

Editorial: Sport and Mission – An Introduction

Author: Simon Steer, former Principal of Redcliffe College, sports enthusiast and Chaplain at [Abingdon School](#).

Introduction

In a recent Radio 3 series of essays on famous sports photographs, *Listener, they Won it*, Simon Barnes, the Chief Sports Writer of The Times, said this:

Sport is not news. That is the point that so many people miss when they come to sport with a news based agenda. Sport is mythology, a mythology that unfolds before us in real time. Marshall McLuhan, the prophet of the information age, said, 'Blast the sports pages, pantheon of pickled gods and archetypes.'

These things are exactly what the global village wants and needs. We sports writers are professional purveyors of pickled gods and sports photographers are the architects of archetypes. That's what sport is all about. That's why, despite its obvious triviality, sport has such extraordinary resonance.

Given this 'extraordinary resonance', it is remarkable how rarely sport has been the subject of theological reflection. Whether we ourselves are sports enthusiasts or not, it is hard to deny that sport is one of the great global phenomena of our times.

Whether as participants, spectators or both, billions of people find pleasure (and pain), fulfillment and 'meaning' in sporting activity. Speaking personally, I am not ashamed to admit that, after faith and family, sport has been the greatest source of pleasure and significance in my life.

For millions of people, I suggest, there is a spiritual dimension to the mythology of sport, a transcendent quality that prompts reflection about beauty, character, the human capacity for excellence and resilience, the individual and the group and even the question of ultimate purpose. One of the most compelling accounts of what we might call the spirituality of sport is an essay entitled 'Federer as Religious experience' by David Foster Wallace that appeared in the New York Times magazine on 20 August, 2006 (I also recommend a wonderful You Tube montage with the same title). Wallace's essay is a superb piece of writing in which he evokes the 'kinetic beauty' demonstrated by Federer and suggests that this is a part of human beings' reconciliation with the fact of having a body. But there is something here that goes beyond the physical. Wallace suggests a 'metaphysical' explanation that 'Roger Federer is one of those rare, preternatural athletes who appear to be exempt, at least in part, from certain physical laws.' This is how Wallace concludes his article:

Genius is not replicable. Inspiration, though, is contagious and multiform—and even just to see, close up, power and aggression made vulnerable to beauty is to feel inspired and (in a fleeting, mortal way) reconciled.

Having recently witnessed Federer's remarkable 7th Wimbledon title, I am more persuaded than ever of sport's spirituality. As Simon Barnes (for whom sports writing often seems a branch of metaphysics), put it in The Times on July 9, 'In recent years Federer has preached us a complex and absorbing sermon about the place of soul in sport'. No doubt there will be a few more soul-inspiring sermons in the course of the impending London Olympics. Let's

hope that the spirit won't be quenched by security crises and aggressive commercialisation. If we need help from an earlier age, the re-release this month of the 1981 film *Chariots of Fire* (together with a new stage version) and its depiction of the 1924 Olympics, should do the trick. Scottish athlete and missionary to China, Eric Liddell's oft quoted line, 'When I run I feel (God's) pleasure' has certainly provided the starting gun for a good few evangelistic talks. Note, by the way, that the Christian organization Damaris has produced some excellent resources tied in with the re-release of *Chariots of Fire* for use in schools and churches.

We have decided to devote this issue of *Encounters* to Sport and Mission. If the literature on the theology of sport is limited, missiological reflection on this ubiquitous human activity fares little better. We hope that the three articles that follow will provide a way in to some of the literature that does exist and prompt further discussion and writing. Even more importantly, we hope that many will be motivated to engage in the practice of 'sports mission'.

The first article, 'Sport and Christianity in the 21st Century', is by two writers eminently qualified in the field. Andrew Parker is Professor of Sport and Christian Outreach and Director of the Centre for Sport, Spirituality and Religion, at the University of Gloucestershire, while Mike Collins is Visiting Professor in the Faculty of Applied Sciences at the University of Gloucestershire. Parker and Collins provide a fascinating overview of developments in the relationship between sport and religion in the UK since the Victorian period. While acknowledging a decline in the relationship between sport and the Protestant church in the UK during the 20th century, the article points to encouraging growth in sports ministry as a means of outreach in recent years. In their final section, the authors describe important developments in the professional preparation of sports ministry workers including postgraduate courses in which Redcliffe College is a partner.

The second article, 'Sport and Mission' is by Stuart Weir, Executive Director of Verité Sport, which exists to promote a Christian presence in sport. Stuart has been involved in sports ministry for over 25 years and has played a significant role in the development of international networks of those engaged in this work. Stuart outlines a possible framework for a theology of sport, summarising his book, *What the book says about sport* (Oxford: BRF, 2000). Stuart goes on to describe a variety of practical examples of sports ministry both in the UK and internationally.

The third article, 'A Once in a Lifetime Opportunity: a post Olympic legacy for sports mission through local church ministry in the UK', is by Graham Daniels, a former professional footballer and now General Director of Christians in Sport. Graham provides statistical evidence for the extent of sporting participation in the UK, using a scale known as the 'McCown Sport in Ministry Map'. Daniels provides a different perspective on some of the historical developments described by Parker and Collins, focusing in particular on the shift from a church to a para-church basis for sports mission in the course of the 20th century, citing the influence of USA based ministries in this regard. In the final section, Daniels suggests that the 'More than Gold' initiative linked with the London Olympics, provides an outstanding opportunity for local churches and national denominations to develop ongoing ministries to those engaged in sport at various levels. Having attended, earlier this week, an evangelistic sports quiz hosted by Graham Daniels and Christians in Sport colleagues in our local church, I can testify to the potential of this sort of ministry. The church was packed, many of those present were not yet Christians and they heard the gospel winsomely explained by means of sporting metaphors. May such ministries prompt many to run the race of faith in the months and years ahead.

At the end of Stuart Weir's article, he cites Bryan Mason's claim that the biggest unreached people group in the world is the group that plays, follows, reads about and watches sport. Mason writes, 'For the church to have no designated strategy for reaching this huge people group is at best ignorance and at worst folly'. We hope that this edition of *Encounters*

provides encouraging evidence that such a strategy is developing and prompt further efforts to demonstrate the Lordship of Christ in the world of sport.



Sport and Christianity in the 21st Century

Authors: Andrew Parker is Professor of Sport and Christian Outreach and Director of the Centre for Sport, Spirituality and Religion (CSSR) in the Faculty of Applied Sciences at the University of Gloucestershire, UK. Mike Collins is Visiting Professor in the Faculty of Applied Sciences at the University of Gloucestershire, UK.

