student Adult Elite International Church



For more information on who we are and how we can help you, please get in touch. You can also find us on social media by searching for Christians in Sport.

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Registered Charity number for England and Wales 1086570. Registered Charity number for Scotland SC045299.
Company number 4146081.

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

When I first became a Christian, a friend who had a great influence on my decision said it was a very good thing that I was excited about following Christ.

He then added that it would be even better if I was more excited about following Christ in 10 years' time. They were words of wisdom that I've not forgotten over the last 30 years - or three sets of 10!

So your task, for whatever sets of 10 you have before you, is to pray, play and say together with all those who have the same God-given passion to serve Him in His world of sport.

That's why, in this magazine, there's story after story of sportspeople sharing their faith in a range of different places where God has placed them. They were born to play, born to use their God-given gifts in sport - people like Karen Bessent, who is living for Jesus as a parent and member



“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works”

Photo: Nottingham Trent University

In chapter two of his letter to the church in Ephesus, having explained the radical nature of the free gift of grace, Paul goes on to write this in verse 10: “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (NIV)

Having been saved by grace, we are called to take the talents God has given us and to put them to His use. We do this knowing that God has created us with our abilities, and all along He was preparing us to know Him and use our skills to serve Him and our neighbours in this world.

Isn't this remarkable? The God who made the galaxies is the God who made you and I able to play sport. He's the one who gave you the joy of competing alongside your teammate and opponent.

at Tyne United Rowing Club.

However, note this: there is no retirement mentioned in Paul's mandate. That's why Dickie Bird's story is so inspiring. He represents so many great Christians in sport. He will never retire from being 'God's handiwork' and will never lose his passion 'to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do'.

However many sets of 10 you and I have left in us, let us keep using our sporting passions and gifts to serve God in the world of sport. Never retire!

Graham Daniels
General Director
Director at Cambridge United FC,
St Andrew the Great, Cambridge





Christians in sport sharing life and the gospel with teammates. Tag us in your sporting photos on social media, we'd love to see them!

GOD'S WORK IN THE WORLD OF SPORT

January - March 2017

Christians in sport are reaching out with the gospel where God has placed them. Here's a collection of recent stories we hope encourage and inspire you.

It has been great to see God at work in my friend Charlotte who came to Club La Santa in Lanzarote with us while I was on the Academy. She told me: "I truly feel that Lanzarote was the spark that triggered my ongoing niggling questions and yearning to learn more about the Christian faith." After praying and really investing in Charlotte, it was such a joy for me to hear this, to now be reading through the Bible with her and to find out that she's been to church and involved with the Christian Union at her university this year!

Holly Phipps, Sheffield University Athletics Club

Five years ago I attended Sports Plus in Brecon. I then went back to Romania and started a team which has now grown to two teams, and we hope to run a second sports camp this year due to our continuing work with young people. We ran our first camp four years ago with the help of Christians in Sport and now we are running it independently with a team of local leaders. Praise God for the growth of the work in Romania.

Manu, Romania



Ashleigh McQuoid hosting the Sports Quiz at Edgewell Christian Centre.

Edgewell Christian Centre in Prudhoe, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, kicked off the new year with the Sports Quiz. The humble-sized hall was filled with good food, fresh faces and a great atmosphere. The teams loved the variety of quiz questions and enjoyed having playful banter with their opponents, as well as having the opportunity to network with fellow sportspeople. At half time, the "Born to Play" videos opened up some excellent conversations, with many of the guests feeling inspired to look into the gospel through the eyes of sport. One guest said that he had never been to an event like it, and that the gospel had completely changed his way of thinking. Since then,



he has asked for a Bible and is looking more into the identity of Jesus. Praise God for His innumerable blessings – may He continue to change lives in the North East. Bring on the next Sports Quiz!

