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JAKE PEACOCK: MIXING MAUY THAI
BOXING WITH CHRISTIAN FAITH

LOCKED DOWN, BUT NOT OUT

TRIALS, HOPE & DISAPPOINTMENT
ON THE ROAD TO TOKYO



CHRISTIANS IN SPORT

CONTACT

Frampton House
Unit D1
Telford Road Industrial Estate
Bicester
OX26 4LD

01869 255630

info@christiansinsport.org.uk

www.christiansinsport.org.uk

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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.

Welcome to the Winter 2021/22 edition of Back Pages. Sporting action has come thick and fast since our last edition, with Tokyo's thrilling Olympic and Paralympic Games being the highlight.

This edition shows how we have seen God at work in the world of sport in the summer and autumn of 2021. You'll hear from Graham Daniels on the wonderful privilege it is to play sport as a Christian; from Natalya, a student, as she reflects on sharing the gospel at university during two seasons of disrupted sport; and from Owen Brown on our international leadership development programmes. In addition, we have Simon Poole reflecting on the joy and adversity faced by athletes at the Olympic trials; as well as a feature on Jake Peacock - a professional Muay Thai fighter - and his perspective on combat sport and the identity struggle that elite athletes face.

Whatever your involvement, we hope these stories will encourage you and we want to thank you for partnering with us as we strive to reach the world of sport for Christ.

BRIAN GLYNN

Back Pages Editor





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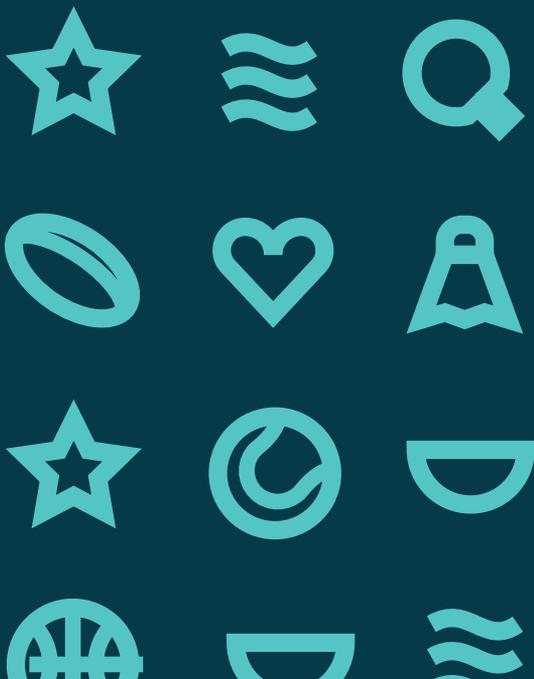
JAKE PEACOCK

MIXING MUAY THAI BOXING
WITH CHRISTIAN FAITH



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

A TIMELESS MESSAGE FOR CHANGING TIMES



SURVEYING THE WORLD OF SPORT

Sport is brilliant. For those of us who love it, the last few months have been a treat. We've had the showpiece elite events of the European Football Championships, Olympics and Paralympics. Alongside that, clubs across the UK have made the return to training and competing. We're back with our teammates, coaches or support staff. As I've reflected on this, it has become clear that our engagement in this thrilling world of sport needs to be shaped by biblical thinking.



As Christians, we know why sport is so good. We can recognise that sport is a gift from God. We believe that God has given us the passion and ability to play. We know that God is glorified as we enjoy His good gift of sport and use it to build community by serving others. That's why we love it.

Yet, we also recognise that sport is deeply broken. Rather than being an arena for God's glory, sport is sometimes a place where pride, covetousness and anger are normalised. As human beings, we misuse and tarnish God's gift of sport. We take the gift but reject the Giver.

The default position of the world of sport is to look to the individual. The epitome of sporting culture is not to look at God and His grace, but to individuals and their performance. The world of sport sees performance as crucial. Your value and identity are a product of how you perform. Play well? Be happy, enjoy it, feel valued. Have a shocker? Be embarrassed, hide, get it right next time. Who you are, and how much you matter, comes down to how you perform.

" AS HUMAN BEINGS, WE MISUSE AND TARNISH GOD'S GIFT OF SPORT. WE TAKE THE GIFT BUT REJECT THE GIVER. "

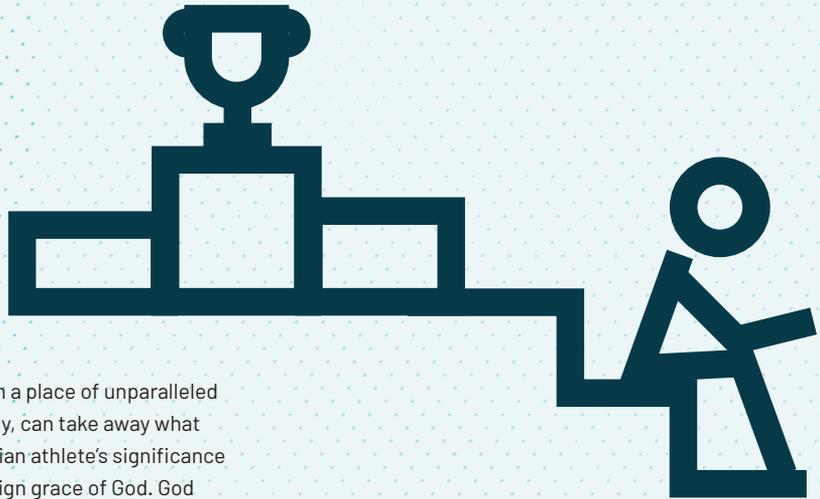


A NEW PERSPECTIVE

As Christians we are in danger of seeing ourselves through the typical lenses of sports culture. Our tendency is to consider our identity from the perspective of our performance. We forget that our identity is secure through faith in Christ. Instead, we think that our identity is contingent on our sporting or spiritual performance. We deny the Gospel of grace in favour of 'backing ourselves.'