Introduction

Over the past 30-40 years there has been a steady growth in the academic literature concerning the relationship between sport and religion. [1] What this article aims to do is to map out the key features of this relationship focusing specifically on developments in the UK both during and since the Victorian period. To this end, we begin by addressing the formative and innovative role which the English public schools and the Protestant church in Britain played in the growth of sport. Our discussion then goes on to locate these developments against a wider cultural backdrop of nineteenth century social change. The subsequent decline of the relationship between sport and the Protestant church in the UK during the 20th century is acknowledged, but it is also argued that there are now signs of church growth and specifically sports ministry as a means of outreach, especially amongst young people. Accordingly, the final section of the article outlines how sports ministry workers may be seen to be re-engaging professionally in both church and non-church settings. [2]

Sport and the English Public Schools

A popular argument surrounding the relationship between sport and religion in Britain is that during the mid-19th century certain sporting activities were transformed from a collection of unruly pastimes into a series of structured and codified games via the English public schools. [3] This transformation, it is argued, primarily took place through the work of Thomas Arnold at Rugby school between 1828-1841. Arnold's appointment to the position of Head Teacher at Rugby came at a time when wider criticisms prevailed of unruliness and disorder in the public schools; 'evils' which he resolved to remedy. Central to Arnold's reforms was his desire to transform his pupils into 'good Christian gentlemen'. The introduction of sport and physical activity into the curriculum at Rugby is seen as one of his most significant achievements. Yet the Arnoldian regime amounted to much more than games playing; an education in the 'classics' was regarded as the guardian of moral character, and the passing of responsibility to older pupils (*prefects*) as the gateway to discipline, respect and 'Christian manliness'. Word of Arnold's reforms - particularly the introduction of competitive games - travelled fast both inside and outside of the public schools with other educationalists following suit. One reason for the wider dissemination of Arnold's ideas was the writings of two well known authors of the time, Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes.

Sport and Victorian Values

During the mid 19th century Charles Kingsley (clergyman, academic, novelist and poet), and his associate, Thomas Hughes (lawyer, politician and novelist), became key figures in the relationship between sport and religion. Most notable in this respect was Hughes's 1857

book *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the story of a boy (Tom Brown) whose character is shaped by his educational experiences at Rugby school. The sense of high moral value and manly Christian endeavour embedded in the story-line of the book formed the basis of what came to be known as 'muscular Christianity', a term encapsulating notions of spiritual, moral and physical purity. In reality muscular Christianity had at its roots in a number of broader social concerns prevalent at that time: the protection of the weak, the plight of the poor, and, perhaps most importantly, the promotion of moral virtue. The idea of developing spiritual and moral fortitude through physical endeavour resulted in the establishment of a series of values which, in time, came to underpin the relationship between sport and religion not just in the public schools but in society at large: fair play, respect, physical and emotional strength, perseverance, subordination, obedience, discipline, loyalty, self control, self sacrifice, endurance, courage and *esprit de corps*. An example of how some of these values might come together can be seen in the 1980 film *Chariots of Fire*, where GB athlete Eric Liddell (a committed Christian) refuses to enter the 100 metres event at the 1924 Olympics because the heats are set to take place on a Sunday; Liddell went on to win bronze and gold medals in the 200 and 400 metres finals respectively. Likewise, these generic values are clearly articulated as underpinning features of the Olympic Games themselves. Indeed, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and of the modern Olympics was familiar with Thomas Hughes' novels and, after visiting Rugby in 1883, was said to be heavily influenced by the work of Thomas Arnold.

It is important to locate the emergence of muscular Christianity against a broader social and cultural backdrop. The rapid onset of industrialisation in 19th century Britain stimulated significant changes in social life which, in turn, generated a series of fears over issues such as health, sanitation and welfare. This led to a desire on the part of the middle and upper classes to improve and refine both the fortunes and habits of ordinary working class folk; a movement which Holt and others have referred to as 'rational recreation'. [4] Rational recreation comprised the will of the social elite to reform society by re-directing the energies of the masses away from the vagaries of drinking, gambling and disorder and towards new forms of social behaviour. The Church was part of this process. During the mid-late 19th century it was not uncommon for clergy to be involved in sporting provision, a number being pro-active in the establishment of some of today's high profile football teams. [5] Employers had similar ideas with some providing sports facilities for their workers alongside more general encouragements to take regular exercise thereby aiding health and productivity.

Sport and the Church: A new era?

From the 1850s onwards, sports grew in popularity in Britain (both at a participatory and at a spectatorship level) and, as a consequence, the Church came to recognize the value of such pursuits both in terms of their social status and religious significance. [6] It is clear, for example, that from the mid nineteenth century the Anglican church actively began to explore its sporting connections primarily out of a desire to eradicate the strong sense of 'puritanism' permeating its orbits. The post 1860s period witnessed a spectacular explosion of sport. By 1900 half a million or more played regularly in leagues. [7] Church sports teams began to spring up all over Britain, although they were much more common among liberal than among evangelical churches. [8] It has been estimated that in Birmingham between 1871-1880, 20% of the total number of cricket clubs and almost a quarter of association football clubs had connections with religious organizations. [9]

Notwithstanding the level of tolerance demonstrated by some denominations in comparison to others, from 1850 onwards Protestantism in Britain had, at the very least, begun to accept sport as a legitimate lifestyle pursuit, all of which added to a broader secularization of the Church around this time. Needless to say, there were on-going debates around the role of sporting activity in church life, these fuelled largely by anxieties over the kinds of moral

values and behavioural practices that sport promoted. Church leaders addressed these tensions in various ways but what seems apparent is that, irrespective of the underlying motives for the increased acquaintance of the church and sport, accompanying this was a more widespread concern for the health and welfare of the nation.

Sport and Protestantism post-1945

As the relationship between sport and the Protestant church grew stronger, muscular Christianity appeared in new and innovative guises. For example, the post-war period witnessed a significant rise in neo-evangelicalism on both sides of the Atlantic which brought with it a wide-range of sports mission organisations. [10] In 1945 the young Youth for Christ evangelist, Billy Graham, keen to make a stir at a YFC rally at which he was speaking, invited America's then leading distance runner, Gill Dodds to compete against a local opponent and to talk about his Christian faith. It was partnership made in heaven with Graham utilising Dodds' sporting fame to generate interest and appeal. [11] What Graham pioneered proved to be a new model of evangelical muscular Christianity which, over the next sixty years provided the focal point of the sport-religion relationship for Protestant America.

