

# BACK PAGES

## WHAT'S INSIDE

THE POSTPARTUM STORY I WANT TO  
BE ABLE TO TELL YOU...

THE NARROW PATHWAY: FAMILY AND  
THE PROFESSIONAL PELOTON

THE DANGERS OF EXERCISE  
ADDICTION



# CHRISTIANS IN SPORT

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

## WE EXIST TO REACH THE WORLD OF SPORT FOR CHRIST.

We're excited to bring you another edition of Back Pages amidst a cracking summer of sport. This summer we're spoilt for choice with an Athletics World Championships, Commonwealth Games and Football European Championships to name just a few events!

Since January it's been a privilege to work alongside many different sportspeople looking to reach their world of sport for Christ. We hope the stories in this magazine bring to life both the challenge and the joy that this work is as we hear from a student on mission, a family navigating elite sport, and a woman coming to terms with the changes motherhood brings to her sport. We also reflect on the culture of sport. Rosie Woodbridge and Si Poole help us work through the biblical foundations that help tackle exercise addiction; and Graham Daniels highlights changes in ethics and practice in the current world of competitive sport, addressing how we engage with Christian perspective, in his director's message.

We remain thankful to God for your partnership as it sustains our mission to reach the world of sport for Christ.

## BRIAN GLYNN

Back Pages Editor

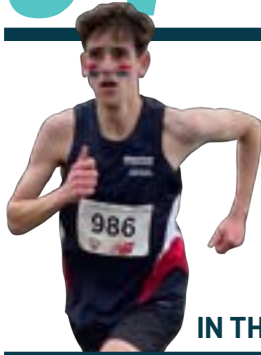




# CONTENTS

04

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



08

NEWS

10

IN THE RACE: WILL'S STORY

14

THE DANGERS OF  
EXERCISE ADDICTION

22

IRON SHARPENS IRON  
GOSPEL COMMUNITY IN  
THE CUTTHROAT WORLD OF  
PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL COACHING



25

THE NARROW PATHWAY  
FAMILY AND THE PROFESSIONAL PELOTON

28

THIS IS THE POSTPARTUM STORY  
I WANT TO BE ABLE TO TELL YOU...



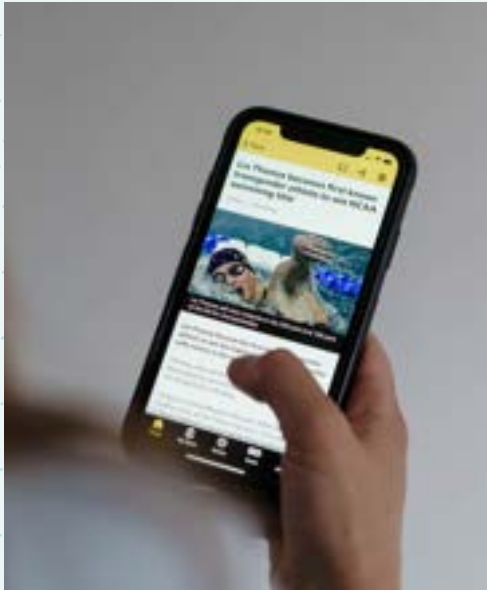
# ***DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE***

Much of the work of Christians in Sport is plain and obvious. We aim to reach the world of sport for Christ, and this involves significant engagement with young people through Sports Plus Camps, students through University Groups, competitive adults through Regional Groups and elite athletes through our Elite Networks. These models originated in the UK and have, over many years, been multiplied across the world through our international partnerships.





An aspect of the work which is less visible is the ongoing study, research and reflection that goes on behind the scenes. This is undertaken with the goal of providing simple, practical resources to encourage Christian athletes and coaches and to equip them to evangelise their sporting colleagues. More reflective consideration of the underpinning relationship between Christianity and sport is important, since sport frequently gives rise to stories which lead to public debate. Two such issues have received much media attention in recent months. There has been much discussion about the mental health and wellbeing of elite athletes, and there has also been significant media analysis regarding the participation of transgender athletes in competitive and elite sport.



When sports stories regarding such issues emerge, Christians in Sport are regularly asked to provide commentary from a Christian perspective. With this in mind, we invest significant energy in seeking to think clearly about the biblical perspective regarding sporting issues that arise in the public square. This approach requires reflection in two specific areas, which are then aligned to offer a Christian response.

First, we strive to attain theological clarity. Christians in Sport seeks to be faithful to historical and confessional Christianity. Every generation faces the cultural pressure to capitulate on key aspects of evangelical faith. To resist these influences, we ensure that our Bible teaching staff undertake foundational theological training and ongoing professional development in faithfully handling and communicating God's word, the Bible.

Secondly, since our primary audience is the world of sport, Christians in Sport seeks to sustain an ongoing understanding of the cultural norms that underlie contemporary sports ethics and practices. Every year, sport governing bodies invest a great deal of time and money in developing and proposing changes to the way sport is organised and played and Christians in Sport needs to be able to offer a thoughtful, gospel-centred response to such developments. For example, regarding transgender participation in sport, on 16 November 2021, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) released new guidelines, which were implemented after the 2022 Winter Olympics. In a departure from previous approaches, the IOC Guidelines contain no requirement for a biological male to suppress their testosterone level to compete in a female category. Rather, the aim of the IOC Guidelines is to enable the participation of transgender athletes by reference to their gender identity, whilst ensuring that no athlete has an unfair and disproportionate competitive advantage because of biological factors.



