

BACK PAGES

WHAT'S INSIDE

UNWAVERING TRUTH FOR
UNCERTAIN TIMES

A LETTER TO MY BODY

A PARALYMPIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

STUDENT SPORTS MISSION



CHRISTIANS IN SPORT

CONTACT

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

01869 255 630

info@christiansinsport.org.uk

www.christiansinsport.org.uk

Back Pages and the Prayer Diary are produced three times a year and sent free of charge to supporters of Christians in Sport for as long as you would like to hear from us. To stop receiving this publication, please email data@christiansinsport.org.uk or call 01869 255 630.

Christians in Sport is a company registered in England and Wales (Company No. 4146081) and a registered charity in England and Wales (Charity No. 1086570) and Scotland (Charity No. SC042599).

THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW
INTERNATIONAL VERSION® NIV®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by
International Bible Society®
Used by permission.
All rights reserved worldwide.

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

WE EXIST TO REACH THE WORLD OF SPORT FOR JESUS.

Welcome to the Summer 2021 edition of Back Pages.

Albeit under unusual circumstances, this summer will be a long-anticipated few months of great sporting action. Even with face coverings, social distancing and bubbles, how wonderful it is to say...sport is back!

In this edition, you'll hear from the Directors as they assess the lasting impact the past year has on the future of Christians in Sport, from Rosie Woodbridge as she reflects on pregnancy and women's body image and from our students- both from our university work and from our pilot online global Leadership Development Programme- detailing the joys and struggles they've faced.

Whatever your 'Summer of Sport' looks like, we pray that you're encouraged by the stories in this magazine in all that God is doing in the world of sport.

Thank you for partnering with us to reach the world of sport for Christ.

JEN SHEPHERD





CONTENTS

04

NEWS

13

LAUNCHED IN LOCKDOWN



18

A LETTER TO MY BODY

08

UNWAVERING TRUTH IN
UNCERTAIN TIMES

REFLECTIONS ON SERVING A
SOVEREIGN GOD THIS YEAR



24

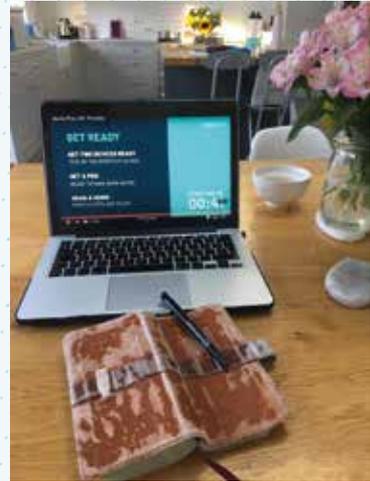
A PARALYMPIAN'S
PERSPECTIVE

LIVING AND SPEAKING FOR CHRIST IN
THE WORLD OF GOALBALL

NEWS

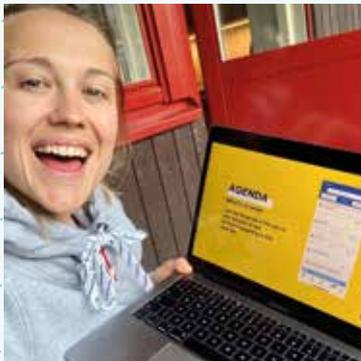
EASTER SPORTS PLUS ONLINE

During the Easter Holidays, we invited young people from all over the UK and Ireland to get involved with our one-day Easter Sports Plus Online. It kicked off with a morning workout and devotion from Hebrews 11. The young people were then set a daily challenge to record and send in during the day to feature in our evening live show where we unpacked the theme of 'Certain Hope.' Dave Hampton unpacked John 20: 24-29 to show that the only certain hope we can find is in Jesus. Praise God for the chance to share this monumental truth with young people.



EUROPEAN GATHERING 2021

The **European Christian Sports Union (ECSU)** Gathering is normally a chance for in-person fellowship, teaching and networking. We praise God for how well this transferred online back in early June when over 350 sportspeople from 42 European countries joined us for the ECSU Online Gathering. Across the weekend, sportspeople came together for three main online meetings looking at the book of Colossians. Saturday was filled with 10 different seminars led by key leaders across the movement, as well as time together in countries to plan for the year ahead. The programme also included morning workouts, prayer groups and networking. It was great to see groups gathering physically (where allowed) to tune in together whilst sharing food. We are looking forward to seeing the fruits of these new connections and partnerships as restrictions start to lift across Europe.