That is a terrible mistake to make. First, it robs God of the praise that He is due. Second, it will let us down. Sport simply cannot provide the fulfilment and security that we seek through our engineered identity. We need to reverse our perspective.

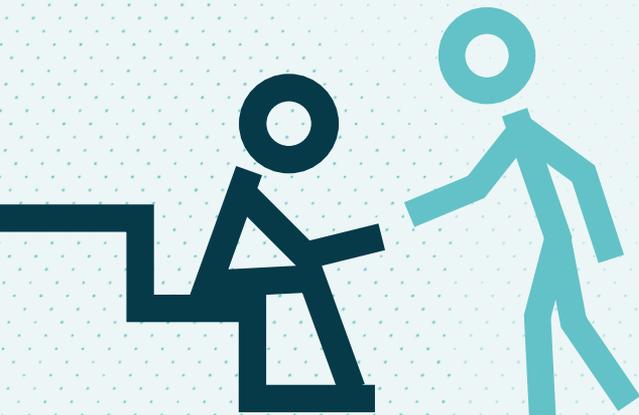
Sport is not about what we can do for God. Sport is about what God can do through us. Our identity comes from God's work in giving us faith. Our witness and worship comes from God's work in drawing us closer to Him and into the service of others through our sport. As we go again, our perspective must be rooted in the grace and sovereignty of God. We need to understand what it means to be a Christian in sport; to compete as someone chosen, loved and justified by a holy God, who is thoroughly engaged with our week by week sporting vocation. Only then can we discover a new way to play.



A NEW WAY TO PLAY

The Christian athlete performs from a place of unparalleled security. Nobody, and I mean nobody, can take away what you have through Jesus. The Christian athlete's significance is predicated entirely on the sovereign grace of God. God has initiated and brought forth salvation in the Lord Jesus. Performance cannot change that. In a world that says that identity is achieved, the Bible says that identity is received.

"SPORT IS NOT ABOUT WHAT WE CAN DO FOR GOD. SPORT IS ABOUT WHAT GOD CAN DO THROUGH US."



That is immensely liberating. Yet, the full picture is even better. Not only is the Christian athlete saved, but they have been supplied with gifts to play sport. Our sporting abilities do not define us, but they are gifts from God. Not only does the

Christian athlete play with security, they can play with joy knowing that it is from God. As sport returns, what a privilege to be able to compete with that kind of joy!

And how does this relate to Christian witness and worship in the world of sport? Once more, sportspeople are helped by considering what God will do through them. God gifts sportspeople with abilities and relationships in sport that they may serve others in worship to Him. He loves, He saves, and He uses sport to draw people closer to Him as they serve others!

What an incredible privilege it is to be a Christian in sport. The Christian athlete has been saved by God's grace, supplied with gifts and enabled to use them for God's glory and others' good. We are enabled to serve others by God's grace, as we care for them and speak of Jesus in the sport that we love. Isn't God so kind?



REACHING THE WORLD OF SPORT

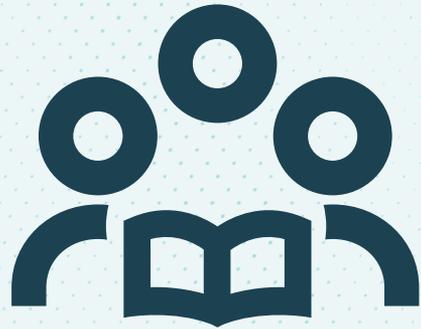
This is, quite simply, the greatest news that sportspeople could ever hear. It is a liberating reality for the Christian sportsperson and the only hope for the sportsperson who is not a Christian. We long for both to hear this message. That is why we do what we do. That is why we will never stop unashamedly opening the Bible to let God speak.

It was with immense thanks to God that seven Sports Plus camps, across every nation in the UK, ran successfully this summer. University students have been meeting together to read the bible and pray for God to work in their clubs and teams. Training and outreach events are back in-person and happening across the UK. Sportspeople are continuing to seek to share Christ with those in their clubs and teams, and we give God great thanks for that. I love hearing about folks from this movement – normal people like you and me – stepping out in faith to share Christ with their teams.

As we emerge from the pandemic, we must remember the gospel underpinning all that we do. The format and people may change; but the Lord Jesus Christ must always be at the centre of this movement.

In a year of uncertainty we thank God for His unchanging faithfulness. We praise God that the Lord Jesus will build His church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. It is our privilege to worship that God in the world of sport. To Him be the glory.