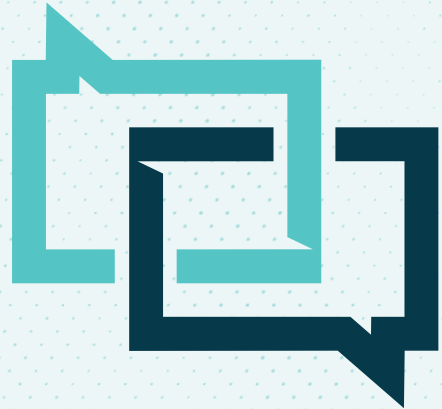
This recent legislation illustrates the demands upon Christians in Sport to consider how to integrate biblical truth with emerging sporting policy and practices. In this process, we want to remain faithful to God's word while simultaneously respecting the impact of contemporary cultural changes on competitive and elite sportspeople. Such questions are demanding ones, and require a great deal of listening, reflection, discussion, and subsequent articulation to offer faithful, thoughtful, and generous responses. This is not easy and demands a real commitment to applying historical biblical truths to contemporary sporting issues.

**"...WE WANT TO REMAIN FAITHFUL TO GOD'S WORD WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY RESPECTING THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL CHANGES ON COMPETITIVE AND ELITE SPORTSPEOPLE."**



The same principles can be applied to the current concern regarding the mental health and wellbeing of elite athletes. For example, this year saw the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP), which had been launched by the Premier League in 2012, in consultation with the English Football League, Football Association and other key football stakeholders. One of its key aims was to develop young players' welfare and broader interests, and the success of this desired outcome has been challenged. Rather than critiquing the results of the EPPP, Christians in Sport has contributed to the desirable outcome of providing a more holistic experience for young, professional players. We undertook a study in the lives of fourteen Christian professional footballers. The research showed that appropriating Christian faith enabled several favourable results in their lives. These outcomes included a degree of personal fulfilment and security previously unattained from their sporting careers. Furthermore, because of these experiences, the Christian players intuitively integrated their private faith in their workplace at the clubs, which challenged some of the less helpful institutional cultures of the professional game. While exhibiting the courage to challenge some aspects of changing room culture led to times of conflict with managers and players, in due course the consistent result was a growing respect for the Christian player. Finally, the growing respect for the Christian faith as seen in a teammate led to numerous pastoral conversations about life in general and, sometimes, to the prospect that a team-mate might become a Christian.

I hope these two contemporary illustrations help you understand how Christians in Sport engages in study and research to facilitate best practice for Christian athletes and coaches. The goal of such 'library work' is to provide firm theological and evidence-based foundations for the practical training and evangelistic material that is found on our website and social media platforms and used thousands of times around the world. In this magazine you'll see examples of this in two articles specifically reflecting on the culture of sport, one addressing the dangers of exercise addiction and the other the challenge of postpartum motherhood. Continued theological and sporting reflection is foundational if we are to go on reaching the world of sport for Christ in each new generation of sportspeople.



## **GRAHAM DANIELS**

General Director



# NEWS

## NORTHERN IRELAND MISSION WEEK

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From March 22<sup>nd</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup>, four of the Christians in Sport mission team landed in Northern Ireland to help the local team run seven evangelistic events for sports people across three days on the Emerald Isle. This included three university events, two schools events and two events for local sportspeople.

Each morning the team gathered together to plan and pray, before setting off to the different events the day had in store. One highlight was a school event, where all the team came together, with the help of several volunteers, to run a Team Challenge and Dodgeball Tournament for 186 young sports people at Ballymena Academy.

Overall, the Mission Week served to reach over 420 sports people, playing in clubs and teams to hear the good news of Jesus in Northern Ireland. We pray that God would have used these events to make Himself known to many, and would continue to serve the Christian sportspeople who continue to live out their faith in their teams regularly.

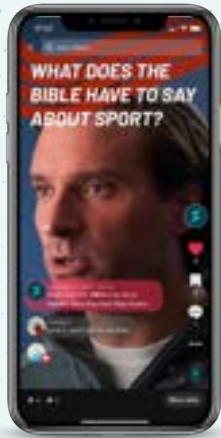


## SUMMER ATHLETICS

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The Wanda Diamond League invites top track and field athletes to compete in League fixtures around the world between May and September. We're hoping to have a physical presence at the majority of these events; supporting the Christian athletes that we have ongoing contact with and putting on Bible studies for any interested athlete that competes at these events. Alongside these events there are four significant domestic and international Championships in Birmingham, Manchester, Munich and Oregon that the British athletes will be involved in. We are looking to support these athletes and others as they face the intense pressure of competing at these major championships by having a physical presence, where possible, in which we serve and support them appropriately.

# 03



## TIKTOK

TikTok is currently the fastest growing social media platform, in fact TikTok's website is now frequently more popular than Google, with most users being under 25 years old. So far in 2022 Christians in Sport social media content has made over a million impressions, our aim is to use the vast reach of social media to help more sportspeople connect their sport and faith, and TikTok provides a rich opportunity to reach and inspire a new audience.

We launched the Christians in Sport TikTok account in May, sharing interviews, videos that address key questions sportspeople have about the Christian faith, and inspirational clips to help encourage young people seeking to live out their faith in sport.

If you're on TikTok you can now follow us @christians\_in\_sport

## ECSU COMPETITIVE & ELITE SPORT CONFERENCE: GERMANY

# 04

This summer, the European Christian Sports Union (ECSU) put on its first ever conference for competitive and elite sportspeople between June 2<sup>nd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup>. 50 athletes were present in Altenkirchen, Germany, from all over Europe, including current Paralympic and Olympic athletes and professionals from table tennis, rugby, football, boxing and many other sports. The purpose of the conference was to come together to look at the gospel of Jesus Christ and how it applies to being a high-level sportsperson. The morning workshops explored Christian identity and vocation in sport and in the main evening sessions we delved into the book of 1 Peter. Attendees also had the chance to choose seminars from a range of topics including 'Dealing with conflict as a Christian sportsperson,' 'Retirement,' 'Sexuality and sport,' 'Dealing with disappointment' and several others. Of course, time was given to sport and training in the great facilities at the Glockenspitze hotel. It was a true joy to be in person, discussing, praying and singing together. We pray this is just the beginning of bringing high-level sportspeople together in this way.

