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SHOULD CHRISTIAN ATHLETES USE SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY?

JUGGLING FAMILY & ELITE SPORT

AN UNCHANGING VISION FOR A NEW GENERATION OF STUDENTS



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**CHRISTIANS IN SPORT IS A MOVEMENT OF
COMPETITORS, COACHES AND OFFICIALS.**

**WE EXIST TO REACH THE WORLD OF
SPORT FOR JESUS.**

2022 has been a year of firsts; England's Lionesses lifted the European Championship trophy for the first time this summer, and more recently the Welsh football team arrived at their first World Cup finals in 64 years. A winter World Cup in itself is a first! In amateur sport, we've seen the first summer free of COVID-19 restrictions since 2019.

This autumn saw a number of firsts at Christians in Sport too. As a brilliant summer of Sports Plus ended, we launched a number of new projects which are detailed in this magazine. Firstly, Local Networks, a new initiative to find, connect and support adult competitive sportspeople. Alongside this, digital upgrades including 'The Academy' and our online campaign 'Play Connected.'

This is undoubtedly a season like no other, yet our core vision remains the same - you'll see this reflected in both the Director's message from Graham Daniels and Ian Lancaster's reflection on the evolution of our student work. We exist to reach the world of sport for Christ, and we remain thankful to God for your partnership as it sustains this mission.

BRIAN GLYNN

Back Pages Editor





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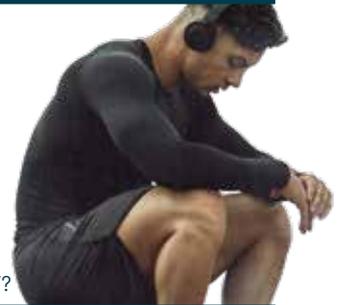
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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

***REFLECTING ON THE
FIFA WORLD CUP***



At Christians in Sport, we begin our training events by teaching Colossians 4:2-6, dividing the passage using the three headings, 'Pray, Play and Say'.

PLAY

This magazine arrives on your doorstep during the FIFA Men's World Cup in Qatar. In the lead-up to the event, we have engaged in many discussions about how Christians should 'Play' [conduct themselves] concerning the event, in the light of Paul's advice in Colossians 4:5 that we should, "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity." How should Christians engage with the World Cup, which is taking place under a significant cloud of controversy regarding Qatar's human rights record? It has been noted that many major sports event hosts have differing but controversial human rights records. This reality has led



" BE WISE IN THE WAY YOU ACT TOWARD OUTSIDERS; MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY. "

COLOSSIANS 4:5

the International Olympic Committee to publish a human rights strategy for future hosts in response to these issues. In discussing how Christians should conduct themselves as potential participants or spectators in controversial sporting events, Christians in Sport has pointed out that Christians should never be surprised by the sin and brokenness in a world which has turned its back on God.

Furthermore, we advise that before holding court on the record of others, Christians ought to reflect on their moral fallibility and seek God's help and strength to overcome their weaknesses as they seek to 'play' for Christ in their sports clubs and teams. It is advisable to look in the mirror before looking out of the window.

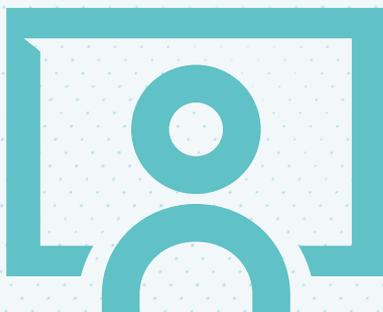
SAY

Regarding how Christians can 'Say', that is, tell the Good News of Jesus Christ in morally challenging settings,

we acknowledge genuine disagreement between Christians. Some have advocated a boycott



of participating, attending and watching the World Cup, saying there is no right to proclaim Christ in a context where you support such injustice. In turn, the majority of sportspeople appear to advocate engagement with the tournament. Jürgen Klopp, the Liverpool manager, has argued that international footballers have no say in choosing the venue for major tournaments. Governing bodies make this decision, with FIFA making the initial choice and National Football Associations verifying the decision by deciding to send a team. Finally, national governments can decide whether to advise withdrawal from a tournament. Players cannot determine this process, and it is reasonable to agree with Klopp that while participants can't control the venue in which they are to perform, they can exercise the opportunity to voice their sentiments regarding issues of injustice to the watching world. Klopp's response seems eminently sensible. Christians who participate or watch the event can speak of the matters raised in Qatar and present the Gospel of Christ as the antidote to the fractured state of human leadership and social distress.

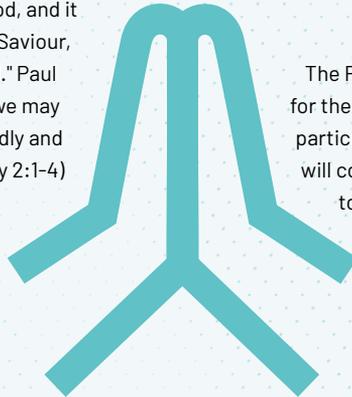


PRAY

As noted earlier, we begin with 'Pray' to summarise Colossians 4:2, "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful", in the context of seeking to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. In the last few months, as the debate around Qatar has raged, we have spent much time speaking and writing about how Christians might 'Play' and 'Say'. We have yet to pay anywhere near as much attention to how we might 'Pray'. However, this may prove to be the greatest weapon in our armoury. It is a weapon we can now deploy



more fervently for the remainder of the tournament and beyond. It may seem pointless to think our prayers could end the misuse of migrant workers and discriminatory legislation. Still, Christians are called to pray for the leaders who rule countries and institutions, including Qatar's rulers. In his letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul writes that prayer for rulers "is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all people to be saved." Paul calls us to pray for all rulers "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way." (1 Timothy 2:1-4)



" DEVOTE YOURSELVES TO PRAYER, BEING WATCHFUL AND THANKFUL. "

COLOSSIANS 4:2

The President of FIFA is Gianni Infantino. Let's pray for these leaders and for the numerous organisers and participants involved in Qatar. Let's pray that people will come to meet Christ during the remainder of the tournament, since the Bible is clear that this is God's main aim and goal - that all people would come to praise and glorify Him.'