“ IN A WORLD THAT SAYS THAT IDENTITY IS ACHIEVED, THE BIBLE SAYS THAT IDENTITY IS RECEIVED. ”



GRAHAM DANIELS

General Director



NEWS

LONDON MARATHON FUNDRAISER

This autumn Owen Brown ran the London Marathon to help raise money for the Christians in Sport Future Leaders Fund. The fund will help young leaders in the UK and around the world access training programmes, participate in international sports missions and learn first-hand what it takes to build sustainable sports ministry. Owen himself is involved with training future leaders internationally, it's something he's deeply passionate about! Christians in Sport are very thankful to God for generous givers who donated. With their support, the target of raising £2,500 was exceeded. Owen completed the course in 4hrs 27mins 53 seconds, perhaps we'll see him back on the course next year to go again!



GAME DAY

Game day is a new weekly devotional we've trialled across October and November as we look to better help sportspeople connect their faith and their sport. In our first six-part series, the studies have been based on the Lord's prayer, aiming to help sportspeople reflect on God's Word in a way that has specific application to their sport that day. We're excited to see how we can further develop this resource as we receive and collate feedback from those who took part in the trial series.

03

SPORTS PLUS XTRA SCOTLAND

Sports Plus Xtra Scotland took place on the 11th of October at Carronvale House, Larbert. It was great to welcome young people from across Scotland, including some who had no prior engagement with Christians in Sport, to enjoy a day of sport and teaching from God's Word. Focusing on Ephesians 2:v1-10 we looked specifically at what it means to be "made alive" by Christ, and what it means to be alive as a Christian in sport. Our hope is that young people have left having had lots of fun, having made new friendships, and having seen a glimpse of the life God offers us through Jesus.



04

WELCOMING NEW INTERNS

We're grateful for our new interns, Vic and Dave, as they start their year on the staff team. Highlights so far include training and teambuilding in Scotland, where challenges alongside second year interns forced them out of their comfort zones as they learnt about serving each other. Time spent studying Isaiah at block training and at the Ministry Training Course in Oxford have also served to provide a foundation in God's Word for their year of ministry. Every Wednesday Vic and Dave are visiting university groups around England as they seek to put into practice all that they're learning by encouraging student sportspeople to live and speak for Jesus in their sports clubs and teams.

05

THE SPORTS QUIZ IS BACK!

The Sports Quiz is back in person across the UK! We've been on the road as quizzes have been taking place, providing an opportunity for Christians to invite their friends to hear the good news of Jesus in a relaxed and informal setting. Cliftonville Football Club Academy in Northern Ireland ran a quiz this November, organised by the club chaplain, David, with a half time gospel talk from ex-professional football player, Daniel Wright. A group of 30 players and coaches attended, and it was a hugely encouraging evening, with young academy players eager to listen to Daniel's talk.



06

ELITE RUGBY PLAYERS BIBLE STUDY

This term we've been back meeting fortnightly on Zoom to study the Bible with elite rugby players after a summer break. We've been joined by some new players which has been really encouraging as we've worked our way through the start of 1 Peter. A highlight has been 1 Peter 1:v3-4; specifically, the fact that through faith in Jesus we have new birth into a living hope. What amazing truth for players to carry with them in every situation! We are excited to get players together in person for meals before and after New Year, the first of which was in England on 27th November. Alongside this, one to one meetings have continued with players, with Christians in Sport staff reading the Bible and coming alongside them in their context in person and on Zoom.

TO KEEP UP TO DATE WITH NEWS FROM CHRISTIANS IN SPORT, WHY NOT SIGN UP FOR BACK PAGES ONLINE? YOU CAN DO SO BY HEADING TO:
CHRISTIANSINSPO.RG.UK/SIGNUP

SPORTS PLUS + 2022



Applications will open for leaders and trainees at 7pm on Monday 17th January and for young people at 7pm on Monday 24th 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 10TH - FRI 15TH JULY

BRECON: SUN 24TH - FRI 29TH JULY

BELFAST 1: SUN 31ST JUL - FRI 5TH AUG

MONKTON 1: SUN 31ST JUL - FRI 5TH AUG

BELFAST 2: SUN 7TH - FRI 12TH AUG

MONKTON 2: SUN 7TH - FRI 12TH AUG

REPTON: SUN 14TH - FRI 19TH AUG





***STUDENT SPORT:
LOCKED DOWN,
BUT NOT OUT***

2021 has seen a return to normality on many fronts. Sports clubs are back training in person, and players can even socialise after a training session! This is mostly true of student sport as well, but some have missed out on a great deal more than others. With university sport being played predominantly in the winter months, those with competition seasons in the late winter and early spring, particularly indoor sportsplayers have had two entire seasons disrupted.



Natalya is a Medical and Sport Science student at the University of Exeter; she's also a double mini trampolinist. In March 2020 her university league season was drawing to a close and the national series was on the horizon when suddenly a busy schedule of study and competing gave way to lockdown, uncertainty, and certainly no indoor sport. Brian Glynn sat down with Natalya (pictured) to find out how she was able to be a Christian in sport, even when her sport stopped.

WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE NOT BEING ABLE TO TRAIN OR COMPETE?

"I found myself in a tough situation: GB and under 18-year-old athletes were still able to train, but there was little provision for me as a national level athlete in an adult age group. The university scene wasn't much better, all indoor sport was cancelled for the entire academic year of 2020/21; the sports hall was even turned into a Covid-19 test centre. Going from knocking on the door of international representation to only being able to train once a week was a tough reality to face!