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SIGN UP TO OUR REGULAR EMAILS:  
[CHRISTIANSINSPORT.ORG.UK](https://CHRISTIANSINSPORT.ORG.UK)**



# **IN THE RACE: WILL'S STORY**

*Will is a student at Newcastle University, and on the cross-country team. In February he took part in a mission week where students ran events with the aim to share the good news of Jesus across campus, supported by the Christians in Sport student team and interns.*

*We sat down with Will to chat about what life looks like for him as a student athlete with a passion to make Christ known.*



## WHAT DOES LIFE LOOK LIKE AS A CROSS-COUNTRY RUNNER AT UNIVERSITY?

I train with the athletics club two to three times a week. On Monday we run on the track in Gateshead and on Thursdays we have a threshold session, a few of us run over together and it's often a good time to catch up and sometimes have some deeper conversations.

Our team recently competed at the BUCS (British Universities and Colleges Sport) Cross Country Championships. I loved having the chance to compete alongside my teammates and enjoy my sport as worship, and there was opportunity to share my faith in the quieter times during the weekend.

## WHAT DOES REACHING YOUR WORLD OF SPORT FOR CHRIST LOOK LIKE NOW?

I meet with the Christians in Sport university group every Wednesday morning which is a great time together to remind ourselves of the need and the privilege it is to share the gospel and to pray for our teammates. The Christians in Sport staff team came down before our mission week to help think practically about sharing the gospel with our teammates, Duncan (Christians in Sport student team) also asked if I might do a dialogue dinner.

I was excited but unsure about it at first! There were a couple of guys who I'd become close with in the cross-country team, I really wanted to share my faith with them, but I didn't know how they'd respond. I imagined it could end in stunned silence or I'd have to answer tough questions but, at the same time, I knew it was a really good way to share my faith – to show my teammates that it's important to me and something I want to share.

**KNOW SOMEONE HEADING TO UNI THIS YEAR? GET IN TOUCH: CHRISTIANSINSPO.RG.UK/STUDENT**

## WHAT HAPPENED AT THE DINNER?

Some of my athletics teammates and course mates came, so there was a mix of people, but they all knew each other to some degree. We ran it early in the evening with time for them to go to sports socials afterwards.

Between dinner and dessert, I shared a five-minute testimony, then opened it up for questions. This was the bit I was quite nervous about. I didn't think anyone would ask anything, but it developed into over an hour of conversation about the Christian faith, particularly focusing on security and identity. I was grateful for the Christians in Sport interns who helped to answer questions when I was unsure and I was hugely encouraged by how it went. I was reminded of Ephesians 3:20 which says God is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine, I certainly hadn't expected the evening to go as well as it did.

We wrapped up and I headed straight to our Christian Union evening event where Graham Daniels was speaking on the theme of justice with time for questions afterwards.

## WHAT ARE YOUR REFLECTIONS ON THE WEEK?

Seeing Christian students captivated by Jesus was amazing. It was encouraging to see people so willing to serve one another, because it is of the utmost importance that those on our campus hear about what Jesus has done for us.

My main reflection was that it's so exciting to follow Jesus, it's thrilling when we take seriously the truth that we are completely secure in Him and so we're free to take risks. Especially as I prepared for my dialogue dinner, the uncertainty of whether it would be a success or a total shambles was exciting, but nerve-racking at the same time! Knowing and trusting that my security is in Jesus meant I was able to step out and take that risk, I was challenged to think how often I act like my security is completely in Christ. Do I really truly believe that I'm secure in Jesus and let that inform the way I live and step out?

# HOME & AWAY

## INVESTING IN LEADERS TO GROW GLOBAL SPORTS MINISTRY

In January the inaugural Level 3 leadership development programme launched, bringing competitive and elite sportspeople from around the world together in North Africa ahead of a year-long programme of in-person and online training. The course is designed to equip and encourage leaders in the world of sport with the aim of growing sustainable sports ministry across the globe. One such leader is Anna, a Rugby League player from the north of England and Level 3 participant.



Anna with the GB Teachers Rugby League squad

**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.

As a rugby league player, Anna has always sought to live out her faith within sport, and has a heart for international mission, spending many past summers working in a children's home within one of the poorest communities in Brazil. She's a fluent Portuguese speaker and had just finished the theology degree necessary to obtain a missionary visa to work for longer periods in Brazil.

More recently, Anna joined the Level 3 programme having been invited through Christians in Sport. "I was attracted to the course as an opportunity for me to meet and connect with other Christians in elite sport - I currently don't know of any others playing in my league. I'd also love to support younger Christian women in elite sport when I stop playing. The support I've received as a player has been so encouraging, I want to be able to offer that to others in the future."



At the Level 3 Launch in North Africa participants came together to build relationships, small groups then meet monthly online throughout the year to share learning and encourage one another. "My group is made up of elite sportspeople in Europe, it's great to be able to check in regularly having formed friendships with them in person. Currently we're studying Bible handling, working to understand the Bible in context and then to apply it to our sporting contexts."

Each participant undertakes a critical thinking project as part of the programme, focussing on a challenge from their sporting context and applying biblical thinking. "As a player I often find the physicality of rugby provides me with an

**"FOR NOW, PLAYING RUGBY IS WHAT I WANT TO DO, AND IT'S A GREAT JOY TO BE ABLE TO PLAY, BUT I KNOW GOD IS PREPARING ME FOR THE FUTURE, BE IT AT HOME OR IN BRAZIL!"**



Anna and another Level 3 attendee at the conference in North Africa

emotional release, but I want to work to better understand the reasons why that is. In my project I'm hoping to dig deeper into the Christian ethics behind this experience, how biblical principles can continue to shape my view of sport and challenge my current understanding."