03

CLUBHOUSE SCOTLAND

In recent years it has been great to see many Clubhouse training events taking place across Scotland for Christian sportspeople to meet and encourage one another. Due to Covid-19, we moved these online and held two events with around fifty people attending. In November, we looked at John 4 as Jesus challenged His disciples to see the mission opportunities in front of them and we prayed that God would enable us to do the same in amongst the restrictions. In March, we spent a more concentrated time praying specifically for the world of sport in Scotland; praying for more workers to be sent into the harvest fields of individual and team sports. It was a hugely encouraging time to see people from the length and breadth of Scotland uniting in this way.



04

NEW YOUTH VIDEO SERIES LAUNCHED

In February, we launched a new video resource for young people which aims to answer some of the questions they might have around sport and faith. We named this series 'Big Questions', and in the series so far we have dug into God's Word to tackle topics of disappointment, body image and if God even cares about our sport at all. Through these short, direct videos on YouTube and Instagram, we hope this series can go some way to keep God at the forefront of young sports people's lives; reminding them that their ultimate identity as young people in the world of sport rests safely in Christ.

SERVING ELITE ATHLETES THIS OLYMPIC SUMMER

05

In the major events there is normally official chaplaincy within the villages for athletes to access. In previous Games, this has seen Christians in Sport staff members being accredited as official chaplains, reading the Bible with athletes and helping facilitate Sunday services.

In Tokyo however, like everything about the games, this has all changed. Chaplains are not even allowed to enter the village and all communication is online, via an official app, only accessible by a sponsored phone the majority will never open. For the athletes, loneliness and lack of support is going to be a major issue.

Jules Wilkinson, who was a chaplain at Rio, regularly meets with a number of Olympians around the world explained: "In Tokyo, the organising committee are doing their best but it is very difficult as they want as few people as possible in the village - currently athletes can't have their coaches or physios in the village with them."

So what will it look like to support these athletes as they compete in-front of millions of people and have their professional performance analysed by hundreds of media outlets (something thankfully most of us never need to do)?

It will involve staff members living on Tokyo time for the extent of the Olympics and Paralympics and being present on Zoom calls and on their phones to walk with them in this most intense environment. We will be organising an online Sunday Service, accessible only by those competing in Tokyo, to help them step out of the pressures of competing and fix their eyes on Jesus with others who follow Jesus at the Games.



MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE, WE RELY ON PRAYER WILL YOU JOIN US?

PRAYER EMAIL

Sign up online to get our weekly prayer email with specific prayer points for each day of the week.

PRAYERMATE

Use the PrayerMate app and search for 'Christians in Sport' to get daily prayer points straight to your phone.

ONLINE PRAYER GATHERINGS

Join us to pray together at quarterly online prayer gatherings.

Our next Prayer Gathering day is Monday 27th September.

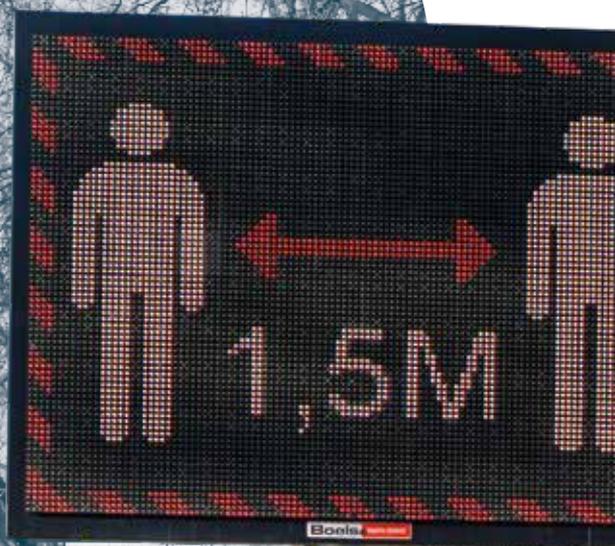
Sign up in advance on our website.

**SIGN UP FOR EVERYTHING AT
CHRISTIANSINSPO.RG.UK/PRAYER**



UNWAVERING TRUTH FOR UNCERTAIN TIMES

**REFLECTIONS ON
SERVING A SOVEREIGN
GOD THIS YEAR**





In March 2020, when the Prime Minister's now infamous words of "you must stay home" rang out across the country, we were forced to ask the question 'what is our relevance?'. When sport was outlawed by the government, what purpose did we have?

But now, writing this 18 months later, we have been incredibly humbled by what God has taught us and can attest to how God, as He so frequently reminds us, is more powerful and good to us than we can imagine.

GOD IS IN CHARGE

Firstly, and rightly, we want to give God the glory. As the Bible tells us frequently using metaphors of houses and buildings, without the Lord, our work is in vain; and when all our normal activities were suddenly physically impossible, it is only through God's grace that we adapted and continued to reach sportspeople for His glory.