The story was similar for many friends in the university Christians in Sport group, however there were some great encouragements despite the challenges. We held a joint social with the group at Durham, sharing stories of the struggles we were facing and encouraging each other to look to Christ for hope. We felt really encouraged by the fact that there were other Christians around the country facing the same challenges. New Year Training, Christians in Sport's student conference, was also held online, and was a huge boost for me whilst university training was still cancelled."

WHAT'S IT BEEN LIKE STARTING TO COMPETE AGAIN?

"Returning to competition has been a real test for me, especially as my sport is very technically challenging. To pull off routines I need to be physically fit as well as having a high level of confidence, it's impossible to perform well if any of the moves still feel scary! I knew I'd be at a lower level than I was pre-pandemic, but, in our university group we were discussing how the Bible shows that ability doesn't define us. Time spent in God's Word has really strengthened my faith, enabling me to enjoy sport more fully now I'm back competing! Previously it was difficult for me to connect my head to my heart, I saw competing as a distraction from my faith, but the Christians in Sport group at university has really encouraged me to see how sport fits with my faith, and how sport can be a means to worship God!"



HOW DID THIS SUPPORT HELP YOU TO LIVE OUT YOUR FAITH WHILE YOU WEREN'T ABLE TO TRAIN OR COMPETE?

"Reading the Bible with the university Christians in Sport group really helped me think through how I can share my faith with others, even if it seems scary to speak about Jesus. At times over that last year it has felt like an uphill battle to share my faith at all! Despite my fears, I felt encouraged to try to share Jesus with whoever I had the opportunity to, not just in the world of sport!"

Whilst time with teammates became limited, there was plenty of opportunity to talk about Jesus with my housemates, especially as we spent a lot more time together during lockdowns. Some even came along with me to events put on by our Christian Union in February, and since then one of them has professed faith in Christ for the first time and joined a church, which is truly amazing!"

HOW DID YOU FIND SHARING YOUR FAITH DURING THIS PERIOD?

"Being a trampolinist with little opportunity to get on a trampoline was tough, as was trying to think about witnessing to my teammates. I'd often think to myself "what teammates?!" Two friends from trampolining had just started exploring faith and church, but went home when the first lockdown hit, and it became hard to connect meaningfully with them. The second lockdown only served to make sharing Jesus with teammates even more discouraging, with training cancelled just as relationships were starting to be rekindled."

WHAT HAS GOD BEEN TEACHING YOU OVER THE LAST YEAR?

"I used to think sport distracted me from faith, but Christ has become my stronghold. I know that God cares deeply about my sport, and meeting with other Christian sportspeople all through lockdown to read the Bible has really helped me figure this out!

Trampolining competitions did not return until long after many other sports were in full swing, for me, God's work in my life during this period meant that I could step back into competing with renewed perspective.

My first competition back didn't go well, I didn't perform how I'd expected to. Despite the frustration of a poor performance, I'm thankful for the fact that, by God's grace, my worth does not depend on performance. When I feel worried about my performance, or how I'm going to get back to the level I was at, I know that I can hand these fears over to Jesus. I know that He died to save me, and my certain hope of eternity with Christ is secure regardless of the outcome of my competitions!"





SPORTS PLUS 2021 REVIEW

There are hundreds of thousands of young people in the UK involved in sports clubs and teams each week.

Christians in Sport ran seven sports camps this summer with nearly 600 young people attending across five venues in the UK during July and August. Sports Plus camps are week-long residential camps. They involve specialist sports coaching and team competitions for young people who are serious about sport and play regularly in a club or team, as well as focused teaching on what it means to follow Jesus. Sports Plus aims to encourage young Christian sportspeople in their faith and help those who don't yet know Christ to explore the claims of Christianity.

YOUNG SPORTSPEOPLE TRANSFORMED TO PLAY

In the evening meetings the theme was 'Real Life', from the Gospel of John, whilst the morning meetings had a theme of 'Transformed to Play' from 1 Peter. John 20v31 was the memory verse for the week where John sets out the purpose of his Gospel: that the reader might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in Him they might have life in His name. Reading 1 Peter helped young people to see that by trusting in Jesus they have a transformed life and can live it out in the world of sport. For sportspeople, knowing that success or failure on the field of play does not define them is freeing, and it was hugely encouraging to see young people grappling with this over the course of the summer.



REAL LIFE SPORTS CAMPS!

In 2020 Sports Plus was held online, however in person camps are vital to the work of Christians in Sport and are often cited by young people as pivotal moment in their understanding of the good news of Jesus and the place they were first able to connect their sport and faith. Therefore, we give thanks to God that, despite Covid-19 restrictions preventing many annual festivals, conferences and youth camps from taking place, Sports Plus was able to operate in person.

REACHING THE WORLD OF SPORT

As we reflect on the summer of Sports Plus in 2021 and look ahead to 2022, we're acutely aware that we depend on God's gracious provision to us. We long to see young sportspeople come to hear the good news of Jesus and connect their sport and faith and we're excited to see how God will use Sports Plus in 2022 as we endeavour to make plans.

FURTHER DETAILS ON SPORTS PLUS 2022, INCLUDING LOCATIONS AND DATES, ARE AVAILABLE ON PAGE 11 OF THIS MAGAZINE.



