

Autumn 2018

back pages

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF CHRISTIANS IN SPORT



Same passion, different hurdles...

Being a Christian
sportsperson across
the ages

WHAT'S INSIDE

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This time we're looking at what it looks like to be Christian in Sport across the ages - from Young Performance Athletes to those considering retirement - the good news of the gospel is still supremely relevant. Sit back, make a brew and enjoy a read of this term's Back Pages!

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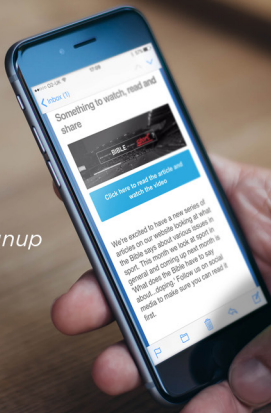
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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Our permanent vocation



"Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them."
(1 Corinthians 7 v 20, NIV)

With 2017 being the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, the Christians in Sport staff team studied a book called 'Why the Reformation still matters'¹. Among the many Biblical themes that shaped Martin Luther's thinking are those of calling and vocation.

Luther took 1 Corinthians 7 v 20 as his key text here. He made the point that our calling is our current circumstances. It is in them that we're able to serve God. The book's authors, Michael Reeves and Tim Chester, write: "Luther's point is not that you cannot change your role, but that you need not. You do not have to stop being a baker and become a monk if you truly want to serve God."

Retirement is a massive deal for elite sportspeople. In one sense, it can appear to be the end of their calling or vocation. This isn't just a battle for professional athletes – it can be tough for any sportsperson who has to stop playing the game he or she loves.

The great news for Christians, if you've been an elite athlete or played sport at any level, is that this is not the only circumstance in which you can serve God. You can do that where you are now. *We are saved to work, in whatever form that takes, not saved by work.*

Whatever stage of life we're at, and however we're involved with the work of Christians in Sport, there is ample opportunity to serve our Heavenly Father and pray, play, say for His glory. As the articles on our Internship scheme and Young Performance Athlete programme highlight, it is vital we invest in the next generation of Christian sportspeople, but that is not to exclude any of you from this work. Whether you're a player, coach, official, parent or pray-er, we're so grateful for your partnership in the gospel.

Graham Daniels
General Director

Director of Football at Cambridge United FC
St Andrew the Great, Cambridge



¹ 'Why the Reformation Still Matters', Michael Reeves and Tim Chester, Crossway Books, 2016

THE RETIREMENT QUESTION

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Helping elite sportspeople navigate retirement is something we take seriously at Christians in Sport and why it was the subject of this summer's podcast series. Here, **General Director Graham Daniels** explains why it's such a big issue and how we're helping top-level athletes navigate it.



Dreaded isolation

When you retire, you become someone who *used* to be a brilliant tennis player or footballer, and that's so painful. You can't go to the place where your old teammates work and you can't keep popping into see them.

Also, the longer you are out of the game, the more likely it is that if you turn up at your old stadium or training ground, someone there may not even know who you are. It's a dreaded isolation.

Three common threads

All the research, and my personal experience suggests, that there are three major factors that sportspeople have as points of reference throughout their careers. These are their relationship with coaches (how that impacts their career), injury (the consequences and pain of not being involved) and retirement. The first two are preparatory for the third in many ways.

When your coach doesn't pick you, that's a real feeling of rejection. When you have a long-term injury, you feel like you're a useless part of the group and you're not contributing anything. These two are tasters of retirement.

Let's dig a bit deeper into the Bible and see how it can help tackle these difficulties. It is right to say that retirement is not specifically mentioned in the Bible, but there are lots of passages that can shape our thinking.

Responding rightly

In Romans 6 v 1-2, Paul corrects the view that if we have been saved by Jesus' death on the cross, we need not worry about living in a way that rejects God. He makes the point that although we cannot earn our salvation, good works should joyfully follow in the lives of Jesus' followers. When so much of elite sporting culture is about earning your place on the team or improving your ranking by your own performance, this is a great

reminder of God's grace and how we should respond. When you retire, you are no less able to live your life in response to what God has done for you. Your context may have changed, but God's grace never does.