GRAHAM DANIELS

Graham is the General Director, he is also a director of Cambridge United FC and an associate staff member at St Andrew the Great church in Cambridge



SPORTS PLUS 2022 REVIEW

Serious sports action for the serious young sportsperson – this is Sports Plus in a nutshell. This summer, Christians in Sport ran seven residential week-long camps at five venues across the UK with a total of 744 young people attending. Sports Plus aims to deliver specialist sports coaching alongside a Bible teaching programme designed to encourage young people to connect sport and faith.

744 YOUNG
PEOPLE

“**THE TEAM HAS GIVEN OUR DAUGHTER THE MOST POSITIVE AND UPLIFTING EXPERIENCE FROM BOTH A SPORT AND SCRIPTURAL PERSPECTIVE THROUGH WHICH SHE HAS GROWN IN HER FAITH AND CONFIDENCE IN HER SPORT. ALL WE CAN SAY IS A HUGE THANK YOU TO THE TEAM.**”

Sports Plus 2022 Parent/Guardian's Survey



THE KING IS HERE

The evening meeting Bible teaching focussed in on the book of Matthew, with the theme 'The King is here'.

“The people living in darkness have seen a great light, on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

The memory verses Matthew 4:16-17, sung every evening to the tune of a popular song, showed that the King is here, He is Jesus, and He has ushered in His new kingdom of freedom and forgiveness, a kingdom of light in the darkness.

The morning teaching theme was 'Born to Play', a series that encouraged young people to think clearly about connecting their sport and faith. Through verses from Genesis through to Romans, young people looked closely into what it means to be created by God with the talent to play sport; the problem of sin and the consequences that has on our sport; and how, through trusting Christ, people can be transformed to worship God in sport and in life.

23% OF VOLUNTEERS
WERE FIRST-TIMERS



A TEAM LIKE NO OTHER

Sports Plus depends on volunteers to run and this year 387 Leaders and Trainees served together, sharing the vision to reach the world of sport for Christ.

Leaders and Trainees also undergo their own Bible teaching programme, applying God's word to sport, and engaging with questions from within the culture of sport. This enables Sports Plus to play a vital role beyond the summer - equipping leaders and encouraging them to engage in the student work or adult local networks.

This year 23% of volunteers were brand new to Sports Plus. It's a wonderful encouragement to see volunteers returning year on year, and exciting to continue to welcome new volunteers each year.

7 EPIC WEEKS OF SPORTS PLUS

NEXT SEASON

The stories from the summer are hugely encouraging, knowing that this work depends entirely on God to bear fruit. Looking forward to next year, we long to see more young sportspeople hear and respond to the good news of Jesus and we're excited to see how God will use Sports Plus in 2023 as we plan ahead of next summer.

SPORTS PLUS + 2023

Applications will open for Leaders and Trainees at 7pm on Monday 23rd January and for young people at 7pm on Monday 30th January. For further details please visit christiansinsport.org.uk/sportsplus or contact the team on 01869 255630 or at sportsplus@christiansinsport.org.uk

PERTH: SUN 9TH - FRI 14TH JULY

Athletics, Football, Hockey, Netball, Rugby, Swimming & Triathlon

BRECON: SUN 30TH JULY - FRI 4TH AUG

Athletics, Boys' Football, Girls' Football, Hockey, Netball & Rugby

BELFAST 1: SUN 30TH JULY - FRI 4TH AUG

Athletics, Hockey & Rugby

MONKTON 1: SUN 30TH JULY - FRI 4TH AUG

Athletics, Cricket, Football, Netball, Rowing & Rugby

BELFAST 2: SUN 6TH - FRI 11TH AUG

Football, Hockey & Rugby

MONKTON 2: SUN 6TH - FRI 11TH AUG

Cricket, Football, Hockey, Netball & Triathlon

REPTON: SUN 13TH - FRI 18TH AUG

Athletics, Football, Hockey, Netball, Rugby, Swimming & Tennis

JUGGLING FAMILY

HOW DO I MAINTAIN HEALTHY FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS WHILST SUPPORTING MY CHILD IN ELITE SPORT?

How often do you hear an athlete thank their parents? It's obvious that parents and guardians play a huge role in supporting children on pathways to the top-level of sport. At Christians in Sport, we recognise this brings unique challenges, and can put strain on family relationships.

So, what wisdom does God's word have to offer, how can you maintain healthy relationships with your spouse and each of your children as you support a child in elite sport?

**" CHILDREN ARE A HERITAGE
FROM THE LORD, OFFSPRING
A REWARD FROM HIM. "**

PSALM 127:3

RECOGNISE THAT CHILDREN ARE A GIFT FROM GOD

Fundamentally, our children belong to God. 'Heritage' is used to describe our children as God's special possession handed down to us to look after.