TRIALS, HOPE & DISAPPOINTMENT

ON THE ROAD TO TOKYO

Over the course of the last year, I've had the privilege of being able to meet and read the Bible with a group of elite track and field athletes. I've stood trackside as they experienced victory and defeat, triumph, and agony.

As the world emerged from a devastating pandemic, preparation was severely disrupted leading up to the Olympics, the Games themselves hung in the balance until the very last moment. Yet they went ahead, and we saw some incredible performances. In fact, that is all we see. Few of us have insight into the weeks, months, even years before these performances, nor do we see what happens after the race is run.

This is the struggle athletes face, they have one moment to give an account of themselves, to put years' worth of preparation to the test. The result of hours upon hours of hard graft is suddenly exposed to the world for entertainment, drama, and scrutiny. The focus then shifts, and athletes' names drift from living room conversation, leaving them to process one of the biggest moments of

their lives largely in isolation.

So, what do you say to a Christian athlete aiming to qualify or compete for a medal at a Games? What about when the Games are finished?

ENDURING TRIALS

The milestones along the road to an Olympic Games are significant but, for a hopeful Olympian, that's as much as they can be. The goal is the Games, and everything else is undertaken with that goal in view.

The British Championships in 2021 served as the Olympic qualifying event for athletics. For those confident they'd secure selection this event needed to be negotiated with as little stress as possible. For those vying just to go to Tokyo, however, this was an all or nothing event. Bodies, many of them teetering on the edge of injury, were put on the line with a plane ticket to Japan and a place on Team GB at stake.

In the lead up, I'd met regularly with an athlete during his preparation. We had the opportunity to meet the night before his race. As we quietly prayed in the hotel lobby, other athletes were milling about and came over to join us, not realising we were praying. It was powerful to see this athlete, unphased, invite a direct competitor to sit down and pray with us. The following day I was sat in the front row by the finish as the athletes crossed the line. In the confusion after the race, the athletes, not knowing who'd qualified and who hadn't, came over to me. I was able to remind the athlete I'd been meeting of his prayer the night before, and that he could trust God whatever the outcome.

HOPE IN THE FACE OF DISAPPOINTMENT

I spent time with several other athletes at the Championships grappling with different challenges. One of them knew he had a very good chance of making the Olympic team, but it would take one of the best performances of his life to do so. We spent time on the morning of his event together looking at the book of 1 Peter, specifically chapter 2. It's a chapter that focuses in on the fact that, as Christians, our identity is transformed by Christ, and this is the greatest prize we could hope for. The athlete was convinced of the fact that his fundamental identity was in Christ regardless of the outcome of his race, and this was clear in the way he spoke after narrowly missing out on selection. The pressure and intensity of racing at this level, combined with the immediate debrief demanded by the press, is a huge burden. The way he grappled with the race laid ahead of him, preparing diligently to speak of the hope he had in Christ whatever the outcome, was encouraging to witness.



AFTER THE EVENT

The moments after a big race has been completed are often a period of questioning. For those who have accomplished their goals and for those who didn't achieve what they set out to, the question is often "what next?" With athletes returning from Tokyo and others finishing their season having missed out on selection, we've spent recent weeks working out what it looks like to 'go again'. We've read the Bible together and talked about how the athletes compete from a place of utter security through their God-given faith in Jesus. Christian athletes can know that God will use the ups and downs in their athletic career to draw them closer to Himself. This is immensely liberating. The Christian athlete can experience joy, win or lose, as they trust their career is under the sovereign hand of God. God provides, and works through, an athletic vocation to fulfil His purposes. Through wins, losses, injury or heartbreak, athletes can hold to God's promises in Romans 8:v28-30. That is, God will work through the turbulence of an athletic career for the athlete's good, by conforming them to the image of Jesus and providing the hope of eternal glory with Him. It has been a privilege to watch athletes compete with this understanding of God's providence. The value of an athletic career is not determined by Olympic qualification. It is a result of God's work in the athlete. God promises to use an athletic vocation, with all its highs and lows, to draw the Christian closer to Himself for His glory. What a wonderful God we have!

FASTER, HIGHER, STRONGER... TOGETHER

The Olympic slogan changed for Tokyo 2020 – faster higher stronger... together. This is perhaps more apt for the Christian. The sense of something bigger, striving together to bring out





"IT'S BEEN A PLEASURE BOYS. I HAVEN'T FELT THIS SUPPORTED GOING INTO AN EVENT FOR SO LONG, NOR COME OUT FEELING MORE INSPIRED. GOD IS STILL DOING GREAT THINGS WITH US."

the best in every competitor, not just to glorify the winner. As Christians we are encouraged to run the race, and to encourage others to run with us. Seeing athletes miss out on goals they'd worked towards for years and yet rejoicing with those who achieved lifelong ambitions is powerful. Seeing athletes put Jesus first, amidst a people group that overwhelmingly put the Olympics first, points to the true and lasting joy that can be found in Christ, not in Olympic Gold.