A few chapters on, in Romans 12 v 1, followers of Jesus are called to offer our bodies as living sacrifices because of the mercy God has shown us. This means whatever we do with our bodies should be worship - giving our all to God. Many things change when an elite athlete retires, but the call of Romans 12 v 1 remains the same - to keep worshipping!

Pleasing God

The Bible is also really clear that faith pleases God, so any act can please Him if done in faith. In Colossians 3 v 23-24, Paul is addressing slaves and encouraging them that, although they were seen as lowly by the society of the time, they were just as able to do their work for God as any high-ranking Roman official who had come to faith.

Having been so used to performing in front of thousands and often enjoying a high profile, 'normality' can be hard to adjust to for many elite sportspeople.

For followers of Jesus, it can be easy to equate competing at the highest level with "working for the Lord" as Colossians 3 puts it; but much harder when your work seems more mundane or if you're not clear what the next stage is. The great news is that your new work can be just as much for the Lord as your old.

Grasping our identity

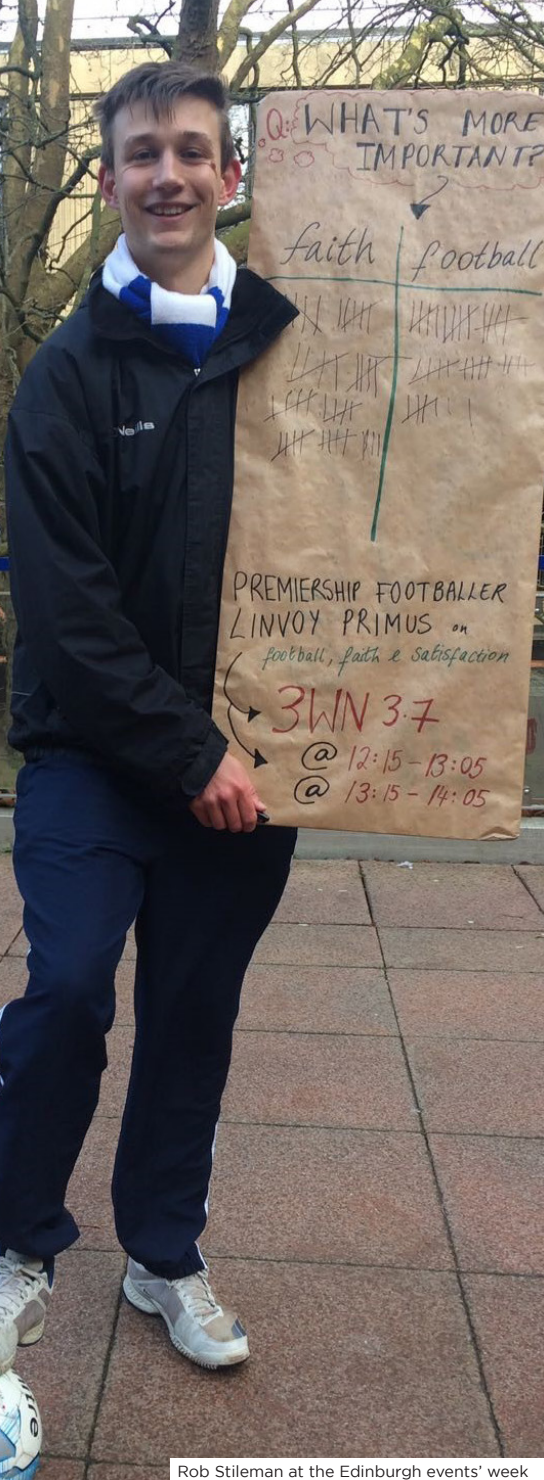
When an elite sportsperson retires, one of the things they often grapple with is their 'former identity' as an athlete. But we must always remember that our primary identity is in being followers of Christ - even if that can be hard to grasp.

The Bible tells us that we are made in the image of God (Genesis 1 v 27). That image is not something which lasts for a set time like a top-level sporting career - it is an amazing, lifelong reality. Although your vocation changes with retirement, this great identity does not.

Listen in

You can hear the 'Retirement Question' podcast series at christiansinsport.org.uk/podcast





Rob Stileman at the Edinburgh events' week

MOTORWAYS, MINISTRY AND MISSIONS

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The **Internship** remains a key way we're investing in the next generation of young leaders and in 2018-19 we have 13 on the team, including six staying on for a second year. Here, Rob Stileman, one of those second years, reflects on the past 12 months and looks ahead to a second year.