Ashleigh and Lauren McQuoid, Edgewell Christian Centre

On Saturday 4th February, young sportspeople from across Northern Ireland gathered at Sports Plus Xtra. It was a great chance to catch up with guys who have previously attended camps as well as give others an insight into what they are all about. We looked at the ‘Call of the Captain’, applying the teaching of the Great Commission in Matthew 28 to our sporting context. This was followed by discussion groups on disappointment, opponents and officials, nerves and banter. It was class to engage with the young people, discussing how we can glorify God through all these challenges.

Peter Ferguson, Hillsborough, Northern Ireland

I spoke to the social secretary before my first social to let him know I was a Christian and did not believe in excessive drinking, but made it clear I still wanted to be involved. Soon, most of the rugby club knew I was a Christian and said they really respected me for still coming to socials. It also gave me chance to talk about my faith. In the pub, one of the other freshers said “you’ve inspired me to stop drinking”. I was so surprised, especially in that environment, but it was during our mission week at the uni so I invited him to the event the next day. He was very



Cardiff University Rugby Club

drunk, so I thought he’d forget about it, but I texted him and he came. He really enjoyed it and also came to the Christians in Sport quiz and a church service.

James Jennings, Cardiff University Rugby Club

More than 250 people attended our ‘More than a Game’ event at AFC Bournemouth’s Vitality Stadium. We had a video on the big screen and then I interviewed ex-players Linvoy Primus and Cyrille Regis about football and faith. We also heard from a Bournemouth player who is a Christian and had a question and answer session. It was a significant time for many. No one went away without hearing that they need Jesus.

Andy Rimmer, AFC Bournemouth club chaplain

Get in touch

We’d love to hear your stories of how God is working in your sports clubs and teams. Share yours by emailing ed.mezzetti@christiansinsport.org.uk

HOW WILL YOU USE THE SPORTS MISSION PACK?

Did you know that more than 10 million people play sport each week in the UK across 150,000 clubs? It is a striking statistic and we are passionate about helping the church reach these sportspeople with the gospel.

This is exactly what the new Sports Mission Pack is designed to do. Available at sportsmissionpack.co.uk, it includes our latest multimedia sports quiz, plans for school assemblies and lessons, guides on how to run sports tournaments, a new evangelistic film and much more.

Interest continues in the free pack, which follows on from the 2016 version, and there are stories aplenty of how it is being used.

Pat Cooke-Rogers is clear how the pack has helped her.

“In my work as a triathlon and ultra-distance race chaplain, I have used the Sports Mission Pack as well as other videos from Christians in Sport many times.

“At middle and long distance triathlons, I run a prayer meeting the day before the race. Attendees include athletes, supporters, volunteers and local people. They might be from any faith or no faith, familiar with a church setting or from outside the church.

“I find the video clips perfect for that kind of gathering - relevant, direct, up-to-date in format and offering encouragement.”

Danbury Mission Church, near Chelmsford, showed England versus France in the Six Nations before hosting the Sports Quiz for 60 people.

Organiser **Robert Goodwin** said: “The evening went very well. About a third were non-Christians, and mostly had not been to a church event before. Two or three came to the open house service the following day.

“A good proportion who came were young people - much more than normal quizzes. We had a great tie-breaker question between three teams for last place. As we had wooden spoons for last place, we decided that the worst answer won!

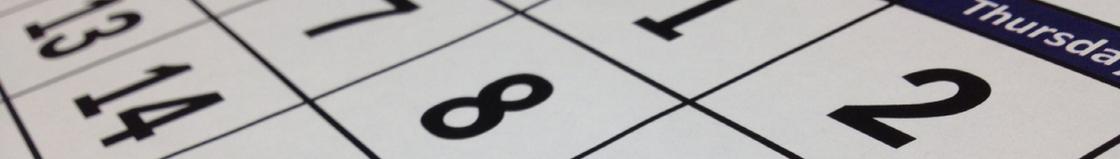
“Having food at the interval went well. We had it after the talk, allowing space for discussion.”