This year has taught the whole staff team so much about depending daily on God when we can so easily rely on our own abilities: how He opened doors to reach sportspeople, how record numbers joined guest events and Bible studies for elite athletes and how, before we had even heard of Covid-19, God had raised up partners to grow our regular and committed donor base through the Big Match campaign. This was important when the financial uncertainty significantly impacted a number of our partners.

We have seen our staff team come together more than ever as we moved our daily prayer meeting online from what was physically held in the office for decades. Having regional and elite staff feed-in and feedback requests first-hand as we pray for their meetings, studies, trainings or events has increased our family feel.



Having realised praying online was not as odd as we thought, why couldn't we involve our partners, giving them a more personal and relevant update about the work during Covid-19? Many staff commented on what a joy these Prayer Gatherings have been, meeting and praying alongside those who have been a part of the work from the very beginning through to new partners who have only recently engaged with us. We've been able to interact with more partners this year using methods we would never previously have considered.

Our dependence is on God and we're thankful it's led to more prayer.

GOD DID MORE THAN WE COULD IMAGINE

Who would have thought **online quizzes** were the go-to event of lockdown? Previously an event which would have reached double or triple digits held in a local town, went to reach five figures and over 80 countries in the world. Removing the barrier of coming to a physical building, being able to sit in your own lounge and do a quiz has meant many of you, as you have so kindly shared with us, have been able to reach friends previously adverse to coming to hear the Christian message. The staff have felt the same, being able to be involved and regularly bring teams where previously it was an annual event. We had an average of 260 teams play in each quiz. Across the 11 events, 85,000 people watched online and heard the gospel proclaimed. It was a gamble to try but has had a reach we could never have imagined or foreseen.

"WHEN ALL OUR NORMAL ACTIVITIES WERE SUDDENLY PHYSICALLY IMPOSSIBLE, IT IS ONLY THROUGH GOD'S GRACE THAT WE ADAPTED AND CONTINUED TO REACH SPORTSPEOPLE FOR HIS GLORY."

Our **elite work** has also seen an exponential growth due to the regular pattern of group Bible studies over Zoom. Elite sportspeople often have incredible restrictions on their time and whereas before, a staff member would drive to meet one athlete or a few players from the same town, we could host Bible studies for specific sports and often across the continents. At the peak, we were hosting more than 20 studies every week for hundreds of players and coaches in elite rugby, football, track and field, para sports, netball, golf, tennis and those on young performance pathways, as well as significant one-to-one work. The depth of peer relationships established have been precious to see over the last year.

With the success of elite calls, we branched out to tackle parents of Young Performance Athletes (YPA's), a demographic we've longed to support but which previously has proven difficult to arrange - either being an ad hoc occasion regionally or offered once a year if their child was attending a Sports Plus camp. Through the increased familiarity and availability online, we now have an established group of parents who meet to encourage and advise one another as they navigate their young people through the demands of elite sport, with some meeting up at competitions.





Thinking of the **global work**, who'd have thought we could train hundreds of leaders from over 120 countries of the world without leaving the house! Engaging partners from new countries through a range of webinars has also been staggering.

God did more than we could have imagined. When sport stopped, more sportspeople engaged with the gospel than ever before.

GOD LEADS AS WE MOVE FORWARD

Without travelling, we were able to reflect and review our activities and practises through some independent research. One project surveyed and interviewed 250 leaders to understand their story of how they developed as leaders to help us replicate and scale godly leaders of the future. One of the core pillars was how mentoring and ongoing relationships with staff was greatly valued. This is a key lesson we are taking away, that by resourcing sportspeople brilliantly and walking alongside them, we can do some of our best work.

As a result, new leadership schemes have been piloted such as the global Leadership Development Programme (LDP) and we are close to completing key 'thought leadership' projects alongside new and exciting plans for resource development hosted digitally so they are at your fingertips when needed.

This year has brought great joy and pain making us adapt and innovate. When our mission field was postponed, we moved online and found this to be a whole new arena for ministry. In many ways the same – supporting sportspeople through God’s Word and hosting events to bring sports friends to hear the gospel – but in many ways transforming, by teaching us more about ourselves and where we can best serve growing audiences.

We have changed, and our prayer is that under God, for His glory, and as He leads us, we are changed for the better to reach the world of sport for Christ for the years to come.

Thank you for your partnership and support as we press on together for the challenges ahead.

GRAHAM DANIELS

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



KEITH PROCTOR

Managing Director. Keith plays football in Bicester and is part of St Ebbe’s Church, Oxford.