**DO YOU KNOW
PARENTS OF A CHILD
ON A PERFORMANCE
PATHWAY? CONNECT
WITH OUR TEAM AT:
[CHRISTIANSINSPORT.ORG.
UK/PATHWAYPARENTS](https://www.christiansinsport.org.uk/pathwayparents)**



AND ELITE SPORT

So parenting is an amazing responsibility and wonderful privilege, sometimes it really feels like that too! But conflict and disappointment can and do put pressure on the joy of parenting - sport can be the source of this difficulty as it brings specific pressure points:

Time: It is likely that more time will be spent with a child on a sports pathway than others that aren't. Competitions and regular training can mean substantial time away from the rest of the family.

Focus: Sport demands attention. It's often the go-to subject in conversation. Success, failure, or anxiety can dictate the mood in the family. Sport gets in the way of other things; family holidays, church, days out, bedtimes. This focus can prove to be a contentious issue in a family.

Money: Equipment. The petrol. The diet. Understandably investment in sport can be a source of envy for other siblings that bubbles underneath before exploding in a tirade of unkind words or expressing feelings of being sidelined.

HOW DO WE PURSUE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS?

Communication

Rich, intentional, listening and talking is the glue in healthy relationships. Above all it's vital to communicate your intention to unconditionally love each of your children, regardless of their performance or interests, just as God's love for you is unconditional and unmerited. There will be disagreement, conflict and anxiety but these can be resolved within relationships open to talking. This doesn't happen by accident. It starts and continues with words of affirmation and affection that are backed up by action which is often unseen.

Practically this means putting down your phone, switching off the TV and listening to words that are spoken and to those that aren't! Patiently pursue conversation every

day as far as your family are comfortable with. Ask them how they feel about 'Billy' the sporty one. Prioritising meal times can really help cultivate good family communication, could you encourage your whole family to prioritise a few meal times in the week?

Pray

Prioritise prayer with your spouse and your children, collectively and separately. Can you create a normal atmosphere of speaking to God in the joys, in the trials, whilst laughing and through tears? Cultivate these times and if they don't feel normal, keep doing it until they do. Start now, could you carve out five minutes a day to pray as a family, or 1-2-1 with each of your children?

Ground yourself in gospel truths.

You can't do this. You will fail. Your children might feel let down, excluded and even unloved...but you have the living Lord Jesus within to lift you up and keep you loving when all your energy has been used up.

Remember and rehearse;

- **God is great so you don't have to always be in control.**
- **God is glorious so you don't have to fear what others think.**
- **God is good so don't despair when things aren't so good.**
- **God is gracious so you don't have to prove yourself as a parent.**

Isaiah 40 is a brilliant place to go for assurance as you preach these things to yourself!

Keep going and keep trusting God...your children need you!

IAN LANCASTER

Ian leads the Young Performance Athlete work and is a parent to three children.



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

THE CHRISTIANS IN SPORT INTERNSHIP THROUGH THE YEARS

Since 1999 Christians in Sport have run an Internship programme focussed on training graduate age sportspeople passionate about reaching the world of sport for Christ. 140 people have since completed the Internship. We caught up with a few past interns for Back Pages to find out where they are now.





RICHARD LEADBEATER

Occupation: *Pastor at Dundonald Church*
Internship Year: **1999**



YOU WERE ON THE FIRST EVER CHRISTIANS IN SPORT INTERNSHIP, HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

I first heard about Christians in Sport as an 18-year-old professional football player when a teammate invited me to a players' Bible study led by Graham Daniels. A few years later Graham asked if I'd consider doing the Internship, or 'Academy' as it was called, alongside playing as a semi-pro for Stevenage.

I wasn't sure what I was signing up for but loved what I'd done with Christians in Sport so far, so I signed up and I'm glad I did!

WHAT IMPACT DID THAT YEAR HAVE ON YOUR LIFE?

It was the first time I'd lived away from home, and it was encouraging to be part of a group of likeminded sporty Christians, something I'd never experienced before. I even met my wife, Libby, who was on the Internship! I'm still in contact with other interns too.

Fridays were the highlight of the week. Graham would open the Bible and help us think through sport and faith. It marked the start of me exploring full time ministry. I didn't want to be a career footballer and I had a hunger for theological training which was well fed during that year!

After the Internship I studied theology at Birmingham University alongside playing for Nuneaton and was ordained a few years later, I've been in full time ministry ever since.

WHAT DOES REACHING THE WORLD OF SPORT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU NOW?

My wife and three daughters all play hockey to a decent level, and I play tennis. My job means it's natural and easy to mention Jesus but there's less opportunity to share life with people in the way I could as a pro.

Reflecting back I can see that I really needed to hear that sport can be worship as a young pro. Now, as a pastor in a church full of sporty people, I'm wrestling with the tension between sport and church, I love to hear stories of personal evangelism, but I don't want to see sport used as a trump card to miss church, it's a real challenge for me at the moment!



JILL GORDON

Occupation: **Kingham Hill School House Parent**
Internship Year: **2010**



HOW DID YOU COME TO DO THE INTERNSHIP?

I studied environment geography at university, but I knew I didn't want to pursue a career in that area straight after graduating. The Internship stuck out as an opportunity to keep playing sport whilst exploring what ministry could look like for me long term.

WHAT WERE YOUR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE INTERNSHIP?