It feels a lifetime ago that I arrived in Brackley for the start of the Internship, and spent the morning hastily assembling two Ikea flatpack beds that would last me and Jack Shepherd (a fellow Intern) the year. That it was only a year ago speaks volumes.

This has been a year like no other. A year where I have learnt more, done more and driven up the M1 more than I could possibly have imagined!

Foundational to the Internship has been the training I have received. Through the ministry training course I attended in Oxford, the weekly Friday morning sessions and four block training weeks with Christians in Sport, I have seen my knowledge and handling of the Bible increase, learnt how to write and deliver talks effectively, as well as develop a plethora of workplace skills.

All this training has been especially useful for my primary role as an Intern - overseeing the Christians in Sport groups



The 2017-18 Intern intake

at universities in the Midlands and the North of England. From Oxford to Leeds, I have found myself shuttling up and down the M1 and M40, visiting university groups, reading the Bible with students one-to-one and speaking at guest events.

For me, these guest events are what it's all about - giving sports playing students the chance to hear and respond to the amazing message of the gospel. And it has been particularly encouraging to see so many students grasp hold of these opportunities to share their faith with their sports mates.

"The stories of people choosing to follow Jesus were a joy to hear and another glorious example of the Lord at work."

Alongside this, the year has been punctuated by various trips away, including mission weeks at Bath and Edinburgh universities, a sports camp in Moldova, and Sports Plus this summer. The standout time for many of the Interns was our trip to Moldova back in January.

A far cry from the comforts of the British Isles, the trip was both humbling and brilliantly encouraging as we saw the Lord powerfully at work, with many of the Moldovan young people making a commitment to follow Christ.

But there have also been times of spiritual disappointment. Whether it be the last-minute cancellation of a guest event, or a friend who is completely closed to the gospel - such moments have left me dejected and frustrated in equal measure. They have been a stark reminder that gospel work, though exciting and a privilege, is also often difficult.

These lessons will stand me in good stead as I begin a second year of the Internship. One key difference, though, will be in location as I move from Brackley to home in London.

It has been fantastic being part of Life Church, Brackley and I am excited for my role at Inspire St James' Clerkenwell.

I cannot wait to see how God uses me and the 12 other Interns this year. Bring on round two...

Meet the team

Get to know the Interns at christiansinsport.org.uk/meettheinterns



View from the stands:

The Open at Carnoustie saw Kenny Crawford, Christians in Sport/ LOGOS Golf Ministries' representative on the European Tour, make his 'major debut'. Kenny held a pre-tournament Bible study and prayer time for Christian golfers, caddies and staff, and was able to encourage many of them in one-to-one chats.

SUMMER

Oarsome week: It was a privilege to host 673 young people at six Sports Plus camps across the UK and we are so thankful for the 500 Leaders, Coaches and Support Staff who made them happen. Looking at Luke's gospel, our theme was 'Rescued by the Saviour of the world'. Sports Plus also took place at Monkton for the first time, where rowing (pictured) also made its debut.



World Cup outreach:

We encouraged churches to make the most of Russia 2018 by adding extra World Cup resources to the Sports Mission Pack. We've had 1,213 downloads of the pack since it was launched, 36,000 people watch our evangelistic film and nearly 5,000 people read the blogs.



POSTCARDS



Sunset sport: It was awesome to organise two weeks where Christian sportspeople could invite their teammates to enjoy the facilities of Club La Santa, Lanzarote, the world's No 1 sports resort, and investigate the gospel. Week two saw Craig Larnier lead a Life Explored course each evening.

INVESTING IN A VISION FOR EUROPE

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Having taken place for a third time in July, the European Sports Mission (ESM) is now a firm fixture in our calendar. It has been a privilege to help train young leaders from across the continent and see God at work. Here's a snapshot of what it's all about...



The 2018 team at Bobbio Pellice

What is the European Sports Mission?

It's a month-long training school with teaching from a variety of European leaders. We start with two weeks of in-depth sports mission training, including skills like explaining the gospel and Bible handling, as well as different strategies you could use. There is also specific leadership training in the evenings. The theory is then put into practice when the team serve on mission trips around Europe. The team then return for a final week of debriefing and future planning.

Who's it for?