LAUNCHED IN LOCKDOWN

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMME ONE YEAR ON





Jessica, USA

Our involvement with the pilot year of the global Leadership Development Programme (LDP) has been both a humbling privilege and a source of real joy. The original aim was to test out the viability of a global training initiative akin to a robust church training apprenticeship but specifically aimed at the elite sports player for whom there will typically be many constraints. We started the pilot year with 40 participants representing 27 countries; we will finish the year on July 2nd with 29 participants from 23 countries. Despite some inevitable drop off and the additional restrictions imposed by the pandemic, it has been really encouraging to see how participants have not only engaged with the material but, in many cases, have already multiplied the programme.

One participant, a professional basketball player and coach in Eastern Europe, has taken the whole programme and translated it into his own language. He is now working through the material with a small group of younger leaders involved in sports ministry in his context. Similarly, another

participant, an ex-International sportsman from a Muslim majority country in Asia, has been replicating some of the core modules and using them with his own team. The same is true for a participant based in French Speaking Africa and involved in the CAF Africa Cup of Nations.

Other participants have been taking a different approach. Reinder, a futsal player from the Netherlands commented "I am finding it amazing, learning so much, it is a lot of new things for me. It is very helpful and inspiring to watch all the interviews and the conversations with others." Now he weekly shares the main learning points from the programme informally through a social networking platform with the rest of the leaders in his ministry. Other participants, especially those preparing for major sports tournaments, have simply navigated through the modules when time has allowed. One of those, who is currently preparing to represent her country at the Olympics this summer, is unable to join other participants in the live sessions but instead takes time to work through the programme with



Reinder, Netherlands

her tutor. She reflected "I came in with a desire to learn more on how to be a disciple of Christ more practically in my arena and I think that I have been helped in that way. It has challenged and shaped the way I think about things." The same is true for Reinder getting ready for the FIFA Futsal World Cup. Joining live sessions for him is likewise problematic given his sporting commitments but he wonderfully reiterated "I would like to say that I was WOWED

with the topics. Thankful for the excellent work!"

With the pilot year now almost at a close, we are looking expectantly to September 2021 and the start of the first fully fledged year. Already we hope to make some significant adjustments. In addition to an edited year long LDP, we will develop a shorter more foundational 12 week programme for local leaders. Our great hope is that we will see over 150 global competitive and elite sportspeople sustainably served by these two programmes annually. Jessica, who works with elite college athletes in the US, encouragingly reflected "I think this is the premier global leadership development programme happening right now...it is so exciting to think what it could be like in two or three years' time." Please do join with us in praying for these ongoing initiatives. We entrust them totally to the Lord and pray that it will all be used for His glory in the elite and competitive sporting arena.

" I CAME IN WITH A DESIRE TO LEARN MORE ON HOW TO BE A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST MORE PRACTICALLY IN MY ARENA AND I THINK THAT I HAVE BEEN HELPED IN THAT WAY. IT HAS CHALLENGED AND SHAPED THE WAY I THINK ABOUT THINGS. "



FOR THE ♥ OF SPORT

SPORT. DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT IT FEELS LIKE?

THE NERVES BEFORE A BIG GAME. THE LAST-MINUTE PANIC AS YOU TRY TO FIND YOUR KIT.

THE DRIVE TO THE PITCH, LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING YOUR MATES.

BECAUSE THE PEOPLE WE PLAY WITH, MAKE SPORT EVEN BETTER.

WE LOVE IT – BECAUSE WE WERE BORN TO PLAY.

AND WE WERE BORN TO PLAY TOGETHER.

SO, IT'S TIME TO GET BACK OUT THERE AGAIN.

**FOR THE LOVE OF SPORT,
FOR THE LOVE OF CHRIST,**

GO PLAY.

**CHRISTIANSINSPORT.ORG.UK
/LOVE**





TO MY BODY,

My lips curve into a nostalgic smile as I reminisce on some of our adventures.

I loved the way that you could run. I loved the way that the sight of open moorland, or a wooded valley, or any glimpse of countryside could lift my feet and bid me run. There was freedom. How many paths we ran together. Mountain trails, muddy tracks, athletics tracks. And then

came the thrill of competition, of striving alongside others. The satisfaction which nothing other than running can give. The end of a race when you are spent. The lungs struggle to catch up, every muscle aches, and you know that you have given it everything.

I loved the way you could play. As the spikes turned to boots how you could plant a foot and change direction. The



A LETTER

" A GIFT FROM THE ONE WHO SMILES AS HE SEES YOU OFFERING UP YOUR BODY TO HIM IN RESPONSE TO ALL HE HAS DONE FOR YOU. A WHOLE NEW DIMENSION TO OUR ADVENTURES TOGETHER. SPORT BECOMES SACRED. SPORT BECOMES WORSHIP. LET'S BE THE BEST THAT WE CAN BE. "



thrill of losing a defender, the execution of a beautiful throw as the disc soars through the air. The sheer joy of chasing after a flying object and when it is just out of reach and the feet are lifted from the ground and just for a moment you are flying, hands outstretched, until contact is made and you crash to the ground with the most treasured possession in your hand. How I felt alive!