Thriving Life Church in Newtownards, Northern Ireland got creative when they held a Sports Quiz

Download

Reach sportspeople in your community by downloading the FREE Sports Mission Pack now at sportsmissionpack.co.uk



VISION CASTING NOT PROGRAMME FILLING

If you love Jesus and your sport, they are two passions you relish putting together. But how do you ensure that sports mission is a way of life and not just one more ‘thing’ your church ‘does’?

That’s a danger Deeside Christian Fellowship leader Dougie Simpson is only too aware of.

“I am really keen not to make sports mission another programme for the church. We do an awful lot of that as it is. I really want people to see that this is just bringing a bit of focus to what they are already doing as Christian sportspeople.”

In the past, the church had mistakenly tried to get people to fit into their programmes rather than seeing where and how they could use their God-given gifts and skills. But filling in a Christians in Sport survey, which highlights the numbers and types of sportspeople in a church, has helped Deeside change that. The church, which has up to 400 people attending on a Sunday, had 17 sports players aged under 18 and 26 over 18. There were also 15 parents of sportspeople, three coaches and one official.



Dougie (pictured) said: “As a church we have been involved with Christians in Sport for about 11 years. We have run Pray Play Say groups and sent leaders to

Sports Plus camps. But we have not really grasped the vision in terms of trying to reach our local world of sport.

“I wanted to find out things like the number of clubs and people playing sport, so that we could get a picture of the local sporting population in Aberdeen. This meant I was able to put Sports Plus into the context of the mission of Christians in Sport locally.”

Dougie said that undertaking the church survey was really helpful in revealing who might be involved in reaching their local world of sport for Christ. Some had previously thought it was only for the younger team players, even though they were active club members themselves.

He added: “We plan to meet together three or four times as a big group. We want to support each other and make people aware that they are not the only one involved in sport.”

With more than 10 million people a week playing competitive sport, there is a huge mission field on our doorsteps. To reach them, God has put the ball in our court.

Find sportspeople in your church

Interested in identifying how you can support Christian sportspeople in your church? Contact sarah.gales@christiansinsport.org.uk to request a custom-made survey – see christiansinsport.org.uk/churchsurvey for an example.

LOOK WHAT GOD DID WHEN STUDENTS MET UP TO PRAY!

When medical student Priscilla Kirkland joined the football club at Edinburgh University, she had no idea how God might use her.

A midfielder, Priscilla went to the trials straight away and since then she has loved being part of one of the fastest growing university sports clubs in the country.

"I never really went into football with an agenda of either pushing my faith or trying to hide it. My dad is a pastor, so growing up I wasn't able to keep that side of my life hidden, even if I tried."

Priscilla was keen to share her faith in Jesus from the outset and was soon speaking about Him with her teammates. But the prayer support and fellowship she found on joining her university's Christians in Sport group made a real difference.

Here, Priscilla met many fellow sportspeople also seeking to live out their faith in the setting God had placed them. This creates a real sense of togetherness and God has used these groups to do some great things.

"I was already praying for my teammates Sarah and Caitlin, but in my second year, I started going along to the group and found it really helpful. It was so great to now be praying with others in the same position.

"My personality is also quite different from a lot of the girls on the team - I tend to be a bit quieter. It was good to chat through what questions to expect from my teammates and how I could answer them.

"Prayer was the biggest thing about it

and I had lots of people from Christians in Sport texting and encouraging me to keep going."

This past year, Priscilla has led the Christians in Sport group at Edinburgh. It is one of 28 student-run groups which meet each week at universities across the UK. They provide a great time for students to stop and pray for their sports friends and a chance to encourage each other as they head back out into their clubs and teams to share life and the Christian message.

We know of hundreds of students like Priscilla seeking to support each other and live for Jesus in their world of sport, so Clubhouse Xtra, our annual new year student gathering, takes this local fellowship to the next level. Priscilla vividly remembers her 'debut' in 2016.

"I had never been to a Christians in Sport event before, but it was probably one of



Photo: Element Photography, Fiona Baslam

the best Christian events I have ever been to. It combined the two things I really love - sport and Jesus - into one brilliant weekend. It was amazing.”