As Anna progresses through Level 3 there is rich opportunity to apply learning as she plays and trains. "You put on a mask when you're playing high-level sport, there's vulnerability you want to hide. Some of that is important: you must be professional in training and competition,

but leaving the pitch and realising you aren't invincible, or you feel insecure is tough on your mental health. Jesus completely transforms this - in Christ there is security, I know when I stand before

God that I'm ok, not because I've lived a good life, but because of what Jesus has done for me. I want to model that Christ-like love to younger players coming through, when they ask for advice I want to show them that they don't have to be defined by how they perform."

"Looking to the future, I know the opportunity to spend this time learning alongside elite athletes on the course will be valuable. I'm hoping to go to Brazil in September, and to link up with some of the Brazilians from Level 3 when I go. For now, playing rugby is what I want to do, and it's a great joy to play, but I know God is preparing me for the future, be it at home or in Brazil!"

This year there are 90 Level 3 participants, all of whom are involved in competitive and elite sport. Our hope, as we collaborate with partners across the world to develop Level 3, is that God would use the programme to develop and sustain leaders, like Anna, in global sports ministry as they deepen their grounding in biblical truth and seek to live it out in the world of sport.

# THE DANGERS OF EXERCISE ADDICTION

**"HOBBLING INTO THE GYM ON CRUTCHES THE DAY AFTER A SERIOUS LEG INJURY, CANCELLING SOCIAL PLANS BECAUSE EXERCISE HAD A TIGHTER GRIP ON ME, STARTING SESSIONS AT 11PM TO SQUEEZE IT IN BEFORE THE DAY IS OUT, RUNNING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT TO ENSURE ANONYMITY, BECOMING UNBEARABLY AGITATED WHEN ANYTHING PREVENTS A WORKOUT, ADDING EXTRA SESSIONS, CARRYING ON THROUGH INJURY, SKIPPING REST DAYS, ALL AGAINST THE ADVICE OF NUMEROUS COACHES, MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS AND FRIENDS."**

When we have the talent to play sport, especially if we're performing at a high level, we feel the pressure to stay on top of our game, to keep progressing. At it's worst this pressure can result in exercise addiction. Exercise can become not something we love, but something we need.

Rosie Woodbridge and Si Poole are both talented sportspeople, well aware of the dangers of an unhealthy relationship with exercise. As they reflect on their past experiences and open God's word, we can build up a better picture of what exercise addiction is, and how it affects sportspeople.

## **WHAT IS EXERCISE ADDICTION?**

Exercise addiction is classified under "behavioural addiction" in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), the gold standard for the diagnosis of mental disorders. It is common for exercise addiction to be linked with eating disorders.

Some of the symptoms include:

- Unhealthy focus on exercise, like experiencing cravings for exercise
- A high from the satisfaction of a workout
- Tolerance and the need to increase amounts of exercise to get the same “high” or satisfying effect
- Relationship conflicts because of the obsession with exercise
- Decreased involvement in other activities
- A compulsive need to work out even when injured, ill or exhausted
- Withdrawal symptoms including depression, body aches, headaches and other issues after periods without exercise.

## WHAT TO DO NEXT IF YOU THINK YOU MIGHT HAVE AN UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH EXERCISE

### MEDICAL

Addiction is a legitimate and sometimes serious health condition. Medical professionals may be best positioned to help, speak to your GP first if you are unsure about whether you need medical advice or treatment. You could ask a friend to go along with you if you're worried.

Additionally – it's important to raise your concerns with trusted coaches. Get advice on your training and diet and make a plan. Prioritise key sessions and take other sessions out if needed, don't exceed the plan, don't hide activities.

### SPIRITUAL

Jesus says “come to me...and I will give you rest.” So come to Him. He has freed you from slavery. If Jesus is the object of your affections you will continue to be transformed to make God-honouring decisions. Exercise your freedom to train hard for God's glory and to be able to take rest from training and competing for God's glory.

This heart change will not happen overnight, and don't try to do this alone. Speak to a mature Christian and ask them to work through this with you.

Understanding what a healthy relationship with exercise looks like is important for sportspeople. So, what does the Bible have to say about exercise, and when we take things too far?

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT IT'S LIKE

I JUST NEED TO HIT MY PB

I'VE GOT CONTROL OF IT

I JUST LIKE  
BEING  
FIT

THIS IS WHAT I

YOU CAN'T BE ADDICTED TO RUNNING

I'M JUST COMMITTED



## EXERCISE IS A GOOD THING

***“The level of sport I was playing at demanded a lot: multiple training, fitness and skills sessions each week, and I loved it.”***

God has put us in the world with a mandate to use the creative talents He has given us. He made us to enjoy our bodies, working them to become faster, higher, and stronger, together, is thrilling because God made them that way. Discipline in training is also a good gift from God. We see respect and recognition of that discipline between sportspeople competing against one another because commitment, sacrifice, and hard work are good, God given things. Sport is given to us to enjoy as worship to God as we offer up our bodies to train and play for Him.

But it doesn't stop at enjoying our talents, exercise is deeply linked to mental health and wellbeing. Exercise is proven to boost mental health and can be an effective part of recovery from depression and anxiety recovery. Exercise also helps to establish and maintain friendships; sport brings people together like few things can. This reflects our wonderful, relational God who made us to be in relationship with Him.

## BUT WE MAKE EXERCISE A GOD THING

***“I see now I pushed myself too far. I knew I was training more than my teammates. I guess I needed it because it made me feel good. When life was hard, running made me feel alive and free. I needed it to obtain and maintain a physique, to justify my next or to atone for my last meal.”***

How quickly as humans do we distort the good things God has given us. We look to them instead of God to give us what only He can provide. This is idolatry, as described in Romans 1:25: “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator”.

Performance can be something that we live for. We claim that we are training hard to glorify God, but actually we're just using Romans 12:1 and the 'Born to Play' mantra as an excuse to justify that performance has become an idol that we are worshipping.