Faster, higher, stronger, together, for Christ. This is the story for this group of athletes, the support they offer one another, and encouragement to compete for Christ is summed up by a message left by one of the group after the British Championships:

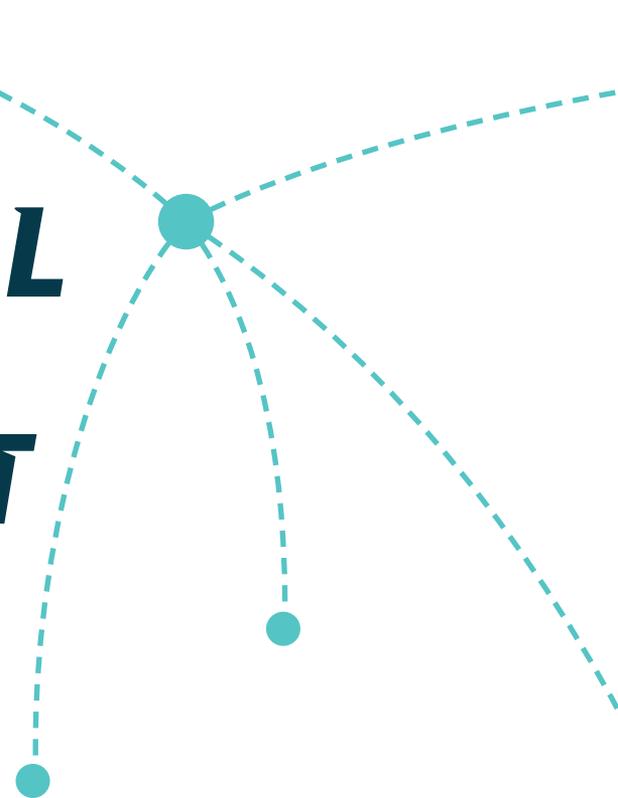
"It's been a pleasure boys. I haven't felt this supported going into an event for so long, nor come out feeling more inspired. God is still doing great things with us"

SIMON POOLE

Elite Team



INTERNATIONAL TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES



Despite the pandemic and the season of lockdown, one of the great highlights has been the privilege to work through new global training programmes alongside accomplished leaders and athletes from around the world. One of these programmes, the Leadership Development Programme (LDP), specifically aimed to bring together leaders from across the globe who are trying to faithfully grow their sports ministries.

One of these leaders was the Filipino basketball player Kat. Kat played professional basketball for almost 10 years. She reflected on the limited understanding she had during that time of what it meant to be a Christian athlete; “I didn’t express my faith vocally through words... I would just try to be excellent for the glory of God... that was my understanding of living out my faith”

The Philippines is often referred to as a Christian country. However, Kat explains that, sadly, Filipino Christianity can quite often be based more on religion and tradition and can therefore be a challenging environment to share the gospel. To change people’s understanding of what faith in Jesus Christ really means can be quite a challenge in and of itself.

Kat subsequently transitioned to coaching; “As I matured... I made sure I was able to build a strong relationship...with the people around me, especially my athletes ... and those were the opportunities to share my faith”

Now in her 30s, Kat leads a team of professional coaches and is the Director of the ‘For The Win Sports Academy’ in Manila. As Kat started the LDP in September 2020 she said “I am expecting to grow more not only in knowledge, learning from and hearing testimonies of sports leaders from different countries and race, but also in experience and network as I engage with the other students in this programme...I’d like to learn different ways and strategies to lead and develop leaders effectively”

Whilst participating in the programme Kat also started to share her learnings with other athletes in her locale;

"I know that in order to reach more, we have to develop more leaders. This is one of the key emphases of our sports ministry, to develop ministry leaders who will develop more ministry leaders in the world of sport"

Since finishing year one of the LDP Kat has been facilitating her own local leader training in East Asia. She has used some of the LDP syllabus with them, most recently training them to understand the Sports Stadium model (a framework for evangelism). Wonderfully, in February 2022, as part of the local leadership team for the region, she will help facilitate a new ministry training programme using some of the syllabus from the LDP. It's exciting to see leaders like Kat around the world developing their own initiatives off the back of time spent training together, as they seek to reach those around them with the gospel. Kat reflects "The biggest impact for me [doing the LDP] is my eyes being opened to the perspective of God, to see them how God sees them, not just as athletes, and to want to reach out to people...and that same passion I hope I am passing on to those I am ministering too."

The LDP will recommence in January 2022 with, we prayerfully hope, a large enrolment of young leaders like Kat, all hoping to proactively impact their corners of the world of competitive and elite sport with the gospel.



OWEN BROWN

International Team



PLEASE JOIN US IN PRAYING AS WE APPROACH THIS NEXT EXCITING STEP. PLEASE DO PRAY FOR KAT TOO AS SHE LEADS HER OWN FRUITFUL AND SIGNIFICANT INITIATIVES.

JAKE PEACOCK

MIXING MUAY THAI BOXING WITH CHRISTIAN FAITH

IN OCTOBER WE SAT DOWN WITH JAKE PEACOCK, A CHRISTIAN, AND PROFESSIONAL MUAY THAI FIGHTER, TO RECORD A PODCAST. WE TALKED ABOUT HIS STORY OF GRAPPLING WITH FAITH AND ATHLETIC IDENTITY, ALONGSIDE HIS PERSPECTIVE ON CHRISTIANS COMPETING IN COMBAT SPORT. WE HOPE THAT JAKE'S EXAMPLE IS HELPFUL FOR THOSE TRYING TO UNDERSTAND HOW TO WORK THROUGH CHALLENGES THAT ARISE IN SPORT FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE.





GOD CREATED JAKE TO BE A FIGHTER BUT....