Living with a great group of Christian friends, helping each other to live out our faith in different ways. It could be challenging at times but that was a real highlight for me. The opportunity to be involved in so many different things was great too, from a mission trip to Uganda to the weekly ministry training course in Oxford. In every area we were pushed well out of our comfort zones, but in a safe environment with great leaders.

I particularly valued a school mission week at Christ College Brecon. We were involved in everything: lessons, sport, Christian Union events, it was exciting sharing Jesus with young people throughout the week, looking back it's not surprising that I moved on from the Internship to work in a school!

WHAT DOES REACHING THE WORLD OF SPORT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU NOW?

I'm a house parent alongside my role as Assistant Chaplain at Kingham Hill. I also coach the senior girl's hockey team. It's a privilege to be working in a school with a strong Christian ethos. I'm able to talk openly about my faith. Pressure on identity is one of the biggest challenges young people face so it's great to be able to share the secure identity I have in Christ with them regularly.

I still play hockey too and try to show the girls at school that it's such an important part of my life. I want to encourage them to keep playing because the dropout rate out after school is quite high in women's sport. Everyone in my hockey is busy, but the decisions I make create opportunity for witness. Our village in the Cotswolds is small and everyone knows each other, so the fact that I prioritise church is obvious to others in my team and that often leads to gospel conversations.



SIMON POOLE

Occupation: **Christians in Sport Elite Team**
Internship Year: **2013**



HOW DID YOU COME TO DO THE INTERNSHIP?

I went to Sports Plus and did the gap year programme Christians in Sport ran after finishing school, so I had a good idea about what I might get from the Internship. I had my interview for the Internship on the same day as graduate scheme interview, but I had a deep conviction that I wanted to explore how sport and ministry would shape my adult life, so I chose the Internship!

WHAT DID YOU LEARN DURING THE YEAR?

You're thrown in at the deep end from the start. I remember visiting the Christians in Sport group at St Mary's University alongside another intern to run a Sports Quiz, the group was small but over 100 guests turned up which was a real learning experience!

I felt well supported through these experiences, I had the chance to try different things and get lots of feedback. It was a good opportunity to work out my gifting within the context of ministry and think about what to do next.

Until that year it was easy to be involved in sport. At university, sport and the relationships that came with it were on a plate for me. The Internship was the first time I had to make adult decisions about my commitment to sport and sharing Jesus in that context.

WHAT DOES REACHING THE WORLD OF SPORT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU NOW?

After the Internship I went Oak Hill to study theology alongside working at a church. Then four years ago, I came back to work part-time with Christians in Sport alongside leading a church in Bicester.

My work focuses on track and field athletics. I support top-level British and international Christian athletes through Zoom Bible studies, traveling to meet 1-2-1 and offering practical support at major championships. Through this work I'm regularly introduced to others in the world of elite athletics and often have opportunity to speak with them about the Christian faith.

A FLAVOUR OF WHAT SOME INTERNS ARE UP TO NOW



" An immensely encouraging year, establishing significant friendships, serving at a school and going on mission to South Africa and Zimbabwe. "

1999

Ben Barton

Training for ordination
Coaching Hockey & Cricket



" I think the main way in which it has shaped me is a deep conviction that God is interested in everything I do, and everything matters to him. "

2001

Rachel Iley

Full-time Mum
Playing Social Cricket



" The internship helped highlight the relevance of the Bible in my sporting career and also educated me so that I may encourage fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and transform my attitude when it comes to playing. "

2017

Vusa Mtunzi

Graduate Mechanical Engineer
London Vipers Touch Rugby



" The experiences I had during the year seeing young people, students and adults involved in various levels of sport, highlighted that I wanted to develop that passion and share it with others. "

2013

Lisa Elliott

Elite and YPA team at Christians in Sport
Thame Hockey & Long Crendon Tennis Club



" The internship gave me the training and the confidence to be an advocate for Jesus in both my work place and my sporting context. I am always grateful for the opportunity I had to take that year out. "

2018

Charlie Tidd

Data Manager for NHS Lung Cancer Trials
Playing Go Mammoth League Netball



It's given me the understanding that God has created and shaped me to enjoy sport, to use the gifts and abilities he's given me for his glory and to offer it back to him in worship.

2002

Pete Skivington

Church Youth Team Leader

Coaching Football and playing 5-a-side



The internship really cemented the connection between sport and faith in my life. Knowing I am created to play is a continual spur to use my sport to glorify God.

2008

Cameron Brown

British Airways First Officer

Wonersh Cricket Club



It was through the internship that I developed a passion for ministry as I was given brilliant training and opportunities to teach the Bible and share the Gospel with sportspeople.

2011

Rosie Woodbridge

Full-time Mum

Running club in Basingstoke



We spent lots of time being taught from the Bible, but emphasis was also placed on skills that helped no matter what you ended up doing after the year.

2020

Sarah Sint

Manufacturing Chemist

Waverley Tennis & Squash Club



The training we had was foundational for me, not only giving me a greater theological understanding of the bible, but a deeper love for Christ. That can't help but spill over into personal relationships with teammates!

2021

Vic Weir

Operations Manager

University of Birmingham Athletics Club

AN UNCHANGING VISION FOR A NEW GENERATION OF STUDENTS

The student years have been dubbed the most informative of a person's life. It's understandable why – the age of adulthood, independence, the broadening of the mind, unlimited social interactions.

"ONE OF THE THINGS THAT STRIKES ME IS THE RAPID PACE OF CHANGE IN THE STUDENT WORLD. EVEN COUNTING THE PANDEMIC ASIDE (!) STUDENT CULTURE HAS SHIFTED MORE IN THE LAST FEW YEARS THAN IN MOST COMPARABLE TIME PERIODS..."