We can also idolise the effect exercise has on our bodies. We feel we need exercise to obtain or maintain a desired physique, we eat less and exercise more because we think it will make us better athletes, training to 'earn' food or to atone for meals we've had. This unhealthy relationship with food and exercise can lead to clinical eating disorders, such as anorexia athletica and bulimia.

Exercise is excellent for our mental health. But we can begin to see it as the solution to our troubles. It becomes the only place we feel safe, in control, good about ourselves.



## THIS WILL BREAK OUR HEARTS...

When we make use of our talents to try and control our own identity and relationships they become an idol. As Tim Keller says about idols:

***"If we look to some created thing to give us the meaning, hope, and happiness that only God himself can give, it will eventually fail to deliver and break our hearts."***

Exercise itself is a good created thing, given by God, but it doesn't and it was never meant to give us everything, it too will soon break our hearts, our minds, and our bodies if our relationship with it is broken.

This is where addictions come from. Idols are not kind masters, they always ask more of you and you can never give enough. They enslave you.

**"WHERE DID THIS LEAVE ME? MY PERFORMANCE LEVEL DECREASED BECAUSE I WASN'T GETTING THE REST AND FOOD I NEEDED. MY UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD LED ME TO AN EATING DISORDER. AND BECAUSE I DIDN'T LISTEN TO MY BODY CRYING OUT TO REST, I GOT MYSELF AN INJURY WHICH STILL SURFACES YEARS LATER. ALTHOUGH TO BE HONEST, GETTING INJURED WAS ONE OF THE BEST THINGS WHICH COULD HAVE HAPPENED. IT GAVE ME THE SPACE TO REALISE I WAS ADDICTED, AND TO WORK THROUGH THESE ISSUES AND REMEMBER THERE WAS MORE TO LIFE THAN EXERCISE."**

## FREEDOM FOR THE CHRISTIAN

Yet the gospel brings hope for those of us who have a broken relationship with exercise.

The good news about Jesus is freedom for the captive. We don't need to turn to exercise for a sense of control, as Christians, it does not define us. It is not worthy of worship, and so exercise does not need to consume or hold us captive. There is only one true God worthy of our worship - He has shown His love for His people as he gave up His son. This defines the Christian now. Galatians 5:1 says: *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."* God rescues His people from slavery so that they are free to worship Him.

Idols will break your heart. They are not kind masters, they will always ask more of you and it's never enough. They will enslave you and exhaust you. But Jesus says, "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30

We can be disciplined, hardworking and committed as we worship God, as we enjoy the good gifts of sport and exercise AND we can be careful, restful and balanced as we worship God as we enjoy these good gifts.

### ROSIE WOODBRIDGE

Rosie is at St Mary's Basingstoke church, she used to play ultimate frisbee but is currently on a break while looking after her daughter Lily.



### SI POOLE

Simon 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.





# 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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CHURCH, WHY NOT TELL  
THEM?

# THERE AND BACK AGAIN

## A STORY OF FAITH & FOOTBALL IN ABERDEEN

**AT 2AM, IN A GLASGOW NIGHTCLUB, DOUGIE WAS OUT WITH HIS UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL TEAM WHEN HE ASKED CAMPBELL, HIS TEAMMATE, WHETHER HE COULD GO TO CHURCH WITH HIM ON SUNDAY. THIS IS WHERE HIS STORY BEGINS...**

### **FAITH FOUND THROUGH FOOTBALL**

Growing up in a Christian home, Dougie had the opportunity to play rugby as a youngster, but that door was firmly closed as it clashed with church. University offered him the chance to do things his own way and he loved it.

There were several Christians in the football club, all committed players, but one in particular – a guy called Campbell – would always come out with the team. One night, past two in the morning, Dougie asked if he could go to church with Campbell on Sunday, thinking it must be pretty cool if he's there every week – the reply came: "it's just me, my brother, and a friend! The rest of them are quite old. To be honest it's not about just church, it's all about Jesus and



Dougie at Sports Plus in 2006

what He's done for us." He went on to explain the gospel, in front of all the football boys in the night club! The next day he called Dougie inviting him to an Alpha course. Dougie simply went out of loyalty to his friend but his journey to faith more or less started there, it was a few months before he committed his life to Christ, but, surrounded by people who persevered with him, he grew quickly. This is what we love to hear at Christians in Sport. We exist to support sportspeople like Campbell as they boldly share their faith, and new Christians like Dougie, who found faith through the witness of others in sport.



smith @andy\_smith315

It just hit me: I started going to church voluntarily, (without my dad forcing me) because there was a church kid in a normal local football team who invited me. I got saved in that church and now I pastor that same church.



Dougie Simpson @deesidedougie

Replying to @Andy\_Smith315

Love this @Andy\_Smith315. I heard the gospel and trusted Jesus because a young guy @Koomba5 who I played football with, had the courage to tell me the truth in front of other lads from the football club at 2am in The Shack. #boldwitness

## MAKING THE CONNECTION

Not long after Dougie started attending church, he became involved with Christians in Sport, attending Sports Plus that summer as a Trainee. "I'd never experienced anything like it" he reflects, "people were serious about their sport, but they also loved Jesus and were genuinely excited about teaching the Bible." At church people got alongside him, helping him to understand what living a life obedient to Christ looks like, both in sport and more generally.

Transitioning from being a university player to graduating and taking on other commitments was a testing time. At university it felt easy to share faith with friends because Dougie was alongside them all the time, but now it was a different challenge. Yet, over the last 10 years, Dougie

remained committed to sport, "I've really valued the training, vision, and direction I've had from Christians in Sport, it's really helped me as I've tried persevere in my world of sport with a missional mindset."

## DON'T LOSE HEART

Dougie's journey to faith through sport, and continued commitment to reach the world sport for Christ is a brilliant example of how God uses sport, and sportspeople, to change lives. Dougie has now been coaching boys' football for five years, and is a Pastor at Deeside Christian Fellowship Church. Naturally the conversation with other parents and coaches at the football club often turns to work, leading to brilliant opportunity for Dougie to share Jesus with them. Three years ago, Dougie was asked to be the club chaplain at Cove Rangers Football Club, opportunities to speak of the gospel don't come up every day in that environment but it's a privilege for him to live as a Christian amongst the players and staff.