The places we could go, the people that we could meet. The sudden death victories, and the sudden death defeats. The medals we won, and the many we did not win! Years well spent.

And along the way I learned something so important about you. Ultimately you are not mine. Truly you are a gift. A gift from the One who made you, a gift from the One who gave you any gifts and talents that you possess. A gift from the One who smiles as He sees you offering up your body to Him in response to all He has done for you. A whole new dimension to our adventures together. Sport becomes sacred. Sport becomes worship. Let's be the best that we can be.

Oh, but my body, I took it too far. I walked down the wrong road, I got diverted. I pushed you too hard. It was more than you could bear. I started to care more about how you looked

" BUT, MY BODY, DON'T YOU SEE THAT SOMETHING WONDERFUL IS HAPPENING TO YOU? THE GIVER HAS GIVEN A WONDERFUL GIFT. YOU ARE A SANCTUARY NOW, YOU ARE A FORTRESS. YOU ARE THE DWELLING PLACE OF A NEW LIFE, YOU ARE A PROTECTOR. "

than what you could do. Healthy eating to fuel you became unhealthy as I stopped giving you enough, I didn't give you what you needed. I hurt you. But the Giver of life did not let me go. He reminded me that I am more than my looks or my talent or my performance. He showed me that He loves me in spite of all my fears and failures, and that love can never be taken away or run dry.

But now everything has changed.

Oh body, there is so much that you cannot do now. You can't outrun a defender. You can't carelessly climb a tree or climb up some rocks. You can't cycle for unending miles down country lanes or busy city streets. You can't dive

around. You can't lift heavy weights. You can't run until you're spent. You're barely supposed to get out of breath. And you're so tired now, so very tired. And I miss it. I look on and see others out there playing, running, catching, diving, and I feel a sense of envy.

Oh body, you look so different now.

The slim, athletic figure I longed for and worked so hard for is a far cry from how you are now. And you are going to get bigger, and bigger, and who knows if you will ever be what you were? Will you ever go back to that?

For long years I could not conceive of conceiving because of what it would mean for my body and my sport. That was too important, that took precedence over pretty much all else.

But, my body, don't you see that something wonderful is happening to you? The Giver has given a wonderful gift. You are a sanctuary now, you are a fortress. You are the dwelling place of a new life, you are a protector.

Body, you may never be the same again. But that does not mean our adventures together are over. It does not mean sport is over. There will be

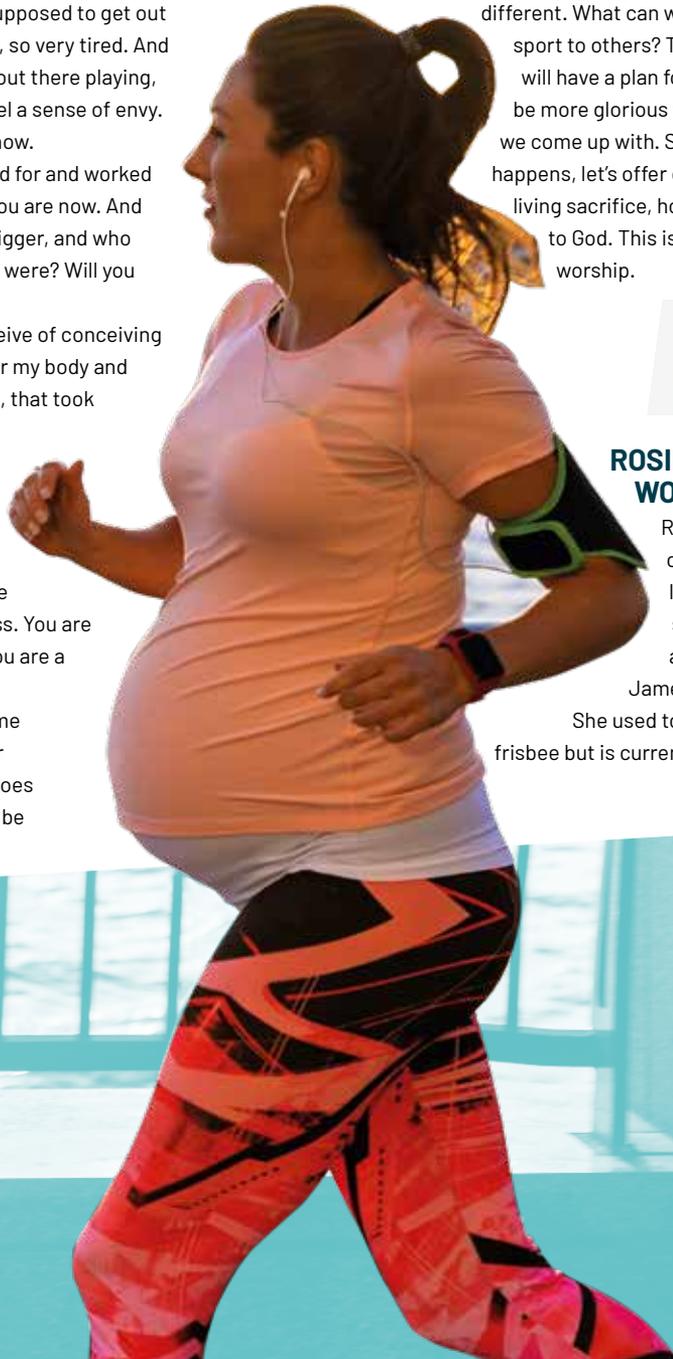
ways for us to move together once again. But it may well be different. What can we do to bring sport to others? The Giver of gifts will have a plan for you, and it will be more glorious than whatever we come up with. So whatever happens, let's offer ourselves up as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is true and proper worship.