PETE DRAY, UCCF

In our 2021/2 student survey we're encouraged to see that:

- Over 75% of students have grown in their understanding in how sport and faith connect.
- Nearly 90% of students have felt more confident to talk to sports friends about their faith.
- 85% of students have been motivated to pray for sports friends.

Christians in Sport have been working with university students for 40 years. We know not every young person who leaves school heads to university, but for those who do, we recognise this as a unique context in which to support sportspeople to connect sport and faith.

Our vision to reach student sportspeople with the gospel hasn't changed and much of what we do hasn't either. We continue to rely completely on God's grace to motivate student sportspeople to share the good news and on God alone to change the lives of their friends.

The focus, with Bible in hand, is still on shaping students' understanding that their sport is a wonderful context within which to worship God and share life and the good news of Jesus with friends.



THE SAME...YET DIFFERENT

Universities may often be ancient institutions, yet student culture is transient. We must remain attentive to this shifting culture to serve students effectively.

Pete Dray (UCCF's Director of creative evangelism) stated in a recent article:

"One of the things that strikes me is the rapid pace of change in the student world. Even counting the pandemic aside (!) student culture has shifted more in the last few years than in most comparable time periods..."

University students today can be categorized within the post-Christian generation, or generation Z. Their boomer generation grandparents were the first to stop going to church, therefore the majority of current students have been brought up by parents with no Christian background or experience.

The default worldview at university has no Christian basis or reference points. This makes it a challenging task; equipping Christians to share life and the good news of Jesus to a generation that determine their own truth, define themselves in many different ways and who reject anyone or any system pushing against their all-inclusive ideologies.

'Cancel culture' means the consequences of standing on gospel convictions can be devastating for students.

The potential to be publicly shamed for holding the Bible up as truth is far greater now than it has ever been, students understandably have a greater fear of rejection for their beliefs than they might have done in the past.

This has led to a more personable approach when sharing faith with sportspeople. Events like 'Dialogues Dinners' enable a relational approach of sharing food, personal testimony and space to field questions around faith in a relaxed environment.



COMMUNICATION

It's far easier to communicate to students but there's more noise to shout over. Video calls and instant messaging have been a big help. Throughout the pandemic this was the best and most efficient way to continue encouraging groups and individuals during a tough time for many. The challenge now is making sure that real relationships are formed and sought after, not just the virtual ones!



MORE THAN SPORT

University sport has always had a unique off-the-field culture that's nuanced to each particular sport - that hasn't changed. However, there have been some big-ticket life items that have found a home and expression in the sports arena. We've had to prepare our students to think biblically around areas like mental health, sexuality, discrimination and other issues.

We're still committed to the world of university sport - that's not going to change soon! It has been and continues to be the bedrock of so much of what we do, especially in the development of leaders.

God is the Lord of the harvest and the harvest of university sport is ripe. We pray that God would continue to raise up His workers across universities who take His good news into a context and culture that desperately needs the hope and new life that Jesus gives.

PRAY FOR OUR UPCOMING ANNUAL STUDENT CONFERENCE 'NEW YEAR TRAINING' - THAT IT WOULD EQUIP AND ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO REACH THE WORLD OF UNIVERSITY SPORT FOR CHRIST.

LOCAL NETWORKS



This autumn Christians in Sport launched a new initiative aimed at adults involved in competitive sport. In September 50 of these networks launched across towns and cities in UK with the aim of gathering local Christian sportspeople together to encourage one another to reach local sportspeople with the good news of Jesus.

We sat down with UK Team Leader, Ian Lancaster, to talk about the vision for local networks, how it has played out over the first few months, and what the hope is for the future.



FIRSTLY, WHY LOCAL NETWORKS?

Christians in Sport's vision is to reach the world of sport for Christ. It's a simple statement but we recognise this looks different across contexts. We're confident our offer of support for competitive sportspeople is clear for under-18s in Sports Plus and for students with our university groups. We have, however, recognised that our offer for adults has not been so clear. Adult competitive sportspeople form a huge part of the world of sport we long to reach, we want work towards a clear and consistent approach to bring sportspeople together locally to support them to connect sport and faith.

Local groups have existed in some towns and cities for a long time. There are groups of sportspeople that have met to pray and run evangelistic events for years, and that's a brilliant thing! What we haven't had in the past are visible groups that are easy for people to find and dock in with. Our hope is that a local network might be the first port of call for a Christian sports person if they move to a new place and want to connect in with other Christian sportspeople.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT IN THE PAST THAT'S LED TO THIS SPECIFIC OFFER?

We want to help connect sportspeople together and support them to take the good news to their clubs and teams, and to know that others are praying for them as they do so, it's so important to know that you aren't alone!

But we know that the local church is the primary place for Christians to be taught and disciplined, not a local sports network. The danger is that these networks could be viewed as competing with the church, which is absolutely not our intention!

We hope this new offer has potential to support the local church really well, providing opportunity to bring Christians together in evangelism which can be a unifying and encouraging thing.

HOW HAS THE LAUNCH OF LOCAL NETWORKS PLAYED OUT?

There have been a good number of gatherings already, and the story is similar for many networks - the numbers are fewer than we might have expected but those that attended have gone away encouraged and with renewed focus. Network leaders, all volunteers, are learning a lot about how best to support their groups and facilitate termly gatherings that work well for local Christian sportspeople.