Dougie reflects on his experience: "This year we've held an evangelistic dinner in February with Gavin Peacock speaking to 280 guests! All the parents I invited from the football club responded really well to it. We had a sports quiz organised for March, but it was almost the opposite response, numbers were low. So, it's been a mixed bag. Alongside events we've seen sport play a vital role in long term community mission. Recently seven young men were baptised in our church. They weren't from church backgrounds but came regularly to our youth fellowship, playing football and hearing the gospel proclaimed faithfully."

Looking ahead, Dougie will be leading a new Local Network looking to reach sportspeople in Aberdeen with the good news of Jesus. Seeing these stories of encouragement shows that the long slog is worth it despite the setbacks. "Gospel ministry is often slow and hard, but the Bible encourages us not to lose heart. Looking back and seeing how others persevered with me as I came to faith helps me to keep going, trusting that God will continue to do the same in the lives of others."

# IRON SHARPENS

**GOSPEL COMMUNITY IN  
THE CUTTHROAT WORLD  
OF PROFESSIONAL  
FOOTBALL COACHING**

# IRON

Throughout the football season, coaching staff working in the world of professional football come together, around God's word, for a team meeting like no other. These are professionals locked in relegation battles, celebrating big wins, making decisions that will determine the course of players' careers, often dealing with immense pressure and public scrutiny.

This weekly meeting started in 2020 as the Covid-19 pandemic called a halt to the football season, and continued to grow as normality gradually returned. We caught up with three members of the group as they reflected on its growth and why they value it as a weekly commitment.





**NAME: MICHAEL JOHNSON**  
**ROLE: ENGLAND UNDER 15-21S COACH**  
**SUM UP THE GROUP IN 3 WORDS:**  
**"IRON SHARPENS IRON"**

**WHY ARE YOU PART OF THE GROUP?**

"I've been involved with Christians in Sport for years. I used to attend meetings roughly once a month in the East Midlands with Cyrille Regis. Since lockdown, I've found moving to meeting once a week really beneficial.

In a world and a sport where your faith isn't celebrated it's easy to feel isolated. This group has enabled us to help each other see that we aren't alone, there's other Christians on similar paths, facing similar struggles. The Bible says that iron sharpens iron, and the coaches' study is an environment where this happens. You feel listened to and people get the difficulties we face working in football. I work with young players and there are Christians there who struggle to be open about their faith because the environment is so competitive, everyone is jostling for position and power, it's hard to be vulnerable. Meeting with this group has strengthened my character, I'm encouraged to feel comfortable with my faith. It doesn't mean that I can speak about it all the time in my job, but I can bring honesty and authenticity to my coaching. This group is enabling other leaders to do that too.

I work for England football, but the group is a constant reminder that this is just shirt that I wear, being a footballer, manager, coach – doesn't define me, the group allows gospel truth to be poured into me, I've grown, and seen others grow in confidence, to exhibit Christ-like behaviour, to live as Christ has called us within our roles as coaches."

**NAME: BOBBY HASSELL**  
**ROLE: BARNSELY FOOTBALL CLUB**  
**ACADEMY MANAGER**

**SUM UP THE GROUP IN 3 WORDS:**  
**"IT'S A FAMILY"**

**WHY ARE YOU PART OF THE GROUP?**

"As Academy Director – I manage over 40 staff, looking after 120 young players, it's a big responsibility. I came to faith at 29 and didn't come across Christians in Sport until the lockdown when another coach at Nottingham Forest invited me to the coaches' Bible study – I've been involved ever since.

I've tried to dedicate that hour a week on a Wednesday morning, not only to receive but to give back, to encourage others. It's great to connect with what has become a family within football, we start and finish in prayer and in between we look at the Bible, seeking to apply it directly to our work.

Football is a performance-based industry, everything is about results, which means I have to communicate disappointing things a lot of the time. Things like releasing young players – it's horrendous, regardless of your honesty and integrity as an individual. It's been great to be able to call on people in those dark times, and many have contacted me directly for prayer. It's been a privilege to pray with other coaches when they've been let go from a club unfairly or faced other challenges. We pray together and offer that encouragement that Jesus is in control of our lives, not man."



**NAME: NATHAN JONES**

**ROLE: LUTON TOWN MANAGER**

**SUM UP THE GROUP IN 3 WORDS:  
"GROUNDING AND UPLIFTING"**

**WHY ARE YOU PART OF THE GROUP?**

"I've been a Christian all my life, I don't know where I'd be without my faith. But the pressure in professional football, means it's easy to stray - it's a real test of character. That's why it's so helpful to regularly meet with other Christians, especially those who understand the world of football.

It's a respectful group and we're blessed to have a leader in Graham Daniels who genuinely cares for us. There's such range of experience, some have been following Jesus for years and others have only just come to faith. It creates opportunity to have open fellowship, which is rare and valuable in football and elite sport. Football is stressful, it's trying and testing. This group is a place of genuine empathy and support when people are facing tough times as we read the Bible together. God's word is also humbling when times are good and there's success to celebrate, the group helps me to stay level in these times. It's been a comfort for me, it helps me maintain my gospel foundation and keep my Christianity at the forefront of everything I do. Being a part of this group is grounding, and uplifting."

## **SPURRING EACH OTHER ON**

Bobby, Michael, and Nathan's reflections bring to life the challenges that are rife within professional football. It's a sport like no other; gaining a contract with a top-flight club at 18 is potentially life-changing, whereas being released at this point is crushing. Promotion at the end of the season is worth millions of pounds, whereas a string of losses could mean the end of a manager's career.