It's open to 18-25 year olds from across Europe. Previously we've had Brits, Portuguese, Serbians, Romanians, Finnish, Dutch, French, German, Albanian and Turkish young leaders involved. It is always a joy to see friendships form across the cultural barriers and see how

other Christians are living out their faith in their culture. Some have even visited their friends' countries to help serve them on other missions.

Why are we involved?

The 18-25 age group is a key window to invest in due to the available time they have, and also the ready made community most have around university or further education colleges, to enable them to share the gospel. It is a great time to invest in leaders before they go off into the wider world. It's also great to share our resources as a member of the European Christian Sports Union (ECSU).

Where does it take place?

The training facility is at Bobbio Pellice in the Italian Alps. The missions the teams go on are all with our partners from the European Christian Sports Union (ECSU). This has included camps in Romania, Serbia and Macedonia, coaching in Malta and community sport projects in Portugal. Some of these would struggle to happen without the ESM leaders. It is a very practical servant leadership as most of the ESM team will not be able to speak the language - but what a way to see God at work across Europe!

Want to get involved

Or know someone who might? Head to christiansinsport.org.uk/esm



YOUNG PERFORMANCE ATHLETE FOCUS SUPPORT ON A LIFE- CHANGING JOURNEY

As well as supporting hundreds of senior elite athletes who are Christians, we are also investing in the next generation. Here, Lisa Elliott, a badminton player who heads up our work supporting Young Performance Athletes (YPAs), sets the scene.

The world of sport can be an extremely tough place, particularly if you're a young elite athlete. For the exceptionally talented young sports person who is a Christian, the journey on the performance pathway can be life-changing in terms of potential successes, but perhaps more so in terms of challenges.

The number of training sessions increases, meaning more time on the road, diary clashes and less time for homework and friends. Expectations of the coach, and others, increase and therefore the pressure to perform becomes greater. Family dynamics can be tested amidst the busyness, whilst meeting other Christians at church or youth group, and spending time alone with God, can become less of a priority.

In this culture, where sportspeople are told that who they are is based on what they do and how well they do it, we are passionate about helping YPAs live for

Jesus. We want YPAs to recognise their gifts are from God and be able to worship Him as they train and compete, with the confidence that their identity, value and worth are secure in being children of God and not based on their performance.

Primarily, we would love to see YPAs being taught and disciplined by local churches. However, we understand this can be a challenge for YPAs because of their increased weekend commitments, and for the church, which may not have the capacity to support them. Therefore, we aim to work with the local church to help these young people grow in their faith and tackle sport-specific issues that arise.

There is not a 'one size fits all' approach to how we provide support, as we recognise that every family and situation is unique. Our main ways of support include praying for families regularly, sending resources which address various topics or issues, linking up families in the same region or sport to encourage each other and, where appropriate, offering a mentor who will keep in regular contact with the YPA and family to pray and read the Bible.

[Read on overleaf to here from two people currently receiving our support.](#)

A photograph showing the lower legs and feet of a group of runners on a dirt path. They are wearing various athletic shoes and socks, and are in motion, running towards the right side of the frame. The path is light brown and bordered by green grass on the left.

“RUNNING THE RACE CAN BE HARD”

AN ATHLETE’S PERSPECTIVE

The YPAs we support include [a 16 year old athlete, who focuses on 800m and 1,500m track running in the summer and cross-country over the winter](#). Here he shares some of the highs and lows he faces as a Christian sportsperson.

I have had a lot of races where it hasn't gone as I would have liked, but I always pray I would do it for God's glory - the audience of one idea. This means that although there may be many people watching me run and competing alongside me, I try to remember that God is the only audience I'm looking to please.

I have got some very close friends within my running group and I think they respect my Christian faith and how I live my life. I just try to tell them what I believe. We have had some good chats about things like evolution. Often, they are really interested and ask questions. I just want to be around them in a way that honours God and Jesus. A lot of the time, I'm guilty of not doing that.

Sometimes in different places, when I'm not so close to the other athletes, I will get jeered at because I'm a Christian. If you take it well, it can be a good witness

to Jesus. It's really amazing to have a God who loves you and cares for you no matter what.