We're aware of the need to support networks really well with the right resources and communications from the staff team, we're learning a great deal on that front too as we gather feedback. I'm always reminded never to despise small beginnings as I hear stories of encouragement from across the country!

WHAT IS YOUR HOPE FOR THE FUTURE OF LOCAL NETWORKS?

Each network will, as a minimum, gather three times and run one evangelistic event per year. We're excited to see networks hosting their first evangelistic events in 2023. Getting these events in the diary brings focus, and really unites people together as a missional team.

Beyond 2023 we're looking forward to networks building momentum each year. For example it's exciting to know we'll have a clear consistent offer of support for university graduates each year, and we're hopeful that this will enable networks to grow.

We'd also love to see more networks up and running, for example we currently have one group across Birmingham, but it's a massive city. We'd love to see multiple truly local groups get off the ground in future.

Ultimately it comes back to our core vision, we trust in God's sovereignty and depend on His grace as we pray for world of sport to be reached with the good news of Jesus.

IAN LANCASTER

Ian oversees the regional, student and youth work in the UK. He runs with Alcester RC and is one of the leaders at Town Church, Bicester.



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MIND GAMES

SHOULD CHRISTIANS MAKE USE OF SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY?

AT CHRISTIANS IN SPORT, WE REGULARLY GET QUESTIONS FROM SPORTSPEOPLE AT EVERY LEVEL, BUT ELITE ATHLETES IN PARTICULAR HAVE ASKED A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS AROUND THE EMERGING DISCIPLINE OF SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY.





In years gone by, psychology has been dismissed as a coaching tool, but more recently it's become increasingly valued by coaches at the top level of sport.

Yet some doubts remain, and, for the Christian, there's potential to worry that the methods and practice of sports psychology aren't consistent with following Christ. So we set out to answer the question: should there be any reservation or caution in seeing a sports psychologist?

To answer this, we've dived into the practice of sports psychology, alongside reflections from top-level sports psychologist Tom Bates, interviewed on our podcast earlier this year.

WHAT DO SPORTS PSYCHOLOGISTS DO?

Renowned sports psychologist Professor Steve Peters, outlines his key methods in his book 'The Chimp Paradox.' This model aims to simplify what is going on in the brain and use systems to understand the impulsive patterns of behaviour that can be limiting performance. Dr Peters explains how identifying the 'animals' or functions of the brain that contribute to decision-making can help you to understand the information you're receiving, why this drives behaviours, and how to change that behaviour.

Sports psychologists generally seek to help athletes understand why they do what they do and how they can control their behaviour, and thus perform better.

Psychologists often play a wider role in sports teams, helping players to create 'high performance culture.' Tom Bates (picture overleaf) explains how his role at Aston Villa F.C. as Director of Performance Psychology and Culture, went beyond individual performance:

"We truly believed in the importance of culture. We worked to help the players and staff flourish in competitive sporting environments, unleashing their potential for the benefit of everyone not just themselves."

WHAT SPORTS PSYCHOLOGISTS DON'T DO

Knowing where you seek to find fulfilment and purpose in life will always be a key part of a sports psychologist's process, but the Chimp Model deliberately doesn't set out to answer that question.

The Chimp Model, for example, references the 'Stone of Life' which contains a person's truths about life, their values, and purpose, which is vital in the diagnostic process. Wonderfully, for the Christian athlete, ultimate purpose and meaning doesn't need to be coaxed out by a sports psychologist. It is given by God and can be found in what He says to us in the Bible.

WHERE IS THE VALUE OF SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY?

Sports psychology has its sceptics, yet it is a coaching discipline with proven value for elite athletes. For Tom, moving from football to work with Olympians such as Adam Peaty was refreshing:

" I DIDN'T HAVE TO CONVINC ANYONE THAT PERFORMANCE PSYCHOLOGY WAS IMPORTANT FOR ELITE PERFORMANCE, IT WAS THE REVERSE. THEY WANTED TO SEARCH FOR THE ONE PERCENT THAT WOULD DEFINE PERFORMANCE WHEN IT MATTERED. "

The diagnostic tools that sports psychology offers can be of real value for any athletes, Christians included. The Chimp Paradox, for example, gives practical steps to help individuals ask simple questions like 'where did the message to respond in that way come from?' Or 'Does that fit with the truths I hold about life?'

These questions help us diagnose whether the things we feel and think in the moment actually hold true when we measure them against the things that we place ultimate value on.

As Christians, ultimate value is found in what God has made clear in His Word. Romans 5:8 explains how God demonstrates His own love for us; we have real value not because of anything we have achieved, but in His choice to love us. This clarity of belief can be the information which helps the methodology of the sports psychologist flourish.

SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY HAS LIMITATIONS

The reality of implementing a system like the Chimp Model is that no matter how well you pick up the signals, or implement the steps, there will always be frustration around the corner. The Bible remind us this shouldn't be a surprise - in Romans





8:20-22, Paul makes it clear that this world doesn't operate as it should, because of the corruption of sin.

Even with the wisdom of psychology input, we end up rooting out behaviour that is inconsistent with who we want to be. This is our sin, our idolatry - where we try to find our ultimate identity in created things - our sport, our times, our medals (Romans 1:21-23). The result is that when we miss out on that expectation, we think our very identity is being ripped away. Even the thought of this can lead to devastating psychological effects - crippling fear and anxiety.