ROSIE WOODBRIDGE

Rosie is currently on maternity leave as the student worker at Inspire Saint James Clerkenwell.

She used to play ultimate frisbee but is currently on a break.



A HOME FIXTURE

REACHING TEAMMATES FROM OUR LIVING ROOMS

As Covid-19 ground sport to a halt, The Big Online Sports Quiz was born. Christian sportspeople from across the UK invited their teammates along to take part in the monthly Quiz and hear the Good News of Jesus.

We caught up with Isaac (a rugby player and student at University College Dublin), Jen (an engineer in London who plays lacrosse and tennis) and George (who has rowed for almost 50 years and currently captains Runcorn Rowing Club) to discuss their experiences of the quiz.

Few sportspeople will prefer an online event to an in-person alternative. But Jen found the online format of the quiz did not stop her teammates coming along.

"It was so easy to invite teammates along, especially during the first half of Covid-19 when people were desperate for community. The Zoom time we had as a team before the quiz especially ... has facilitated further gospel conversations."

For George, the online format allowed the net of invitations to be cast wide.

"It was so easy to invite people... to reach so many people with the gospel is wonderful and we thank God for that."

And in Isaac's view, those rugby teammates who did come along were not disappointed.

"The production value was top class and it genuinely was a top quality quiz with a wide range of challenging and interesting questions. The gospel message fitted in well, was an appropriate length and was always very clear. It was definitely an event that I was confident inviting my teammates to.... We didn't get huge numbers in the end, but it was still such an encouragement that the boys who did come on not only clearly enjoyed themselves but also got to hear the gospel put forward in a way that they could understand."



George sculling at Northwich



We thank God for this chance to share Christ with thousands of unbelieving sportspeople. Even when the training grounds were shut, the Lord opened doors for the gospel.

Of course, as with in-person events, there will always be obstacles along the way. For George, it was discouraging when club members either didn't come or came but didn't listen to the talk.

THE BIG ONLINE QUIZ KEY FACTS

- 11 BIG ONLINE QUIZZES
- 82 COUNTRIES PARTICIPATING
- AVERAGE 260 TEAMS AT EACH QUIZ
- 15,000 PLAYERS
- 85,000 VIEWERS ACROSS THE 11

"The biggest discouragement was the numbers whom I invited but who did not want even to participate, and those that came but went for a beer when the talk was given."

But even in those moments, there are grounds to be thankful. Despite no teammates coming to the final quiz in March, Isaac was thankful to have invited his rugby teammates.

"Of course I was disappointed at the time, but I can still take encouragement that I crossed the pain-line, sent the invite and took the chance to remind them that I'm actually a Christian - the rest is always up to God!"



Jen playing lacrosse

Jen also saw that the quiz was part of a wider mission in her tennis and lacrosse clubs.

"The quiz motivated me to pray more and be more active in my evangelism. I have since been really encouraged by how I've seen God answer those prayers ... with one girl really keen to come to church with me."

We pray that, as for Jen, the quiz would simply aid the Christian sportsperson's ongoing evangelism within their team. And so, we look to the future – trusting in a sovereign God who delights to save sinners. Our prayer is the same prayer that George has for his rowing club.

"I pray that God's word will not return to Him empty and that the seed planted – the Word – will have fallen on fertile soil; that all will accept the offer of God's grace and mercy; and that they will come to faith."