The Christian presence in American sport made further headway in the 1950s and 60s with the formation of Athletes in Action (AIA) and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA). FCA was founded in 1954 subsequently flourishing into a notable High School and coaches' ministry. From its inception in 1966, AIA rapidly grew into a worldwide movement holding fast to its original mission statement to introduce athletes to Christ, and to subsequently use their profile as an evangelistic platform. As the number of evangelical Christians in US professional sport began to increase, so too did opportunities for sports chaplaincy. With the support of the commissioner of Major League Baseball, Bowie Kuhn, in 1974 Baseball Chapel was established to provide a chapel programme for all major league baseball teams with a minor league programme following in 1978. [12]

Alongside the blossoming of sports chaplaincy came a re-definition of sports ministry in the life of American churches via increasing investment in resources and full-time sports ministers. Whilst not as dramatic as in the US, sports ministry has also flourished significantly in the UK. During the post-1950s period the sporting activities of churches in Britain experienced something of a decline, so much so that by the 1980s many congregations had little, if any, involvement in what was one of the most popular leisure-time choices for young people in secular settings. However, by this time moves were afoot to re-establish the relationship between sport and the Church in Britain. In the mid 1970s, a delegation from the UK were invited to attend a sports ministry conference in the US. On their return they set up a Christian ministry for sport in the UK culminating in 1975 with the launch of the Christian Sportsmen's Outreach. Over the next five years attempts were made to identify Christians in professional sport and by 1980 the movement had been renamed 'Christians in Sport' and registered as a charity.

Today the spectrum of the Christian community's interface with sport in the UK is far-reaching, with around 35 different Christian organizations in the UK alone. [13] There are ministries focused on specific sporting activities such as Christian Surfers UK and Logos Golf Ministries. Sports Chaplaincy UK (formerly SCORE) specializes in promoting sports chaplaincy services among professional/elite and amateur athletes both by supporting specific sports and by offering chaplaincy to major events such as the Commonwealth and Olympic Games. [14] Indeed, a particularly significant development, in recent years, has been the increasing recognition of the potential of such events as evangelistic opportunities. Mega-event ministry (as we would recognise it today) effectively began in 1988 at the summer Olympics in Seoul, Korea and at the winter Games in Calgary, Canada. The initial focus was on the competitors themselves, along with those who came to watch the event

live. In time the vision spread to encouraging the local church to use the interest generated in major events in their vicinity as a bridge to minister to the wider public. As the media revolution took hold, it became clear that approaches aimed at reaching people in the host nation could equally be applied to any city or country, when and where the event was given a significant media profile. The largest Christian campaign to take place thus far at a major sports event was at the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games when approximately 45 denominations and para-church ministry groups participated, (along with 700 churches), to stage outreach across Australia.

Sport, faith and academia in the 21st century

The first hand experience of UK organisations in touch with church congregations is that interest in sport is now re-emerging, as is the role of sports/youth ministers, lay or ordained. Of course, in a sporting world where provision has to meet stringent professional health and safety, youth safeguarding, and technical coaching or management standards, it can no longer be administered or delivered by 'amateurs'. In contrast to the public or commercial realms, or for Governing Bodies of Sport, historically there has been no accredited or formally recognised training for sports ministers or chaplains analogous to that which is available for coaches, administrators, sports facility managers or sports development officers. [15]

In recent years the University of Gloucestershire has developed a major Faculty of Applied Sciences training people in a range of health, physical activity and sport disciplines. The University's formation had incorporated two theological colleges and a teacher training college specialising in religious education. One of its statutes requires it to 'further faith' in the county and region, unusual even among the 12 Institutes of Higher Education in the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities. In 2005, the second author was asked to explore the potential for a postgraduate course in sports ministry/outreach. Such courses were (and are) numerous in the US, over 60 being identifiable at Masters level, some dating back to the 1920s. Of nearly a hundred individuals and institutions contacted about the viability of such a course in the UK, not one expressed doubt over the need for accreditation and qualifications in this area; hence, planning went ahead.

The upshot of these initial explorations is that since 2007 the University of Gloucestershire has:

1. *Validated and launched two postgraduate courses* (Certificate and Diploma in Higher Education, and MA) in Sports Ministry and Sport Chaplaincy, [16] comprising a suite of compulsory and optional modules which are taught through a blend of short blocks and semester attendance. [17] The focus is on Christians working in and through sport for the development of individuals and communities. Modules involve units on theology, the development of sport via churches, and the history and sociology of sport. Optional modules cover a range of health, education, sports development and social science themes. Theology modules have been developed through a local partnership with Redcliffe College, whose degrees the University validates. [18]
2. *Negotiated bursaries to support students in approved projects*, funded by the Joseph Rank Trust, [19] a charity specialising in youth and church projects; a number of these support sports ministry and sports chaplaincy candidates, some in local (Gloucestershire) sports clubs and villages, others further afield.
3. *Appointed to a Chair in Sport and Christian Outreach* (the first author), with an initial grant aid from the AllChurches Trust.
4. *Assembled an Advisory Group to guide and promote the overall initiative* from key figures in UK sports and youth ministry, chaired initially by the University's

Chancellor, Lord Carey of Clifton (and former Archbishop of Canterbury), and latterly by Revd. Dr Stuart Burgess, former UK government Rural Champion.

5. *Established the Centre for the Study of Sport, Spirituality and Religion (CSSR)*, the only research centre of its kind in Britain and Europe. [20]
6. *Sought funding for research* to undertake the mapping of faiths involvement in sport to help fill the gap in related research, and examining through case studies how particular programmes work, whether single denomination/faith or ecumenical/interfaith or with secular partners.
7. *Sought to make links with agencies both church based and secular* such as: the Association of Church Sport and Recreation Ministers (CSRM) in the USA, [21] the International Sports Coalition, [22] Sport England, Sporting Equals, the Local Government Association, Home Office [23], and Departments of Culture Media and Sport and Communities and Local Government.

Teaching and research in this area requires rigorous scholarship in order to support and maintain its development as a field of academic enquiry. More texts are emerging on the theology of sports ministry, [24] and its practicalities [25] including chaplaincy in soccer clubs. [26] In turn, the *International Journal of Religion and Sport* was launched by Mercer University Press in 2009.