One of my main battles is congratulating opponents when I lose unexpectedly. There might be someone who you have always beaten in races and then something happens and they beat you. You feel like saying to everyone, 'he shouldn't be beating me, I have beaten him loads of times'. But that is not how I should act. I will try to justify myself and say how much better than him I am and that was a bad race for me. He had a lucky run or whatever. It's something I have been struggling with.

My identity isn't found in athletics. It's found in God and how He views me as His child because Jesus has died for me. That can be a big thing when people around you care so much about exams and sport. Hopefully, I can show that in a way that people can't quite put their finger on and want to find out more.

It's God who really matters. If you display Him in your sport, that can really speak to people and that will create questions in your friends' minds. It goes against the culture of sport, but it's the best way to play sport.



“I THOUGHT I WAS LOSING THE PLOT”

A PARENT’S PERSPECTIVE

Supporting a child who is a YPA brings plenty of ups and downs in its own right. [Here, the mother of a 16-year-old netballer, shares her story.](#)

I have been a Christian for a long time and my faith is really important to me, but working out what following Jesus looks like in our position has been a real challenge.

My daughter was always a very sporty girl and once she focused on netball at 13, she progressed from county to England level. I didn’t realise how much impact it would have and it’s been a steep learning curve for me. There are big demands on the players in terms of training, travelling and nutrition.

We’ve definitely become quite isolated from our local church because they don’t really understand our situation. I am still able to stay quite involved myself because I have time in the week, but I think my daughter is less connected to

her faith than she has been at any point in her life. Although not intentionally, she was made to feel that she was not a good Christian because she couldn’t be as involved as others in the youth group.

On the other hand, the high for me is seeing her so fully alive when she’s playing her sport. I guess that’s the bit that people at church don’t see. They don’t see how much joy it brings her. All the best bits of her come out when she’s in that team environment. Being a Christian in a very competitive world like that is quite hard.

Another parent I met through netball passed me Lisa Elliott’s (see page 11) number. Meeting Lisa and having her talk to us was just so wonderful. I thought I was losing the plot with all that was going on. The pressures we face are fairly unique, so it was great to hear that others are in that position too. Lisa talked my daughter’s language, she talked about sport and faith, which others in church found it hard to relate to. It’s been great to have this support on our journey.

Featured resource

We have produced a booklet called ‘How do I support my child as a Christian in the world of elite sport?’ which features the top 10 questions asked by parents and guardians.

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



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Steve Bontrager, captain of Polycell Kingston, shares his triumph in Basketball's Prudential Cup Final with his son

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Where sport and faith
collide for those who kick,
dive, catch, or slide

The Guinea Pig
and The Bishop

am Daniels on
Christians in Sport and the
local church

NEW LOOK, SAME US

From January, you'll notice a few changes at Christians in Sport. We'll have a brand-new logo, a revamped magazine and prayer diary, and an updated website.

We're not just updating for the sake of it or because it's on trend. As we keep striving to reach the whole world of sport for Christ we need to grow the work and find more sportspeople to go and live and speak for Jesus in their clubs and teams. To help us do that, we feel there is a need to simplify our offering and freshen up how we look so that someone finding out about us for the first time can quickly and easily see how to get involved.

We've had great feedback from you, our supporters, as you've shared views and impressions through emails, letters,

'phone calls, as well as an extensive online survey, helping us to understand how people see us and helping us see areas where we can improve on to make our mission more clear.

As we seek to train and envision more people, we've been focusing on how our website and digital resources can help sportspeople to live and speak for Jesus. Of those who completed our survey, more than half said these digital resources are useful. However, many mentioned difficulties in navigating or finding them. Part of this work will be looking to correct this.

To that end, we hope you'll be excited to see our website in the new year. It will still be full of resources to help you as you live for Jesus in the world of sport, but hopefully it will be far easier to find everything, especially for a new Christian in sport looking in.


Thanks so much for your partnership in the gospel as we go about this important work.

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CHRISTIANS IN SPORT

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Who are You?

Welcome

to the Christians in Sport website

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OLYMPICS 2012

We've got it! The Olympic torch is on its way to London and Christians in Sport are just a 'hop, step and a jump' away from their biggest and most ambitious sports project

About Christians in Sport

Formed in 1980, Christians in Sport has more than 35 years of experience supporting Christians in the world of sport and helping sportspeople explore the Christian message. For more information on who we are and how we can help you, please get in touch using the details below.



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