Praise God that through the quiz, unbelievers were reached with the good news of Jesus. And the work does not stop now! With restrictions easing and potential quizzes approaching in the autumn, now is the now time to keep going for, and speaking of, King Jesus.

A PARALYMPIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

***LIVING AND SPEAKING FOR CHRIST IN
THE WORLD OF GOALBALL***



Anna Tipton (née Sharkey) is a former Great Britain goalball athlete. Her career spanned eight European Championships, two World Championships, and one home Paralympics in 2012 - where Anna was the highest scorer in goalball for Team GB. Born with a retina cell disorder and coming to faith as a teenager, we chatted to Anna about finding goalball, coming to Christ, and the joy of bringing her sport and faith together.

Believe it or not, Anna Tipton was not a sporty kid. When we think of elite sportspeople, we might imagine childhoods full of backyard hat tricks, glistening trophy shelves and performance pathways.

But as a child with tunnel vision, Anna found sport a nightmare.

“The thing about growing up with a visual impairment is that sport is really challenging. You can't see the ball necessarily and you can't necessarily see your teammates. You're often the weakest link on a team. So it made PE quite an emotional experience, I suppose, quite stressful.”

As a young teenager, however, Anna and her brother Michael, who is also visually impaired found a surprise love for the sport of goalball. This game is played with three players on each side, all wearing blind folds and attempting to score in a goal the width of the court. When not attacking, players use their bodies to listen to the ball's enclosed bell and try and block the opposition's goal attempts. They were introduced to this fast-paced game at a 'have-a-go' day with a local visual impairment charity.





"It was a wonderful act of God I suppose in that I'd never heard of goalball, never seen it before... It seemed like a good idea from [that first taster] that we'd enter ourselves into a development tournament. And at the time goodness knows why! Because we didn't really know the rules, we didn't have any kit and we were a bit of a shambles really."

But the pair showed natural ability in the sport, winning their first games with ease and some time later being head-hunted for the Great Britain junior set up. From a girl with little confidence in her sporting abilities to an athlete within the national performance pathway, the introduction of goalball to Anna's life brought great joy. "It was such a treat to suddenly have [the stress of sport] let loose and go, 'Do you know what? You can be physical and enjoy it.' It just brought such freedom of expression I suppose. Sometimes you don't know something about yourself until you get an opportunity. It's a wonderful gift."

Flash forward to the London 2012 Games, where Team GB had secured their goalball spot after four hard years of changing squads and funding uncertainty. Playing in front of unprecedented 7,000-strong crowds, Anna felt "10 feet tall." "It was just the dream wasn't it? I mean to compete at a Paralympics and do it on home soil is just incredible. It's like you're doing the thing you enjoy most in the world, and you've got that many people on your side who want it for you. I loved it, I loved showing off. It was just such a joy."

And through all the highs and lows of her career, Anna's faith as a Christian has brought her a new perspective on her sport and opportunities to share her faith with teammates.

When Anna became a Christian in her mid-teens, she understood how Jesus' death on the cross gave her real, relational intimacy with God by taking away the barrier of her sin. From this point, Anna revelled in letting Him into all parts of her life, including onto the goalball court.

"GOD ISN'T JUST ABOUT THAT SORT OF CONFINED SPACE ON SUNDAY MORNING. [BEING A CHRISTIAN] IS ABOUT THE INS AND OUTS OF YOUR LIFE. OR THE INS AND OUTS OF THE GAME. GOD IS THERE WITH YOU."

This led to a wonderful closeness with her Heavenly Father as Anna integrated her sport and faith. She began to feel that playing goalball, that using the skills God had given her and playing for Him, could be an act of worship.

"I'm not a gifted singer. That's never been my thing. But I have got an affinity for playing goalball. And every time I play it's like my worship to God. If I can do my best on a goalball court, then that's my joy in the way that God has made me."

Anna's relationships within goalball also created an opportunity to share her faith. "Because [teammates] see the best and the worst of you, they see all the emotion that you put in. So by nature they see your faith and what that means to you. I've always been open and up front about my faith. And then I've been able to pray with teammates before. That's a really fulfilling experience as well because God becomes part of everything you do within that team."

Now a mother, Anna is looking forward to sharing the love and hope of Jesus with her young son. Although outside of the rawness of elite sport, God is still close and unchanging in His love, an amazing and welcome truth for the Tipton family to treasure.

Praise God for the way He has given Paralympians like Anna the joy of sport. For those who are Christians, pray that they would see their sport as worship and would share their faith with those around them. Pray that Paralympians who don't yet know Jesus would come to faith in Him and play and live for His glory.