Conclusions

Throughout the preceding discussion our intention has been to present an overview of the way in which the relationship between sport and Christianity has developed in the UK over the past 150 years. [27] Given all of the above, how, we might ask, should we begin to think about future work in this area? For sure, there is evidence to suggest that, in the UK at least, the vestiges of evangelical negativism towards sport remains. It is true, for example, that some churches and church leaders still see sport as something which detracts from (or counters) spiritual growth and maturity. On the other hand, sport, as a specific area of ministry, has witnessed something of a resurgence in the UK in recent years and is now an established field of outreach both within church and para-church organisations and within secular settings. Likewise, those involved in sports ministry at a national level continue to forge forward in relation to establishing a presence in elite sport and within the context of mega-events; this is presently evidenced in and through the operationalisation of the 'More than Gold' strategy, the interdenominational organisation coordinating the Christian community's involvement with the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games in London. [28]

On a broader scale modern-day sports ministry also has a host of practical matters with which to deal. The culture of 21st century secular sport is such that moral and ethical issues feature large amidst the day-to-day processes of participation, spectatorship and media commentary, all of which have the potential to manifest themselves, to some degree or another, within the context of church-based sports programmes. Likewise, nowadays Sunday church attendance often competes for the attentions of those wishing to play sport in secular circles; youth football's move to Sunday mornings in the 1990s being a prime example of how such tensions and dilemmas may arise. Nevertheless, the popularity of sport (especially as an aspect of youth culture) continues to grow and, in this sense, one of the greatest challenges facing sports ministry workers (and those who educate and train them) is to provide a quality of service in this area which competes with and surpasses all that the secular world has to offer. Indeed, it is to keep pace with secular sporting provision, whilst distancing itself from the moral dissonance which it often promotes, that is arguably the most pressing challenge for modern-day sports ministry.

Notes

1. See, for example, M. Novak, *The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls and the Consecration of the American Spirit* (New York: Basic Books; 1976); S.J. Hoffman, *Sport and Religion* (Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics; 1992); T. Ladd and J.A. Mathisen, *Muscular Christianity: Evangelical Protestants and the Development of American Sports* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999); and J. Parry, S. Robinson, N.J. Watson, and M. Nesti, *Sport and Spirituality: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2007).
2. For a more detailed discussion of the topics under consideration here see: A. Parker and J. Stuart Weir, 'Sport, spirituality and religion: From muscular Christianity to Modern-day Ministry', in: *Theology* (forthcoming, 2012); M. Collins and A. Parker, 'Faith and Sport Revival in Britain: Muscular Christianity and Beyond', *Stadion: International Journal of the History of Sport*, 35: 195-212.
3. See J.A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* (London: Frank Cass, 1981).
4. R. Holt, *Sport and the British* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
5. P. Lupson, *Thank God for Football!* (London, Azure, 2006).
6. See McLeod, "Thews and Sinews"; H. McLeod, 'Sport and the English Sunday School, 1869-1939', in S. Orchard and J.H.Y. Briggs (Eds.), *The Sunday School Movement: Studies in the growth and decline of Sunday Schools*, (Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2007), pp. 109-123; D. Erdozain, *The Problem of Pleasure: Sport, Recreation and the Crisis of Victorian Religion* (Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 2010).
7. Holt, *Sport and the British*.
8. P. Scott, 'Cricket and the religious world of the Victorian Period', in: *The Church Quarterly*, 3 (1970), pp.134-144.
9. T. Mason, *Association Football and English Society 1863-1915*.
10. For a more detailed picture of the development of the sports ministry both in the UK and the US in the post-1945 period, see: Ladd and Mathisen, *Muscular Christianity*.
11. J. Mathisen, "A brief history of Christianity and Sport: selected highlights of a puzzling relationship", in D. Deardorff and J. White (Eds.), *The Image of God in the Human Body: Essays on Christianity and sports*, (New York, Edwin Mellen Press, 2008).
12. Of course, such progress has not gone without criticism. See, for example, T. Krattenmaker, *Onward Christian Athletes: Turning Ballparks into Pulpits and Players into Preachers*, (New York, Rowman and Littlefield, 2010).
13. For further details of this network see the web site of UK Sports Ministries: <http://uksportsministries.org/>
14. For further details see: <http://www.sportschaplaincy.org.uk/>
15. See A. Pitchford and M. Collins, "Sports Development as a job, a career, and training", in: M. Collins (Ed.) *Examining Sports Development*, London, Routledge, 2010, forthcoming.
16. For more information, see: <http://www.glos.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/scm/Pages/default.aspx>
17. Sports chaplaincy provision has been developed specifically in association with Sports Chaplaincy UK (formerly SCORE).
18. For more information, see: <http://www.redcliffe.org/>
19. For more information, see: <http://www.ranktrust.org/>
20. See <http://www.glos.ac.uk/research/dse/cssr/Pages/default.aspx>
21. For more information, see: <http://www.csrn.org/>
22. For more information, see: <http://www.intersports.org/>
23. See for example Home Office, 'Working Together: Cooperation between Government and Faith Communities London', Home Office, 2004.
24. See D. Deardorff and J. White (Eds.) *The Image of God in the Human Body: Essays on Christianity and Sports*, Lewiston, Edwin Mellen Press, 2008; S.J. Hoffman, *Good game: Christianity and the culture of sports*, Waco, TX, Baylor University Press, 2010; J. Parry, M. Nesti and N. Watson (Eds.), *Theology, Ethics and Transcendence in Sport*, (Routledge, London 2011) and N.J. Watson and A. Parker (Eds.) (forthcoming 2012), *Sports and Christianity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, New York, Routledge.
25. S. Connor, *Sports Outreach: Principles and practice for successful sports ministry*, Scotland, Christian Focus Publishing, 2003; J. Garner (Ed.), *Recreation and Sports Ministry: Impacting postmodern culture*, Portland, B&H Publishing, 2003; B. Mason, *Into the Stadium: An active guide to sport and recreation in the local church*, Milton Keynes, Authentic Lifestyle and Spring Harvest Publication Division, 2003; L. McGowan and V.J. Gin, *Focus on Sports Ministry*, Marietta, 360 Sports, 2003.
26. See J. Heskins and M. Baker, *Footballing lives, as seen by chaplains in the beautiful game Norwich*, Canterbury Press, 2006.
27. For critique and comparison of the varying approaches to sport by the Protestant and the Roman Catholic church see: S.J. Hoffman, *Sport and Religion*, and Ladd and Mathisen, *Muscular Christianity*.
28. See: <http://www.morethangold.org.uk/>

Sport and Mission

Author: J. Stuart Weir, Executive Director, Verité Sport.



Rev Samuel Ashe was an 18th century English clergyman who clearly saw the need for interaction between church and sport. He used to spend his Sunday afternoons hiding in the trees by the local sports field. He would bide his time till the football came near him when he would catch the ball and pierce it with a pin [1]. He could then go home rejoicing that he had stopped his parishioners from sinning! There are better ways for Christians to engage with sport.

