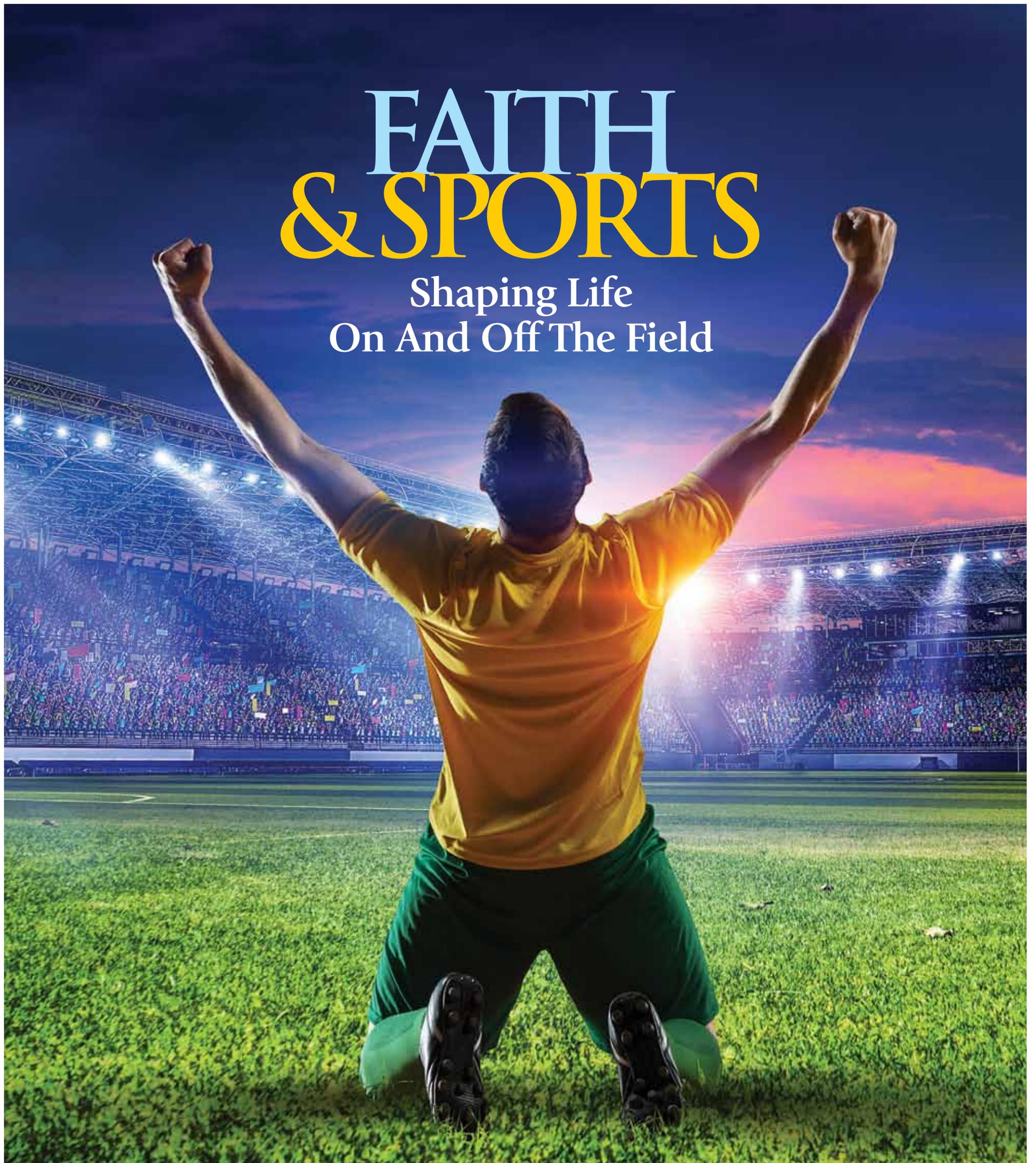


FAITH & SPORTS

Shaping Life
On And Off The Field





FAITH & SPORTS: Shaping Life On And Off The Field

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Muhammad Ali: Shaped by his Islamic faith



By Ronald DiNicola

Muhammad Ali once said “a man who views the world the same at 50 as he did at 20 has wasted 30 years of his life.” It was a revealing statement by someone who by age 20 had won an Olympic gold medal in boxing and was bearing down on the world heavyweight title. It was an acknowledgement that even The Greatest must evolve. The impetus for Ali’s evolution over time would be his Islamic faith.

The religious journey of then-Cassius Clay began shortly after his return from the 1960 Rome Olympics. He was feted with a parade through downtown Louisville, Kentucky, but the fact he could not be seated at many of the restaurants on the parade route was not lost on Clay.

Thereafter, at 19, Clay joined the Chicago-based Nation of Islam, a religious and political movement that espoused black nationalism and separatist views.