Professional football demands so much from any individual involved, it is ruthlessly results based, cutthroat. This is why gathering weekly around God's word has proved so valuable for these three individuals, the ability to encourage each other and reflect together with individuals who share same challenges, is powerful.

We exist to support Christians in this world of sport. Facilitating opportunities for people to spur each other on, through reading God's word and praying together, is an immense privilege. Our hope is that God would continue to use this group to disciple Christian coaches, encouraging them to live and speak for Christ in the world of professional football.





# **THE NARROW PATHWAY**

**SUPPORTING FAMILIES  
NAVIGATING THE  
CULTURE OF YOUTH HIGH  
PERFORMANCE SPORT**

Every spring the cobbled roads of northern France are transformed from empty farm tracks into an iconic sporting venue. The rough, granite surfaces produce some of the most attritional racing on the professional cycling calendar, with the pinnacle being Paris-Roubaix, dubbed 'The Hell of the North'. In 2022 the women's professional peloton tackled Paris-Roubaix Femmes, in only its second ever edition, among the starters was Flora Perkins, recently progressing from the junior ranks to ride at this highest level.

*The pathway to this level is as demanding as the racing itself, elite sport offers a serious challenge to the ambitious young sports person. The convoy of team cars following in the dust behind the peloton is representative of the impossibility of arriving at this level without support, quite often in the form of parents or guardians. The reality of elite sport is that most don't make it, some crash out, and many give up the chase before they reach the top level.*

*We caught up with Flora, and her parents Richard and Rosslyn, to chat about their experience of navigating performance pathway sport as a Christian family.*

## **WHAT'S IT'S LIKE TO BE A FAMILY IN THAT WORLD? WHAT ARE THE BEST AND WORST BITS?**

**Richard:** Watching Flora at Paris-Roubaix was a highlight, to see her racing at that level. But it's not been simple to get here, the first lockdown coincided with a period of disappointment for Flora when she didn't make an academy squad, she's worked hard to make it to the senior level.

**Rosslyn:** It's great to see Flora in a professional team set up, the level of support is far greater than we could offer at race days. But getting used to her being away and supporting from a distance is hard. She's looking to move to Belgium next year, so it will take some adjusting to get used to that.

**Flora:** I've surprised myself at senior level, it hasn't been too much of a shock to the system, I love being part of a team set up where my job is to race to support other riders. On the other hand, I've been doing A-Levels alongside racing, I love cycling because it takes me away from that stress sometimes, but I must remember that I'm not a full-time pro yet!

## **AS A FAMILY YOU'RE INVOLVED IN THE GROUP CALLS FOR YOUNG PERFORMANCE ATHLETES (YPAs) AND PARENTS/GUARDIANS RUN BY CHRISTIANS IN SPORT, HOW HAVE YOU FOUND BEING A PART OF THOSE GROUPS?**

**Flora:** I got involved in the calls through one-to-ones with Lisa from Christians in Sport. We look at the Bible and have discussion, often centred around struggles we share as YPAs. For all of us, there's pressure around performance, selection, balancing study, training, church, and social life. It's helpful to apply God's word in those situations, and to have that accountability with each other as we share life together. Cycling is my passion but studying God's word shows me that it shouldn't be my obsession.

**Richard:** It's unique to get on a Zoom call to pray with other parents in the same position, we all understand what it's like to be the closest observer as our children celebrate successes, but also deal with disappointment through not making a squad, or injury, or anxiety around performance. It's a regular reminder of what matters, there's a sense of gentle accountability as we reflect on these challenges. We can't care for each other like a church family but we all want Christian maturity for our children as they grow up, even whilst they chase sporting dreams and thrive as they do what they love – that's a rare but precious thing for a young person.



## WHY WOULD YOU ENCOURAGE OTHER PARENTS OR YPAS TO GET INVOLVED?

**Richard:** The calls have helped me figure out what it looks like to support Flora. Winning matters but not as much as I often think it does as a competitive person. It's challenging to work through that with Christian perspective, especially as you're one stage removed, you're not the competitor. I need to be a supportive parent without going too far and becoming the overbearing, irritating Dad!

It's also been encouraging to hear Flora use terminology she hasn't picked up from us or church - that has come through one-to-ones and YPA calls with Christians in Sport. It's great to know she's working through what it looks like to be a Christian in sport with others. We trust that Christians in Sport take sport seriously, but without compromising when it comes to faith.

**Rosslyn:** Initially as a parent I felt like an outsider, standing alongside other parents as Flora raced on yet another Sunday afternoon. I wish I'd been more proactive and prayerful about grasping that opportunity for mission because it's a rich mission field. I'd encourage other parents to go for it, to be bold as they live amongst other parents supporting their children.

**Flora:** I always think back to one of my first meetings with Christians in Sport, I learnt that sport can be worship, that you can conduct yourself in a way that brings glory to God and shines a light to others. Sport heightens all emotions and shows character, it's an opportunity for me to be a disciple of Christ in an obvious way. It's daunting but a wonderful opportunity.

*As riders race through the feed zone, staff at the side of the road shout encouragement as they hand out bottles containing vital energy for the final kilometres of the race. Experience shows us that Christians in elite sport massively benefit from spending time together around God's word, it is fuel and encouragement to face the inevitable challenges present in an uncompromising environment. Our aim is to continue investing in young people, parents and guardians involved in performance pathway sport, to facilitate opportunities for them to gather and encourage one another around God's word and to encourage them to live faithfully in the world of sport.*

**"SPORT HEIGHTENS ALL EMOTIONS AND SHOWS CHARACTER, IT'S AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ME TO BE A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST IN AN OBVIOUS WAY. IT'S DAUNTING BUT A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY."**

**FREE RESOURCE. WE'VE PULLED TOGETHER A BOOKLET TO ADDRESS SOME OF THE TOP QUESTIONS ASKED BY PARENTS AND GUARDIANS OF YOUNG PERFORMANCE ATHLETES (YPAS). HEAD TO [CHRISTIANSINSPORT.ORG.UK/YPAS](https://CHRISTIANSINSPORT.ORG.UK/YPAS)**



***THE POSTPARTUM  
STORY I WANT TO BE  
ABLE TO TELL YOU***



## **THIS IS THE STORY I WANT TO BE ABLE TO TELL YOU**

I was so well prepped during pregnancy that I could take labour in my stride. Of course, it was one of the hardest things I could ever do, but my fitness, strength and mental resilience got me through.