There has been a dearth of theological reflection on sport [2]. From Tertullian [3] onwards through the Puritans [4], the Christian view of sport has tended to be negative.

Puritan opposition to sport might be summarized under three points:

- 1 Sport was not the best use of time;
- 2 Sport often took place on Sunday;
- 3 Sport was often associated with drinking, gambling and bad company. [5]

Steven Overman [6] argues that the Protestant Ethic is a significant influence on modern American sport. The Puritans saw play generally as time which could be better spent. Overman starts his book with four fundamental questions, one of which is: "Why do Americans feel guilty when they play for the fun of it?" [7] Overman suggests that John Calvin's ghost still haunts the sports arenas and the playgrounds. [8]

Overman uses a wonderful phrase "soap-swimming Presbyterians", which implied that recreational bathers took a bar of soap along so that time spent swimming was not time wasted.

The emergence of the Muscular Christianity movement in the nineteenth century saw Christians – but not really evangelicals – engage with sport. Thomas Hughes's novel, *Tom Brown's School Days*, published in 1857 certainly had great influence.

The evangelical view of sport in this period was generally negative, Bishop JC Ryle, (1816-1900) for example, had been cricket captain of Eton, triple Oxford Blue. He took 10 wickets v Cambridge in 1836. However he never played cricket after ordination. His attitude is summed up in his *Who's Who* entry which records his interests as "cricket until ordained [9]".

In Wales non-conformists were discouraged from playing rugby by the ghoulish warning that they were "kicking the head of John the Baptist". [10] There were remarkable stories from the Welsh revival of 1904 of a rugby team playing a game on the Saturday, going to chapel on Sunday and enough of the team being converted and convinced that playing rugby had no place in the life of the Christian, that the following Saturday's game had to be cancelled.

The book, *What the Book says about sport* [11], included a chapter "Towards a theology of sport", which started with creation, then the fall, judgment and redemption. It concluded that any theology of sport must include these elements.

Sport is...

- a gift from God
- part of God's creation
- an opportunity for worship
- an opportunity to love one's neighbour
- a testing ground
- an opportunity for witness
- important but not all-important
- not the source of our significance as people

Romans 12 includes a number of points which can be applied to sportspeople

12:1 - *A living sacrifice!* Having a body is essential if you are going to play. Offering our body to God as a living sacrifice doesn't mean that we are not to play sport but rather that we must play as people who have given our bodies to Jesus Christ.

Paul calls it your spiritual act of worship. We are called to give our bodies to God to please him, as an act of worship, a 24/7 lifestyle activity, including when we play sport.

12:2: *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,* Playing sport as people transformed by God rather than conforming to the world's standards is a challenge. Now that means representing Christ in your sport. You operate to God's standards, not the etiquette of the game around you. You cannot pull someone's shirt because everyone does it. That attitude is conforming to the world, not being transformed by God.

12:3 and 16: *Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought to. Do not be conceited.* The world of sport is riddled with pride. That it is a "me first" culture is almost inevitable in a world where identity is performance-based.

12:10: *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love* is such a brilliant description of team-sport. Being part of a team over a period of years, sharing the successes and disappointments creates a bond between people like very little else.

12:12 *faithful in prayer* George Bruder, in the nineteenth century, believed that no Christian could possibly go to the theatre. His argument was that the idea of praying about the theatre was quite ludicrous. How could you possibly pray, he asked, "Lord! Go with me to Covent Garden. Bless the actors, strengthen the dancers, assist the musicians, let us have a merry evening, and render the whole performance useful to my religious interest [12]". He was right in his belief that the Christian should not do anything that they could not pray about but, perhaps, wrong to think he could not pray about the theatre or sport.

12:16 *Live in harmony with one another... live at peace with everyone.* What a great summary of our attitude to the opposition and to the officials.

Sports Mission

So how do you do sports mission? There is no one simple answer. It is easier to give examples than to define it.

Chaplaincy

Chaplains are appointed to meet the needs of competitors at major sports events. It is a recognition that there is more to people than just the physical. At one event a leading churchman said, "It is good and right that our churches are setting a clear Christian emphasis during this World Championship. We are opening up space for God. It is necessary that sportsmen and women have the opportunity...to turn to God in prayer and share about their faith" [13].

The former Leeds United football club chaplain, John Jackson used to say: "I don't go into the football club to take Jesus. He is already there. I just go in case he needs an errand boy".

Simon Stevenette, tells the story of when he was chaplain to Swindon Town. They were in the play-offs at Wembley at a tense point when a man behind put his hands on Simon's shoulders and said "Reverend, pray". Simon told me "I explained that I did not think prayer worked like that. But in case I was wrong, I prayed. [14]"

Service

In 2006, Africa Cup of Nations took place in Egypt. The sports ministry associated with the Kasr El Dobara Evangelical Church in Cairo approached the organizing committee and offered to serve the tournament. The committee was at first sceptical but when they were having difficulty recruiting volunteers, and the church was able to produce volunteers, their attitude changed. Maged, the leader of the church sports ministry, was given the role of Head of Volunteers and a place on the organizing committee.

Maged said, "It was an incredible opportunity that God gave to the sports ministry in Egypt, to be at the heart of such a big sports event. 90% of the people I was working with - volunteers, organizing committee, government - were not Christians. But all of them knew I was from a Christian church. Many found out about our camps and Kids' Games. Some heard my testimony [15].

It is a legal requirement in the USA that drinking water is provided at all sites where there are crowds. At the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City the Salvation Army offered to take responsibility for all the water distribution points at all sites. The Salvation Army also provides warehouse space for the packed lunches, that the Organizing Committee distributed to all volunteers on all sites each day.

Incarnational Ministry

Laura Kyte from UK has just completed two years in Argentina, working with Latin Link on a mission placement under the "Strider" scheme. She is a good club runner and much of her

time was spent in the local athletics club, training and competing – sharing her life and her faith with local runners.

Two European Christians have spent time in the Middle East, one as a basketball coach and the other as a professional footballer. Playing professional football is also a great model for support raising! Kate Randle, a teacher from Cirencester, went to Zimbabwe with Crosslinks to work as a PE teacher and hockey coach.

There is a Christian based business which recruits and places sports coaches in countries which are closed to foreign missionaries. The coaches, by the way, all happen to be Christians!

Sometimes foreign missionaries find it hard to get to know people and to feel part of the community. Sport can help break down barriers and enable the foreign “missionary” to meet people naturally and even professionally.

More than Gold

The London Olympics start later this month. More Than Gold [16] is the group which co-ordinates ministry among churches and agencies. The strategy includes

- 40+ resources to help Christians engage with the games;
- 3,000 mission team members from around the world serving in London;
- Athlete Family Homestay programme;
- Chaplaincy;
- Social Justice;
- Service;
- Community festivals.