What made it even better for Priscilla was that her friend Sarah Thompson from the football club came with her. Having prayed persistently for Sarah with her fellow Christians at the University Group, Priscilla was left rejoicing at what God did in her friend’s life.

“We got to know each other really well as we walked to and from training and questions such as ‘what did you do at the weekend?’ gave me natural opportunities to speak of Jesus.”

Although she wasn’t interested in the gospel straight away, Sarah said that the way Priscilla lived her life really stood out.

Sarah said: “One Saturday night I had just got home from one of the football socials and I went into my room. To this day, I don’t know what really drew me to send the text, but I said to Priscilla ‘could I come to church with you tomorrow?’ Looking back on that now, I know that that was one of the first things that God did in my life.”

Sarah chatted much more about faith

Priscilla and Sarah (centre) at Clubhouse Xtra 2016



Priscilla Kirkland (second row, kneeling on the furthest left) with her Edinburgh University team

with Priscilla and kept coming to church. A little while later, the church pastor asked if she wanted to give her life to Christ – and she said yes.

“Clubhouse Xtra was especially good for Sarah,” Priscilla remembers. “The only Christian in sport she really knew before then was me. I think she was really struck that were all those others who were just as passionate about sport as her.”

Sarah’s story is just one of many encouragements in our student work as it has continued to grow in recent years and it was a massive boost for Priscilla. She simply lived out her faith among her teammates and prayed that God would be at work. Let’s get out there and do the same!

Ed Mezzetti
Back Pages Editor

City of York Athletic Club, St Thomas’ Church, York



Find out more

To read and watch more about Clubhouse Xtra 2017, including a video interview with Sarah, visit christiansinsport.org.uk/daretotell



NEVER TOO OLD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Wicket-keeper, goalkeeper, linesman, club member.

Dickie Bird proves that age doesn't matter when it comes to living out his faith in the world of sport.



Dickie running the line for Alresford Colne Rangers FC.

"If you've still got a love for sport and Christ, just be your normal self and go for it. It's not about getting up and bashing everybody with a Bible.

"Some weekends, I just go up to the club and behave in a way that honours God – cleaning the dressing room and little bits like that. That may go on for a few weeks and then someone might ask why are you doing that. There's your opportunity to speak!

"If you are your normal self, then talking about Jesus becomes a normal part of your conversation."

At 71, Dickie Bird's mission field remains Alresford Colne Rangers Football Club, whom he joined in 1995 after his son started playing for them. Dickie became a Christian aged 42 as his playing career as a football goalkeeper and cricket wicket-keeper was winding down.

His son's team needed a linesman and Dickie took up the flag, which he has held ever since. More than 20 years later, he

has become a stalwart of the Essex club where he is determined to use his love of sport to share his faith.

Although at first he found it hard to say something of his faith, Dickie realised the importance of simply living out what he believed.

"As you build relationships, people can see there is something a little bit different about you. You can earn their respect and then it gives you an opportunity to speak.

"Even when I go to away matches, I have built relationships with many of the other teams and they know where I'm coming from."

Dickie added: "Being involved in football all my playing career, and only coming to Christ when my playing days, were over, I was keen, and still am, to give as many youngsters as possible the opportunities that I never had to hear the gospel, so it would have an impact at an early age."

Sport played a part in Dickie becoming a Christian.

“Playing sport most weekends, Saturday night was ‘wahey, out with the guys’ and Sunday was my day of rest. There was never any thought about going to church to hear the gospel.”

Someone from the local church started coaching youth football and Dickie’s son began playing. This proved the initial spark for him going to church and coming to faith.

Dickie is a member of Kingsland Community Church, Lexden where his roles include sports coaching at their holiday club each summer. He has also hosted sports dinners at his club, run sports quizzes at Colchester United games and is

encouraging Colchester churches to get stuck into sports ministry together.

Dickie said: “Being nearer the finishing line than others, I always pray and ask God, do I sign on for another season, or is my work finished? The answer is stay until I come, or I call you home.”