WATCH ANNA'S INTERVIEW AND GET MORE INSIGHTS INTO THE OLYMPICS AND PARALYMPICS AT CHRISTIANSINSPO.RG.UK/TOKYO.



STUDENT SPORTS MISSION: ALL DOOM, GLOOM AND ZOOM?

Not leaving the house in weeks, £50 fines for a kickabout with your mates, and throwing pillows across your lounge to practice goal-shooting - this year has certainly been one like no other for students across the UK.

For the average student, this year has consisted of hours of lectures online which can be watched from bed, BUCS tables being a no-score draw between every single university, and the closest thing to a ball being kicked is perhaps a trickshot in the garden.

Plenty of students have spent this year at home rather than their student accommodations and screen time for many must be at an all-time high. Have we seen any encouragement of reaching the student world of sport for Christ, or has this year only been all doom, gloom and Zoom?

HIGHLIGHTS:

1. EASY INVITES TO INNOVATIVE EVENTS

One thing undoubtedly easier about life online is the ease in joining virtually. No commute, the option to contribute as much (or as little!) as you want, the anonymity of YouTube, and all from the comfort of your pyjamas if you so wish.

This means evangelistic events such as mission weeks, online quizzes and 'Explore More' courses, have been able to reach more people than ever before. 'Explore More' is a recent adaptation in the online mission field, a chance for students to invite teammates along to a more intentional, deeper discussion on the Christian faith. And offering an invite to watching a church video stream is an easier debut than walking into a church building for the first time.

2. EXERCISE WITH A MISSION

The Train 1-2-1 resource was released to help encourage Christian sportspeople to go for a walk, run, or ride with a sports friend (as allowed within restrictions), and promote gospel conversation while doing so.

Group member Becky found it to be a brilliant opportunity saying "I think lots of people are struggling with their sense of identity, with not being able to do everything they normally do, and so they can chat about something that is a bit deeper and more personal. This gives me a platform to talk about the gospel with the certainty that I trust in a sovereign God".



3. REAL RELATIONSHIPS

A third positive has been the greater personal relationships students have been able to develop with team-mates, a result from spending more in-depth time together. Group member Dan said "I've found one-on-one relationships have been strengthened, and conversations run deeper on a walk than they do at training or pitchside."

This greater intentionality and resulting deeper, more personal relationships, along with the ease of online interaction, has been a great positive for student mission - but it hasn't all been plain sailing.

CHALLENGES:

1. FACING ZOOM FATIGUE

Really, another video call?

For over a year now studies, work, and entertainment have primarily had only one source: a screen. And any student evangelism methods are no different.

Likewise, the Christians in Sport group meeting may feel like yet another session for students to dutifully log onto. Group leader Sam said “we’ve found our focus has been on keeping the group together, which has been challenging.”

Pair that with studying Bible passages to help students navigate a world of sport which hasn’t existed for nearly a year and it’s perhaps no surprise motivation may be dwindling!

2. IS THERE ANYBODY OUT THERE?

Despite the ease with which social media allows us to contact almost anyone at the click of a button, relationally we have suffered this last year. Friends are at our fingertips, yet friendships have flatlined.

Group leader Gemma said “staying in touch with teammates and inviting them to events is much harder virtually than when you are seeing your peers three, four, five times a week at training sessions, matches, socials, or bumping into them on campus.”



3. LOCKED DOWN AND LOCKED OUT

Freshers in particular have had a tough time - many have spent the majority of the first year at home, and haven’t even been in their university town since before Christmas! Pre-November lockdown was mostly the only opportunity for first-years to socialise, an opportunity made harder by the absence of sport, societies and live lectures. How to evangelise to a club you’ve not yet met, or even not yet joined?

For older students, how can your mission field demonstrate your faith when there is no mission field? How to play for an audience of one, when you can’t play at all?

What a testament it is then, to the perseverance of group leaders and members that new students have joined groups and new university groups have still formed, despite no prior experience of in-person group meetings!

There have been so many encouragements from this bizarre year which we as a student team have been thrilled to hear. What a joy it’s been to see students creatively adapt to novel circumstances, the gospel go out, and students come to believe in Jesus - knowing that God is at work over all!

TOKYO 2020

GET INSIGHT AND UNDERSTANDING INTO LIFE AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF SPORT. HEAD TO CHRISTIANSINSPORT.ORG.UK/TOKYO FOR BLOGS, PODCASTS AND MORE.





christiansinsport



cis_uk



ChristiansinsportUK



christians_in_Sport

01869 255 630

INFO@CHRISTIANSINSPORT.ORG.UK

WWW.CHRISTIANSINSPORT.ORG.UK