Other models

How do you share the gospel in Pakistan? There is an annual cricket tournament, where all teams are required to have a mix of religions [17].

In Togo Aime Agbovor runs a girls’ football team, Amis du monde. He is football coach, life coach, pastor, evangelist, surrogate parent for 40 girls. [18].

Sports coaching is a widely used method of reaching out to young people [19].

Christian run gyms are very common in the USA [20] but also in India, where Steve’s gym is clearly evangelistic in purpose while providing excellent facilities.[21].

Conclusion

Bryan Mason argues that the biggest unreached people group in the world, is the group that plays, follows, reads about and watches sport. He continues “For the church to have no designated strategy for reaching this huge people group is at best ignorance and at worst folly” [22]. Is sport included in your mission plan?

Notes

1. Holt, R Sport and the British, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1989). Page 39.

2. For a review of material reflecting on sport theologically, see J Stuart Weir Theology of sport, an historical review: at http://www.veritesport.org/downloads/Theology_of_Sport_An_historical_review.pdf
 3. Ballon, R B physical activity, (in EF Zeigler, ed, History of sport and physical education to 1900: Champaign, Ill., Stipes, 1973). Page 195.
 4. Stubbs, P, Anatomie of Abuses, 1583, quoted in Brailsford, D British Sport, a Social History, (Cambridge, Lutterworth Press, 1998). Page 30.
 5. Brailsford, D, Sport and Society, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969). Page 132-3
 6. Overman, SJ, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Sport , How Calvinism and Capitalism Shaped America's Games, (Macon, Mercer University Press, 2011).
 7. The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Sport, Page 3
 8. The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Sport, Page 41
 9. Loane, M, John Charles Ryle 1816-1900 (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1983)
 10. Smith, D and Williams, G, Fields of Praise : the official history of the Welsh Rugby Union 1881-1981, (Cardiff University of Wales Press, 1980), Page 6. See also Erdozain, D, Revival as Cultural Spotlight: The Strange Case of Rugby Football and the Welsh Revival of 1904-5', in Revival and Resurgence in Christian History, Studies in Church History, 44, (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2008)
 11. Weir, S, What the book says about sport, (Oxford: BRF, 2000).
 12. Bruder, G Lawful Amusements, (London Biggs and Co, 1805) Page 29
 13. Dr Wolfgang Huber, the most senior Bishop in the German state church at the special worship service held in the Berlin Cathedral at the beginning of the World Athletics Championships August 2009. See also: Weir, S, Space for God, The Times Online August 21, 2009
 14. Quotations from personal conversations with John Jackson and Simon Stevenette
 15. For a fuller account of the ministry to the Africa Cup of Nations in 2006, see Daniels, G and Weir, JS, Church and Sport in Deardorff, D II and White, J (Ed), The Image of God in the Human Body, (Lewiston, NY, Edwin Mellen, 2008)
 16. See [http:// www.morethangold.org.uk](http://www.morethangold.org.uk)
 17. See <http://www.veritesport.org/?page=Pakistanpi>
 18. See <http://www.veritesport.org/?page=Togo>
 19. Examples: <http://www.highersports.org/>, <http://www.aisint.org/>, <http://www.kicklondon.org.uk/>
 20. <http://www.southeastchristian.org/?page=3770>
 21. <http://www.stevesgym.com/about.htm>
 22. Mason, B, Beyond the Gold, (Milton Keynes, Authentic, June 2011).
-

A Once In A Lifetime Opportunity A post Olympic legacy for sports mission through local church ministry in the UK



Author: Graham Daniels, General Director of [Christians in Sport](http://www.christiansinsport.org).

The London Olympics appear to have made a significant impact on the outlook of UK churches. At the time of writing over 3,000 local churches in the UK have signed up for involvement in the More Than Gold (MTG) movement which holds that "the churches in the UK have a once in a lifetime opportunity thanks to the 2012 Games being awarded to London. We are here to be a one-stop-shop that helps the churches seize the moment." [1] The mission of MTG is "to enable the UK churches to engage with the 2012 Games" [2] and its vision is that "when the dust has finally settled we hope to have fulfilled our dream for the 2012 Games to have enabled thousands of churches to taste the excitement of reaching their community in fresh and ongoing ways in Jesus' name." [3] MTG holds that, "all too often the churches are seen negatively, as out of touch and only interested in themselves. The 2012 Games provides a unique opportunity for UK churches to be seen for what they really are." [4] MTG aims to achieve this transformation in a range of ways but here is a primary way which is helpful in re-enforcing the centrality of the local church in sports ministry. MTG aims to support local churches by "making connections between the many agencies and thousands of churches that can make it happen" [5]

Sport in the UK

The importance of the MTG initiative is predicated on the significant number of the UK population who are involved in sport. If it is indeed the task of the local church to share the good news of Jesus in its local community, then the figures below indicate that a sizable proportion of most communities in the country are involved in sport. "Currently in the UK 45% of adults and 87% of young people participate regularly in sport, yet the Government has set an even more ambitious target - to introduce the equivalent of 100,000 new participants to sport every month until 2020." [6] Again, "over 10 million adults in England alone play sport in a club" [7] and "there are 150,000 Sports clubs in the UK" [8].

These are significant numbers which make up a sizable proportion in a UK population of around 62 million people. [9] If we are to understand this broad people group more clearly, it will be necessary to define the range of sporting participation the numbers represent. Defining the nature of participation in sport is a relatively complex operation. We will here use a scale called the "McCown Sport in Ministry Map" [10] to show the range of people who engage in sport. Before outlining the definitions, it's worth noting that though we shall use his definition of "Spectator" here, spectators are not included in the range of UK statistics regarding sports *participants* outlined above. If they were to be added the number of people in the UK who are involved in sport on a regular basis would increase even more dramatically.

McCown suggests the following levels of engagement with sport and following the categories offered by McCown, we will offer a summary definition and, in appropriate cases, the ways in which sports mission movements have engaged with that type of sports participant.

"Spectator" [11]: these are people who watch sport. Sports mission movements have employed as a primary evangelistic methodology the distribution of the testimonies of "High Profile" (see below) Christian athletes during major sporting events.

"Novice": "Novices are those participants who are developing sports skills at an introductory or developmental level, and they can be of any age." [12]

"Leisure": the third category comprises of people who compete for fun. "Their sport is a hobby that they enjoy; yet not something they take too seriously. For them, participation is more important than performance and results." [13] Where churches are involved in sports participation, this is the most common methodology employed.