It took time to recover from labour but now I'm back into sport and I love it. You'll see me at buggy fit classes or doing workouts with my baby strapped to me. You'll see me out running, getting back into sport. I'm maintaining a healthy diet. I've regained my figure too, it doesn't look like I was ever pregnant.

Of course, pregnancy kept me out of my sports club for a while. But I kept in touch with teammates and having a baby has been a great opportunity to share something of Christ. Friends have come to church and I'm hoping to start reading the Bible with them soon.

**" THAT IS THE STORY I WANT TO BE ABLE TO TELL YOU. I GUESS THAT'S WHAT I IMAGINED MY STORY WOULD BE. MAYBE IT'S YOURS. BUT IT'S NOT MINE. THAT'S NOT MY STORY. "**

## **MY STORY...**

I thought my athleticism would mean a quick and straightforward labour, it would be similar to the gruelling sports events I'd done before. But it wasn't. It took what felt like forever, anything but quick. And I wanted to quit. I would have taken any easy way out if they offered it to me.

And now I am still so far off playing sport again. My body feels broken, weak, exhausted. Legs, arms, drained of the strength I once knew. All my energy spent on another. There is always so much to do. I thought about couch to 5K, but I've been on the 'couch' part for a long while now.

They tell me what I should and shouldn't eat. But who has time to choose the healthy option? Oh body, I used to think so carefully about what I put into you. How to look your best, how to optimise performance. But there's no time now.

Others don't look like they're having these issues. Other women who have had more babies, more recently than me, have bounced back to their flat stomachs fast. They look like they were never pregnant, as they

squat and jump and run for miles. How have they bounced back so quickly? Their diets are perfect, and their houses are clean. Or at least that's how it seems.

And Pray Play Say? Covid and pregnancy have kept me out of sport, I've wondered what it means to be a Christian in sport in this season. I'm sure there is much I could have done, but evangelism to sportspeople has fallen off my radar.

I sometimes feel diminished, frustrated, and less than I was.

But what about God's story? I am part of His story. And He meets me here. How can God's story change my view of my body?

## GOD'S STORY

Body, you are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139). You are a gift from God, for His glory, made to do good works for Him (Ephesians).

And look at what you have done!

You formed and grew a life within you. A sanctuary, a fortress for her.

You brought her into this world. A challenge greater than any physical effort you had done before. A feat unknown to man.

And now she grows and she thrives because of you. You gave her life and you give her life.

You carry her, hold her, comfort her, play with her.

You give yourself for her. You sacrifice so much for her. What an honour! What a joy.

Her body is a gift from God too. As she learns to sit and to stand and to crawl and to walk and to pick up and throw, see the wonder of the human body! The wonder of creation! This child that you are growing, what will she be? What will she do? What will she play?

Will she know that her body is a gift from God? Will she know of God's mercy, and in humble thankfulness offer all that she is as a living sacrifice? (Romans 12:1)

Can this in some way point me to Christ? Body, you were broken to give life. You gave yourself and you give yourself for her. Just a small shadow of the Saviour whose body was torn apart, who gave up everything to give you new life.

In view of His mercy, will you offer yourself up as a sacrifice again? As you play some form of sport again, perhaps... but in your every day. When your exercise is basically just breathing. Or walking. And more walking.

**"MY STORY IS THAT I AM NOT WHERE I WANT TO BE, NOT WHERE I THOUGHT I WOULD BE. BUT I HAVE A SAVIOUR WHO HAS A PURPOSE FOR ME, WHO HOLDS ME IN THE PALM OF HIS HANDS."**

Oh and body, I put so much pressure on you! I have so longed to get back into the action that I have gone too fast, done too much, too soon. There's a lesson I still need to learn. That's why we gave our daughter the middle name 'Grace.' I need to remind myself - I am not justified by how much I can do, I am not made whole by sporting success, I am not saved by my physical abilities. I am not defined by my evangelism, which falls so short of God's calling for me. God is kind. He saves me by His grace. He meets me in my weakness and failure, and He loves me still. Christ is enough.

My story is that I am not where I want to be, not where I thought I would be. But I have a Saviour who has a purpose for me, who holds me in the palm of His hands.

Who meets me in my weakness and has a plan for me in every season of life. In this season, I can't be the Pray Play Sayer I was or hope to be again someday. But I am Christ's. I am forgiven, I am justified. And I will offer this body, such that it is, as a living sacrifice.

### ROSIE WOODBRIDGE

Rosie is at St Mary's Basingstoke church, she used to play ultimate frisbee but is currently on a break while looking after her daughter Lily.




# ***LOCAL NETWORKS***

## ***JOIN YOUR BRAND-NEW LOCAL NETWORK THIS YEAR.***

Imagine a group of people across your town or city who love sport and love Jesus, regularly meeting to pray and provide opportunities for sportspeople to hear and respond to the good news of Jesus – that's a local network.

If you're a Christian involved in a club or team and over the age of 18, then your local network is for you. They'll meet to pray three times a year and put on at least one guest event to help reach local sportspeople with the good news of Jesus.

A black and white photograph of a group of female athletes, likely a netball team, huddled together on a sports field. They are wearing dark uniforms and are embracing each other. The background shows a fence and some trees.

***SIGN UP NOW TO BE THE FIRST TO HEAR WHEN  
YOUR LOCAL NETWORK IS MEETING AND BE  
CONNECTED IN WITH OTHERS JUST LIKE YOU.***

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