Whatever age we are, Dickie has some great encouragement for us all.

“Just be patient. It takes time. People will get to know you, watch you and see there’s something different. I’m just an ordinary, everyday guy. I’m not academic, but God has given me the one gift that I have, sport, to reach out to people.”

Share your story

We’d love to hear how you are sharing life and the gospel in the world of sport where God has placed you. Email ed.mezzetti@christiansinsport.org.uk

Ed Mezzetti
Back Pages Editor

City of York Athletic Club, St Thomas’ Church, York



SPORTSPPLUS 2017

To make Sports Plus happen we need over 400 Team Leaders, Coaches, Medical, Technical and Support Staff. Could you serve this summer?

christiansinsport.org.uk/sportsplus2017leaders



MY SPORTING LIFE

However you are involved in sport, this feature is designed to encourage you as you read of others looking to share the gospel where God has placed them.



Profile

Name: Suthan Selvachandran

Age: 45 **Where from:** Jersey

Church: St Paul's Church, St Helier, Jersey

Sporting involvement: Cricket umpire

Sporting highlights: Umpiring Jersey versus Middlesex, the vocal Jersey versus Guernsey senior Inter Insular match and international players from the Netherlands when Jersey toured Holland.

Most embarrassing moment in sport?

After the last game of the Holland tour, I decided to join the players on a night out. When it was time to leave, we noticed that the main gate to the ground was locked. The players decided to climb the gate; I decided to take a different route. To cut a long story short, the bus journey into town smelled of pond which only disappeared once my feet, shoes and the bottom half of my trousers dried out!

What encouragements have you seen as a Christian in your sport? I was standing in a match between Jersey Under 17s and Ireland Under 15s when a player noticed my blue wristband and enquired about it. I mentioned Christians in Sport and an 'Audience of One'. He immediately said: "I have been to their sports camp! I am disappointed to have missed this year's one because we are on tour".

What do you find tough about living as a Christian in your sport? My colleagues know I am a Christian and respect my beliefs. To date I have been unsuccessful in getting a table made up of umpires to attend a Christians in Sport quiz night.

How do you look to share the gospel in your sporting role? I do the necessary pre-match preparations and then find a quiet moment to pray. When I cross the boundary rope, I apply the philosophy 'What would Christ do?', which to me is compete as Christ would compete by giving the best of sportsmanship and effort.

What one piece of advice would you give to Christian officials to help them share their faith? It is really important to uphold your sport's values. The Christian's purpose is to show 'the presence of Christ in sport', the idea of demonstrating Christ's presence with us and in us in the sporting competition.

LYCRA, IT TURNS OUT, IS A NECESSARY EVIL

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"I'd like to try rowing!" announced Michael, then aged 12. We agreed to find out more. Three years on and my car, I'm convinced, could drive itself to Tyne United Rowing Club! We are there nearly every day.



Karen and Michael Bessent

I have stood and watched as Michael posted age-group records for times and distances on the "erg" (rowing machine). I have stood and prayed as a rescue boat fished him out of Talkin Tarn in Cumbria after capsizing in his first ever race in a single. I have yelled from the banks as he developed the stroke which would see him winning races in local regattas and bronze in a national competition in 2016.

We have talked and prayed about disappointments, performance pathways, injuries, physios, opportunities, social media, church, priorities, jealousy, losing, winning, Sunday training... to name but a few topics. Christian parenting, athlete parenting – it's a real roller coaster!

All along, I was beset by this crazy idea... in my 40s, unfit, recovering from back surgery, I wanted to try rowing too!

After much hesitation (and six months of Pilates), I enrolled with a friend onto a Learn to Row course in March 2016 and, from then until December, was out on the water once or twice a week. Lycra, it turns out, is a necessary evil, but I love the exercise, the water, the sky, the wildlife and the company.