At 19 years of age Jake threw in the towel. He gave up fighting, the sport he'd been working at for years already despite his young age.

His departure from the world of combat sport was, in part, because he'd recently committed his life to Christ. His identity as a fighter was at odds with his new found Christian faith.

JAKE WENT HIS OWN WAY

Jake was used to forging his own path through life. He was born missing the lower half of his right arm, but grew up playing football, swimming, and practicing Karate to a level where his Sensei touted him as a potential Olympian in combat sport. Jake refused to let his arm hold him back as a fighter, but the attention this difference drew had an impact on his life.

"I just was angry, I just was angry at people, staring or making comments, making fun."

He found increasingly that he was seeking security in his identity as a fighter, to the point where it was consuming him.

"It started to take away identity from me, throughout my teens. I was finding my identity in me winning."

The pressure to win as a fighter was overbearing and sapping the joy he used to experience from practicing his art form.

So he quit.

Jake's motivation to compete was more about fueling his identity as a fighter than enjoying his identity in Christ, so in his late teens, he decided to give it all up.

In fact, Jake didn't touch fighting for two years.

"I said 'no, no more', and I quit and completely. I didn't go into a gym, I didn't train anyone, I didn't train myself. This was about 19 years old, I think 19 or 20. And I took a good two or three years. Didn't touch the sport."

This could have been the end of the road for Jake's fighting career, as is often the case for young, talented, sportspeople. The pressure of competition becomes too intense, and the motivation to face that pressure is rooted in something that isn't sustainable or satisfying.

The courage it takes to leave behind something you love to better follow Christ is highly commendable, and difficult decisions will face every believer at some point during their walk with Jesus. But, for Jake, this wasn't the end of the story.

"IT STARTED TO TAKE AWAY IDENTITY FROM ME, THROUGHOUT MY TEENS. I WAS FINDING MY IDENTITY IN ME WINNING."

JAKE DISCOVERED WHO HE WAS MADE TO BE

Jake could not continue to ignore the gift God gave him; he couldn't let his God-given talent lie dormant within him. A couple of years after cutting clean from combat sport, he came back, opening a gym, training people to fight like he once did. In 2019, he stepped back into the ring to fight for the first time since quitting years previously, and fight as a professional.

How had he come to step back into an arena that once robbed him of joy, where he felt intense pressure to succeed and his identity as a fighter conflicted with his who he was in Christ?

"I realized I've got all this anger, I've got issues with my arm and stuff, and I'm not putting my trust in the right thing, I need to repent."

As Jake's trust in Jesus grew, he was able to reflect on the truths he'd learned from the gospel.

"The veil was lifted, I realized all the things my parents were teaching me they'd say the same things and I'd be like 'this is amazing'."

He realised that to compete again his security, his hope, and his identity must be rooted in Christ.

JAKE FLOURISHED IN HIS NEW IDENTITY

His identity in Christ had completely flipped his view of sport, instead of competing for personal gain, he could now compete as an act of worship.

The freedom Jake discovered brought with it unexpected benefit. Jake says "I'm actually better than I ever was before, because my faith is in Christ". Jake's certain hope is found in the cross of Jesus is what allows him to be at his best, "I'm just completely content. Whether I win or lose," Jake says, "I'm seeing it as a great blessing to be able to compete a high level in Muay Thai." Jake certainly is competing at a high level in the world of Martial Arts.

He's unbeaten in 6 fights, he's a North American and European Muay Thai Champion. He's fighting some of the best in the world.



"I'M JUST COMPLETELY CONTENT. WHETHER I WIN OR LOSE," JAKE SAYS, "I'M SEEING IT AS A GREAT BLESSING TO BE ABLE TO COMPETE AT A HIGH LEVEL IN MUAY THAI."



WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM JAKE?

Jake's struggle wasn't with the legitimacy of practicing martial arts, in fact he's clear that a Christian can compete in the ring.

"At no point, especially in martial arts, there's no anger or animosity, across the board. Non-Christians and Christians, no one's fighting out of anger. At the end of the day, it is a martial art and you're displaying an art form. Muay Thai is a very, very respectful sport. There's no bad mouthing, there's no animosity. No one's in there trying to mame the other guy. It's a sport, it's an art, we're putting it on display for people to watch."

No, the battle Jake fought between quitting at 19 and returning to fight in 2019 went far beyond the question of Christian involvement in combat sport. Rather it was tension between letting go of the identity he'd built for himself and accepting the life he'd been offered through Jesus' death and resurrection. When Jesus said, 'whoever wants to keep their life will lose it', he wasn't calling us to gain a hatred of life, but to relinquish control of our lives and the things that we used to grip so tightly as to have our identity completely rooted in them. For Jake, God's work in his life is evidenced just as clearly through his sport as it is in any other aspect of his life.

" AT THE POINT I BECAME A CHRISTIAN, I DIDN'T WORRY ONE BIT ABOUT MY ARM ANYMORE. AND THAT IS BECAUSE MY IDENTITY WASN'T IN WHO I WAS ANYMORE, HOW PEOPLE SAW ME. IT WAS AND IT IS WITH WHO IT IS IN CHRIST, WHO I AM IN CHRIST. "



Jake's ability to fight free of the pressure and anxiety he used to feel is testament to the freedom offered to all of us through the cross of Jesus Christ.