"Player": as we move to the rest of the categories, the characteristics of the people involved in sport change significantly. From this point on the people defined find their *identity* in their sport experience...If you ask a Player to tell you a bit about himself, he will reply, "I'm a cricketer" or "I'm a swimmer", or identify herself through whatever sport he play. Players are known by others on their team and in their community because of their sport. "What sets the Players on a team apart is the fact that they are highly competitive and extremely motivated by their performance. Unlike Leisure, they are concerned with performance as much as or more than winning." [14] Most of their experiences are sports related and all of their life experiences are filtered and processed through their sport experience. People like this spend much of their spare time in sports clubs, training and competing. They find it difficult to commit to church activities and relationships if they are to sustain the level of commitment required in their sport, and are often peripheral to their church community. This tension is further heightened in the final two categories.

"Elite": "the Elite in sport possess all the characteristics of the Player coupled with a greater fear of failure. Even more so than the Players, they are concerned with individual performances over winning and losing. It is hard to discern whether the motivations of the people who want to be their friends are genuine or for selfish gains. So despite the fact that their team mates often fulfill their need for friendship, Elite players are so competitive that they place their own performance, and by extension their own interests, above those of their team and team mates." [15] In some sports the Elite player remains an amateur or a part time professional, so their involvement in a local church can be even more limited than a Player. These folks are in a minority but even as Christians are often beyond the fringe of local church relationships.

"High Profile": these are the famous Elite players, the David Beckhams of sport. "High Profile players have the Player and Elite characteristics plus significant public profile arising from their fame and popularity." [16] They are usually the sportspeople that Spectators are interested in hearing from, and therefore they are the fuel for Spectator driven testimonial literature and films, as observed in our first category above.

Sport, church and para church mission

The large number and wide range of sports participation in the UK should be considered as a significant mission field for the UK church. Yet the dominant force in the modern history of sports mission has been the para-church as opposed to local church movements. The encouragement of the MTG movement outlined at the start of this paper is that it wants to take the local church seriously enough not to by-pass it in its zeal for mission to sportspeople. Indeed, it presupposes an underlying ecclesiology that was present in the origins of sports mission in Victorian England in the late nineteenth century but that has been absent for the last century.

The impact of churches on the development of sport and evangelism in the UK has been documented in popular form by Peter Lupson, in his book 'Thank God For Football' [17]. He shows how post 1850 the relationship between churches, sport and recreation became very strong, initially through engagement with what McCown calls local Leisure and increasingly Player participants as a result of government legislation insisting upon regular recreation time for industrial workers. Indeed, this was the primary factor in the the development of some of today's major football clubs such as Aston Villa, Everton, Liverpool, Fulham, Manchester City, Queen's Park Rangers and Tottenham Hotspur. It was local churches that pioneered this relationship between sport, Christian mission and society in their own neighborhoods.

Allied to this development in local churches in industrial areas was the emergence of "muscular Christianity" in the English public schools. In the Victorian period the lawless environment of the public schools was addressed by Thomas Arnold under his headship at Rugby School (from 1828) by his application of his Christian ethic to leadership. Sport was at the heart of this, for example by codifying the rules of games, and encouraging ethical development through amateur sport. The influence of Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, fictionalising his time under Arnold at Rugby was very influential in developing 'muscular Christianity' in the English schools system and these values are perhaps best represented by the McCown's Leisure and Player categories.

Meanwhile, Ladd and Matthisen [18] have charted the development of the relationship between sport and mission in the United States (US) and drawn attention to the fact that the dominant drivers of the movement were para-church organisations. The observation of this paper is that this was the polar opposite of what happened in the UK and that this has had a detrimental effect on local church sports mission in the UK.

Dwight Moody, the Chicago based itinerant evangelist, was involved with the Chicago YMCA and by 1867 boxer Orville Gardner's Christian conversion and public testimony through the YMCA brought a Christian sportsman's testimony into a celebrity status hitherto unknown. By the 1880s the New York YMCA developed a series of "Athletic Sundays". The Christian message was offered through the testimonies of prominent athletes such as Billy Sunday, a professional baseball player who had recently converted to Christianity. Sports mission was being driven by para-church leadership and by their contact, using language developed by McCown, with Elite and High Profile participants in sport, whereas in England it was driven initially by churches and schools working with Leisure and Player participants.

D.L. Moody's links in England led to something of a convergence of these two worlds. Moody developed a strong relationship with the family of C.T. Studd, the amateur international English cricketer and famous member of 'the Cambridge Seven' (who eschewed Elite and High Profile participation to become missionaries to China). J.E.K. Studd, C.T.'s elder brother, toured the American colleges in 1885 at Moody's invitation and played a role in establishing a generation of American college students who met at the Northfield Conference and emulated the Cambridge sportsmen's zeal for mission, particularly on campus. 'By the early 1890s six of the starting eleven of Yale's football team were evangelical Christians and

the YMCAs on college campuses were booming' [19]. These new leaders of Sports mission in the US were Players.

Sports mission was now being driven by Players but it wasn't to last as the US default position of para-church leadership allied to Elite and High Profile testimonies regained prominence. This crucial divorce from local church roots, which drove the emergence of sports mission in the US, was to have a significant influence on the 20th century sports mission movement. [22]

This thesis is supported by what happened in a second wave of the US sports mission movement under the ministry of Billy Graham and Youth for Christ from the 1940s onwards. [21] Billy Graham was determined to make his mission in his home town of Charlotte in 1947 a success. He and his Youth For Christ associates realised that sport might attract a youth audience ready to listen to their message even though, since the late 19th century, the relationship between Christianity and sport in the US had broken down. On the opening night of the Charlotte Mission, Graham used Gill Dodds, the American Mile Champion, in a race and then to testify to his faith. It was a great success and it became normative for Billy Graham to use High Profile sportspeople's testimony in his missions.

Subsequently, it was the emerging para-church organisations that continued to drive the movement in the US. The Fellowship of Christian Athletes, founded in 1955, became and continues to be, the dominant force in domestic American mission to young Players and uses the testimony of the Elite and High Profile participants to evangelise young Players as well as Spectators.

Internationally, throughout the 1950s, numerous American college teams made up of Players began travelling across the globe during their summer vacation to play sports like basketball and to share their faith. Bill Bright began Campus Crusade in 1951, followed in 1966 by Athletes in Action (AIA), initiated by Dave Hannah, who said "the purpose of this work is to introduce athletes to Christ, then to use the platform they have for evangelism." The AIA contacts on campuses filled up teams of travelling missionary teams in the summers. By 2009 AIA had 875 staff in 60 countries and continues to provide multiple resources for sports mission predicated on the use of High Profile testimonies to drive the mission strategy.