The Bible shows that good behaviour, or physical and psychological discipline in the case of sport, cannot ultimately satisfy us, or make us right with God.

So, sports psychology is helpful for improving performance on the pitch, and perhaps help us manage challenges outside of sport. But it will never meet our greatest needs.

Tom reflects on how this understanding has played out in his career:

"WHEN I RECOGNISE THE GIFTS I HAVE ARE BLESSINGS FROM GOD, THEN I'M LESS CONCERNED WITH WHAT SUCCESS IS, OR WHETHER THE MANAGING DIRECTOR IS GOING TO THINK I'M GOOD AT MY JOB. INSTEAD, I'M MORE FOCUSED ON WHETHER WHAT I'M SAYING IS TRUE AND HOW I CAN BEST SERVE OTHERS."

SO, SHOULD ELITE ATHLETES HAVE ANY RESERVATION HEADING IN?

The Christian sportsperson need not hold any particular reservation about sports psychology. A psychologist undoubtedly brings expertise in one aspect of performance and coaching in this area will often bring methods and systems that can be useful.

Yet, it's worth carefully considering the claims the Bible makes about how we find ultimate purpose and security.

For Christians, the truth that God unconditionally loves you, and has given you the gifts and abilities to compete with absolute security and freedom is the foundational truth that undergirds performance in every area of sport - technical, tactical, physical or psychological.



DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT SPORT AND FAITH?

SEND THEM TO US AT ASKCIS@CHRISTIANSINSPOORT.ORG.UK OR FEEL FREE TO CONTACT US VIA SOCIAL MEDIA



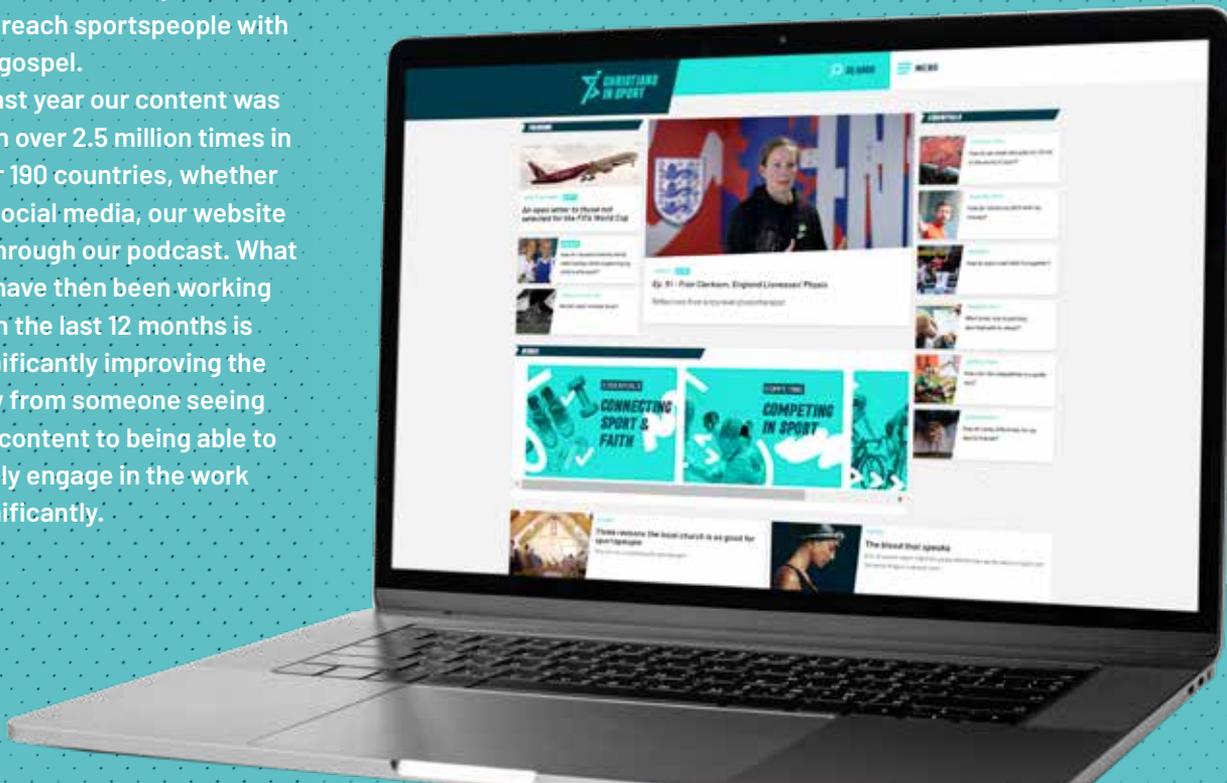
SI POOLE

Si is a Christians in Sport staff member on the Regional & Elite Teams. He is a duathlete and is one of the leaders at Town Church, Bicester.

REACHING SPORTSPEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

For many years Christians in Sport has sought to have a strong digital presence as we seek to reach people where they spend their time and both resource Christian sportspeople to connect their sport and faith and reach sportspeople with the gospel.

Last year our content was seen over 2.5 million times in over 190 countries, whether on social media, our website or through our podcast. What we have then been working on in the last 12 months is significantly improving the flow from someone seeing our content to being able to easily engage in the work significantly.



This has resulted in an upgraded website and now a new marketing campaign, 'Play Connected', which is seeking to connect with thousands of sportspeople, who have not previously docked-in with Christians in Sport, either face-to-face or in online community.