As friendships formed in those impossibly slim boats, I was able to extend invitations to church events and just talk about my faith. One summer's day saw me stuck in a small safety boat with one other person covering an extra-long training session: "That's our church up there" was all I said as we zipped along the Tyne past St Joseph's, Benwell. It was enough - he fired questions at me for the next 20 minutes!

We were thrilled when Olympic rowing medallist Debbie Flood took a junior training session at TURC and spoke at our church. A direct result is the new Sports Plus Xtra in the North East on 30th May.

God is at work on the Tyne and in Tyneside! Praise Him - and pray for us!

Karen Bessent

St Joseph's Church, Benwell & Tyne United Rowing Club



GOSPEL GROWTH IN THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

It has been amazing to see how God has grown the work of supporting professional and elite-level footballers. Bible studies, contract renewals and career-threatening injuries can all be part of this varied but rewarding work. Here, two members of our Performance Team explain how they are encouraging the next generation of UK footballers.

Russell Bowers



Russell played for Lisburn Distillery, Dundela and East Belfast before moving into coaching aged 30 and gaining his UEFA A Licence. He

is back coaching at Dundela for a second time, having also coached Glentoran's under 18 development team and Knockbreda's first team.

How would you sum up your role?

My role is to provide ongoing support and training for Christians who are involved in elite football throughout Northern Ireland, equipping and encouraging them to live out their faith through the sport. I also seek to come alongside those who have never thought about faith, to explore the Bible and what Jesus says.

What have been some recent encouragements?

These would involve two particular players. One is not yet a Christian, but we meet up regularly to read the Bible and seek to understand what God is saying to us both. The other is someone who has grown in faith and matured and is actively using his sport as both worship and witness.

What have been some recent challenges?

One challenge is to always remember that this is God's work. He is the Lord of the harvest and it's God's timescale and not mine. Another is to work in partnership with Him, while seeking to invest fully in the right people who have a heart for kingdom work.

Find out more

Training and playing commitments mean it is often difficult for professional and elite sportspeople to be regular members of a local church. The Performance Team support and mentor many of these athletes to help them live for Christ in a place the local church can find hard to reach.

For more information, visit christiansinsport.org.uk/performance

What are your hopes for the future of this work?

I hope to see a movement within Northern Ireland of elite men and women footballers living out their faith with boldness through their sport and impacting teammates and staff with the good news of Christ. I hope to see people coming to a living faith and many more opportunities to grow the Christians in Sport work.

Linvoy Primus

Linvoy played professional football for Charlton Athletic, Barnet, Reading and Portsmouth. He has been an ambassador for Portsmouth FC, helped run the charity Faith and Football, had a year in business and is now back at Christians in Sport for a second spell. He works alongside



fellow staff members Graham Daniels and Junior McDougald within English football.

How would you sum up your role?

I support and mentor elite athletes, most of whom are footballers. At the moment, I'm overseeing England, Wales and Scotland and partnering with Russ in Northern Ireland if he needs any support. My focus is on the four English leagues and anybody outside of that I can support as well - often that will be phone calls and Skypes. Mentoring takes different forms, but we always go to the Bible. Having previously received Christians in Sport support, Junior's experience provides valuable input.

How do you work with club chaplains?

I encourage them in relationships with players and offer to speak to groups of players (academy or first team) about the football journey and how chaplains helped me. I identify Christian players and initiate an introduction between them and the chaplain. As players move from club to club, I signpost them to chaplains.

What have been some recent encouragements?

The obvious one is the number of players who are professing faith that I have been able to get to know. The second is the gatherings that are taking place. There's a real desire to meet as a group, but there's a real sense that this is bigger than just meeting up. We've had them in the West Midlands and London and hope to have more and more.

What have been some recent challenges?

One is to make sure that you're meeting the guys regularly because there are a quite a number of them and we want to make sure we have regular contact. It's a good challenge to have.

What are your hopes for the future of this work?

I would love to see more people on our team. It would be great to see the gatherings running themselves as the players take ownership of them, so we can support them rather than leading them. I would love to see more gatherings across the UK and something happening on an international scale in a few years.

THE
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