In newspapers Jake has been described as a professional Muay Thai fighter, and Chelsea legend Gavin Peacock's one-handed son, but Jake's own words are strikingly different:

"At the point I became a Christian, I didn't worry one bit about my arm anymore. And that is because my identity wasn't in who I was anymore, how people saw me. It was and it is with who it is in Christ, who I am in Christ."

YOU CAN LISTEN TO THE FULL PODCAST WE RECORDED WITH JAKE ON ANY PODCAST PLATFORM OR HEAD TO OUR WEBSITE: CHRISTIANSINSPORT.ORG.UK/JAKE-PEACOCK



FINANCIAL REPORT

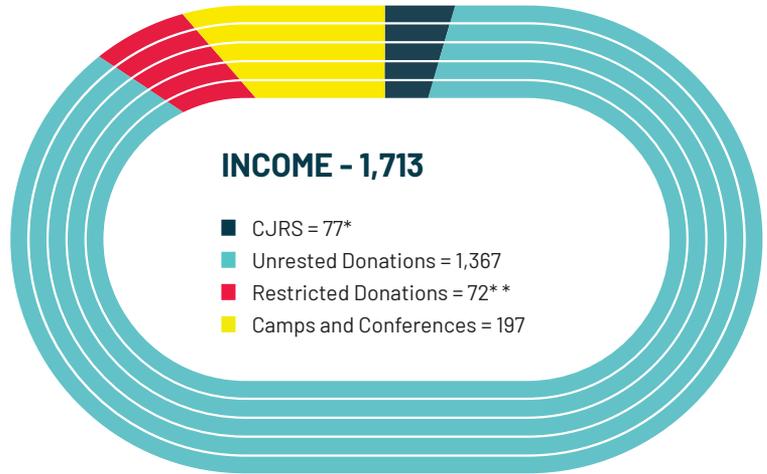
OUR YEAR

Each Autumn when we come to submit our accounts for audit, we are struck again by another year of God's goodness, provision and protection. This year has been no different. We are thankful to God for your financial partnership over the last 12 months. When the 'Big Match' matched funding initiative was launched in January 2020 before the pandemic we were not aware just how important the timing of this campaign would be. Last year, one year into the campaign, we forecasted we would be able to draw down 60% of the funds by the end of 2022. This year, thanks to more partners joining the initiative and committing to new or increased regular giving, we forecast we will be able to draw down over 90% of the funds. There is still one more year left of the 'Big Match' and we trust that, if it is His will, God will raise up more partners to help us reach the target.

COULD YOU JOIN OUR BIG MATCH? ALL NEW AND INCREASED MONTHLY GIVING MATCHED UNTIL DECEMBER 2022. TO GIVE GO TO: CHRISTIANSINSPORT.ORG.UK/BIGMATCH

INCOME

We are thankful to report donations from individuals, trusts and churches to fund the core activity of our work in 2020-2021 totalled £1.4m. That is a 5% increase compared to the previous year when Covid-19 first impacted Christians in Sport as it did many charities and donors. However, the annual total of these donations remains 14% lower than pre-pandemic levels. Each year we also receive donations reserved for a specific needs or projects, these this year donations totalled £175,000.



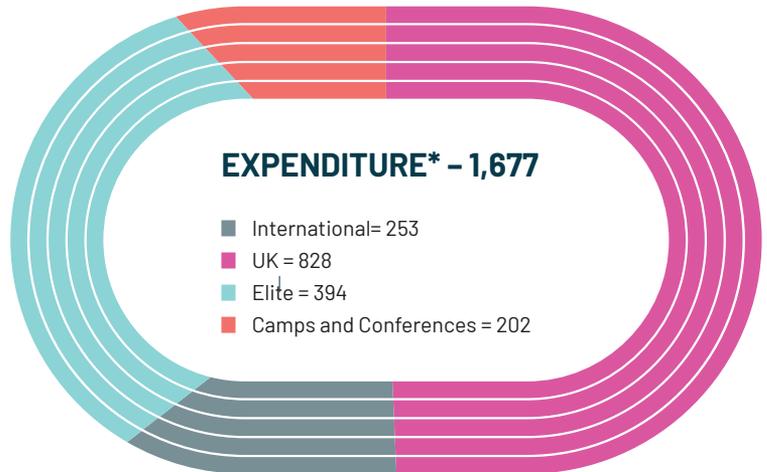
Figures in 000's

*Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

**However, £103,000 was refunded from a grant awarded in 2019/20 due to Covid-19 restrictions .

EXPENDITURE

As you have read in the previous pages, we were delighted to be able to get back to some of our regular activity this year and put on more events for sportspeople of all ages to hear the Good News of Jesus. As such, our expenditure increased by 11% on last year as we once again invested in these events and programmes including Sport Plus camps last Summer. We continue, with God's help, to carefully steward all that we are given and budget accordingly.



*All restricted expenditure encapsulated within these figures

THANK YOU

Thank you, to you, our partners, who represent so many experiences of being a Christian in sport, for being part of our mission to reach sportspeople for Christ. We pray that, in the coming year, we will continue to invest well in growing the work for God's glory.

KATE THORPE

Finance Manager





christiansinsport



cis_uk



ChristiansinsportUK



christians_in_Sport

01869 255 630

INFO@CHRISTIANSINSPORT.ORG.UK

WWW.CHRISTIANSINSPORT.ORG.UK