By the 1980s evangelical muscular Christianity was increasingly well established organisationally and culturally on a global level. [21] The big sporting events were now huge cultural tools available to churches as a means of outreach. In the early 1980s representatives of the American sports missions organisations and emerging foreign-based organisations gradually discovered each other through a series of informal meetings and conferences which gave rise to the International Sports Coalition. In action not unlike the Northfield conferences in the 1880s or the early Billy Graham Youth For Christ meetings in the mid-1940s, several individuals worked to merge the overlapping interests and concerns. The result was the formation of the International Sports Coalition with the purpose "to promote unity and co-operation with local church and para-church sports ministry servants so that together we might follow God's leading in worldwide evangelism and exhort each other to keep Christ first in our lives and ministries". The crowning achievement was a week-long gathering of more than five hundred delegates in Seoul prior to the 1988 Olympic Games for the World Congress on Sport.

In Europe, in 1989, there was the first ARENA conference out of which grew the European Christian Sports Union (ECSU). There is currently sports mission in 27 countries out of 52 in Europe. In the UK, Christians in Sport was founded in 1980, emerging in Oxford in the 70s as a para-church student movement and in the spirit of American methodology, the Gill Dodd phenomenon happened in UK. In the 50s and 60s there were virtually no role models among UK Christians sportspeople apart from David Shepherd, the England cricketer who went on to become the Bishop of Liverpool. Alan West, captain of Luton Town, was

converted to Christianity in 1976, one of the first High Profile footballers to give testimony to his faith in the post war era.

In 1984 there were no known Christians in the British Olympic team but by 1988 Andrew Wingfield Digby and Peter Swaffield were chaplains ministering to 5-10 Christians in the UK team. In 1989, the international Olympian and High Profile Christian Kris Akabusi spoke at a Billy Graham Mission in Crystal Palace, echoing the methodology of Charlotte in 1947. By 1996 Christians in Sport were making videos with High Profile participants Jonathan Edwards, Gavin Peacock, Bernhard Langer, Cyrille Regis and Inge Tuigamala, whilst other High Profile participants whose testimony was made public in this period included Sue Barker, Justin Fashanu and Glenn Hoddle.

Not all the names listed are today pleased to have been identified with the cause of Christian mission in their younger, High Profile prime! Indeed, in retrospect Christians in Sport have observed that the risk of asking young, famous High Profile sports participants to be the key drivers of sports mission has substantial pastoral risks for those athletes both during their athletic careers and even more significantly when they are no longer High Profile athletes.

More Than Gold, the Local Church and the future of sports mission.

In its original form, UK sports mission was led by the pioneering US led methodology; in McCown's language sports mission was dominated by para-church movements working alongside Elite and High Profile athletes who were professing Christians. This had a subtle dual effect. Pastorally, it became effectively a 'church' movement, since the majority of these itinerant, Elite and High Profile athletes found their Christian community amongst their 'Christians in Sport' contemporaries who understood their world so well, ahead of their relationships in their local churches. The second effect was the noteworthy influence of the story, or testimony, of these athletes on the wider British public, which encouraged Christians in Sport to facilitate the production of videos to maximise the publicity for the Christian message in the public, sporting arena. The decision to encourage such public testimony was made by the para-church staff, without consultation with a local church leadership who had any day to day, church based contact with the athlete, leading to some pastoral disasters in the lives of the High Profile athlete, both during and after their careers.

Since the Atlanta Olympics in 1996 there has always been a major sports mission strategy at Olympic Games and World Cups, with the Olympic brand now entitled More Than Gold and the World Cup branded The Ultimate Goal. The MTG approach to the London Olympic Games has provided a significant impetus for the possibility of minimising para-church groups with their emphasis on Elite and High Profile testimony in favour of local church mission to sportspeople. In the last year the More Than Gold movement has seen all major denominations and some 3,000 churches sign up for involvement in the possibilities for mission surrounding the Olympic Games. For the first time in the history of sports mission in the UK, this number provides a critical mass of churches who are explicitly desiring to consider sports mission a part of their portfolio.

As we approach London 2012, alongside the longstanding and excellent provision of chaplains to coaches and competitors within the Olympic Village itself, there is an Athletes' Family Hosting programme (namely free accommodation for overseas competitors' family members provided by local churches); high quality, purpose-designed evangelistic resources not always dependent on High Profile testimonies; sports clinics and camps programmes which are delivered locally by churches; local church driven public screening of the major events of the Games as well as the provision of street pastors in strategic venues and churches in strategic places being open to visitors.

Thirty years after the emergence of para-church driven sports ministry, the MTG movement is showing strong indicators that the local church in the UK may be seeing the vision for how

it can engage its surrounding sports community, through the mission of local Christians who happen to have a passion for sport in their own, local community. This may at first appear a relatively small gain, but in terms of a mission strategy it speaks significantly of a potential legacy for mission for local churches in the UK into a significant mission field in the country for years to come.

NOTES

1. <http://www.morethangold.org.uk/about-us/why-we-exist.html>
- 2- 5. *ibid*
6. General Household Survey, Participation in sport – past trends and future prospects (2004)
7. Sport England, Understanding Participation, 2008 (Website) <http://www.sportengland.org/research.aspx>
8. 2009 Survey of Sports Clubs 2009, Sport Industry Research Centre, Sheffield Hallam University.
9. Office For National Statistics, Annual Mid-year Population Estimates, 2010
Date: 30 June 2011
<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/pop-estimate/population-estimates-for-uk--england-and-wales--scotland-and-northern-ireland/mid-2010-population-estimates/annual-mid-year-population-estimates--2010.pdf>
10. Focus On Sport In Ministry, Lowrie McCown and Valerie J. Ginn (360 Sports, 2003) chapter 4, 'A Visual Perspective - The McCown Sport in Ministry Map
11. *ibid*
12. *ibid*
13. *ibid*
14. *ibid*
15. *ibid*
16. *ibid*
16. Thank God For Football, Peter Lupsom (SPCK, 2001)
18. Muscular Christianity, Evangelical Protestants and Development of American Sport, Tony Ladd and James A Mathisen (Baker Books, 1999)
19. *ibid* Chapter 1, The Rise of Evangelicals and the Development of Sport in America, Chapter 2, The Engagement of Sport and Religion
20. *ibid* Chapter 4, Toward the reengagement of evangelicalism and sport
21. *ibid* Chapter 5, institutionalising Muscular Christianity since the 1950s

Please Note: The views expressed in these articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of Redcliffe College.