Alongside this, we have improved our resources platform on our website, re-launching it as 'The Academy.' It includes new explainer videos and talks on 24 key questions Christian sportspeople wrestle with; as well as another series of our podcast, as we speak to Christian sportspeople about how they play their sport with their faith connected. To supplement all of this, we have also trialled and launched a new weekly devotion for sportspeople called 'Game Day,' which over 1,000 people now receive each week on the day of their choosing.

All of these digital initiatives aim to further the mission of reaching the world of sport for Christ as we reach sportspeople with our resources all over the world. Please pray to this end that all we make and all we do online leads to more sportspeople being equipped to live and speak for Jesus in their world of sport and to many coming to put their trust in Him.



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A GLOBAL TEAM

REACHING THE WORLD OF SPORT FOR CHRIST

Our vision is to reach the world of sport for Christ and this includes reaching all corners of the world. To fulfil this we find, connect and support leaders who have the same passion and are involved in top level sport all over the globe.

The Level 3 Leadership Development Programme, launched in 2021, plays a key strategic role in developing leaders that share this vision and is designed specifically with the aim of growing sustainable sports ministry across the globe through in-person and online training.

We caught up with Kenyan leader, Paul, to find out more about his ministry in elite sport and how he's been putting learning from the programme into practice in Kenya.



"IT WAS A GREAT REALISATION THAT MY PASSION FOR FOOTBALL AND MY FAITH COULD BE INTEGRATED, AND NOT SEPARATED AS THEY HAD BEEN."

WHAT IS THE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME?

Level 1: Three short sessions to help Christians connect sport and faith

Level 2: A 12 week programme for local leaders in competitive sport ministry.

Level 3: A year long programme for leaders in competitive sports ministry at a regional or national level.

PAUL'S JOURNEY TO LEADING SPORTS MINISTRY IN KENYA

Paul is passionate about football. He began coaching at a youth academy in Nairobi and came to faith during this time. Shortly after this he connected his sport and faith.

"It was a great realisation that my passion for football and my faith could be integrated, and not separated as they had been."

Since this moment Paul's passion for reaching the world of elite sport in Kenya



continued to grow. He progressed as a manager, including a three-year stint at Tusker F.C. – one of Kenya’s most successful clubs. He also launched a sports marketing firm in 2016, something he sees as a key opportunity to reach elite sportspeople in Kenya with the good news of Jesus.

“We aim to build rapport and trust with our clients so we can introduce sports ministry, and we’ve been able to implement this model across elite sports in Kenya.”

SUPPORTING DEVELOPMENT OF



Vihiga Queens FC celebrating 4th Kenyan Championship

PASSIONATE LEADERS

Level 3 exists to support leaders like Paul to develop existing ministries, creating opportunity for leaders to come together with like-minded others to share challenges and learn together.

Paul outlines the opportunity, alongside the specific challenges he’s come up against in Kenya:

“We’ve been able to do sports ministry in some clubs. For example, at Vihiga Queens F.C. (a professional women’s club) we were able to implement sports mentoring, delivered by

another Level 3 participant, Celia, she’s known as a team counsellor, but she’s able to openly refer to the Bible in the club. But things happen very slowly in elite sort in Kenya, for example I’ve been talking to one club for two years and nothing has happened yet. We often need to pray for patience!”

Biblical training and critically thinking through practical

“ LEARNING THE SIX WINDOWS MODEL [A SIMPLE FRAMEWORK FOR EXPLAINING THE GOSPEL] IN DEPTH HAS TAUGHT ME MORE ABOUT HOW I CAN ENGAGE WELL IN CONVERSATIONS WITH OTHERS AND MOVE TOWARDS TALKING ABOUT THE GOSPEL. ”



Paul (third from left) alongside the Vihiga Queens FC Staff

sports ministry are both key components of the Level 3 programme, Paul outlines how these have helped his work in Kenya:

“Learning to understand the gospel in depth has taught me more about how I can engage well in conversations with others and move towards talking about the Jesus.”

“Level 3 has also aided my thinking on strategy for ministry in the specific context of elite sport. High performance environments are generally secular, guarded, spaces – elite athletes don’t find it easy to be open because people often want something from them. To create opportunities in this space, you need to understand this mindset. On the Level 3 I got to listen to interviews with high level performers, and even interview some myself, to better understand what they go through meaning I now feel I can speak into these situations better.”

A TEAM TO REACH THE WORLD OF SPORT

As this year’s Level 3 programme finishes in the next few months, Paul, and many leaders like him will continue to work to reach competitive sportspeople with the good news of Jesus around the world. Our hope, alongside our international partners, is that participants will go back to their contexts feeling better connected and supported to sustain faithful sports ministries.

PLEASE USE THE WINTER PRAYER DIARY TO PRAY SPECIFICALLY FOR THE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME AS IT CONTINUES TO RUN.



GAME DAY

You love sport. You love Jesus. How can you start your game day, preparing to give your all, keeping your eyes fixed upon Jesus?

1

GET OUR WEEKLY GAMEDAY DEVOTION LANDING IN YOUR INBOX EACH WEEK.

Game Day is for all sportspeople who want to connect their sport and their faith. From September 2022 you can get it each week into your inbox on the day of the week which works best for you.

“THE LENGTH WAS PERFECT AND THE CONTENT HIT THE SPOT IN TERMS OF BEING BIBLICALLY FAITHFUL AND APPLIED SPECIFICALLY TO CHRISTIAN SPORTSPEOPLE.”

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GAMEDAY**

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THEM?



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