Clay was offended by state-sanctioned segregation. But more telling, as a child he was gripped with fear by the murder of Emmett Till, a boy his age, in Mississippi in 1955 for whistling at a white woman. Clay’s alignment with the Nation of Islam seems to have been as much a declaration of freedom as a proclamation of faith.

His conversion was downplayed until 1964, when Clay overcame long odds in defeating the ferocious Sonny Liston for the world title. Following the fight, Clay, named like his father for a Kentucky abolitionist, announced his conversion and that he would now be known by the name Muhammad Ali. As white America drew its collective breath, Ali, 22, set out to define his future.

Ali defended his title nine times over the next three years with athleticism never seen in a heavyweight. He seemed unstoppable until, in 1967, invoking the tenets of his religion, he refused induction into the U.S. Army. He was stripped of his title, convicted of draft evasion and sentenced to five years in prison.

Ali’s professional and financial sacrifice in the name of faith was unparalleled. It catapulted him into the center of a moral and generational divide on the war in Vietnam; abroad, it established his profile, particularly among the poor, as a principled defender of peace.

Vindicated three years later by the Supreme Court, he set out to regain his title and stage his fights across the globe. As his wife Lonnie observed, Ali “discovered the world wasn’t really black and white at all. It was filled with many shades of rich colors, languages and religions.”

By the mid-1970s, Ali had developed a more nuanced view of his faith, moved away from the Nation of Islam and embraced what he described as “true Islam.” His evolving faith seemed a channel for his self-awareness and the realization that his talents and global influence were not entirely of his own making.

Edgy rhymes to promote his fights gave way to poetry of a different tone, indicative of his changed attitude toward salvation. “Rivers, lakes and streams,” he said, “all have different names, but all contain water; so do religions have different names, but all contain truth.” He told students, “There is one God but many ways to that God; all religions are good if you live them right.”

With the 1980s, Father Time closed the window on boxing for Ali with two crushing defeats in the ring. Then the onset of Parkinson’s Disease became apparent. It was unclear what would become of the fallen warrior, away from the lights and the crowd.

It was during this period, Ali said,



The Muhammad Ali Center’s exterior is encased in mosaic tiles that reveal images of The Champ. Photo credit: Muhammad Ali Center

that he became a true believer. To those close to him, he made it clear that he would focus his life on securing his place in heaven. His good works are well documented, with millions of dollars raised for charity, countless relief and humanitarian missions, service as a U.N. Messenger of Peace, and securing the release of U.S. hostages in Iraq.

In his private life, Ali adhered to the strict dictates of Islam. He said no to lucrative financial offers that did not harmonize with his religious views. During a 1993 visit to South Africa, he declined a \$1 million fee for a one-hour appearance at a local resort on such grounds.

Ali was honest to a fault. He was

accessible to his fans, never refusing an autograph seeker. To stay ever connected with his public, Ali’s beliefs are commemorated at the Ali Center in Louisville, celebrating his six core principles: confidence, conviction, dedication, giving, respect and spirituality.

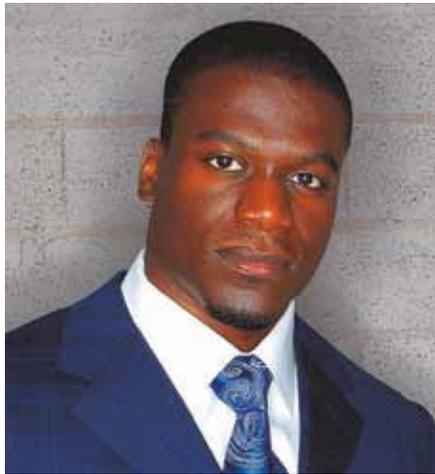
Ali’s rise amid storm-driven times, and his capacity to change in order to create meaning for his life, was deeply rooted in his faith. It would allow him to evolve into the man Robert Lipsyte would describe as “a secular saint.”

Ronald DiNicola was Muhammad Ali’s personal attorney and adviser for three decades beginning in the 1980s and often traveled with him abroad. The Muhammad Ali Center, a 501(c)3 corporation, was co-founded by Muhammad Ali and his wife Lonnie in their hometown of Louisville, Kentucky. The international cultural center promotes the Six Core Principles of Muhammad Ali (Confidence, Conviction, Dedication, Giving, Respect, and Spirituality) in ways that inspire personal and global greatness and provides programming and events around the focus areas of education, gender equity, and global citizenship. Its newest initiative, Generation Ali, fosters a new generation of leaders to contribute positively to their communities and to change the world for the better. The Center’s headquarters also contains an award-winning museum experience. For more information, please visit www.alicenter.org.



This pavilion illustrates how Muhammad Ali put his convictions into practice — and stayed steadfast — during the tumultuous 1960s. Photo credit: Muhammad Ali Center

Trusting God brings ‘eternal perspective’



By Benjamin Watson

The following is a conversation between Benjamin Watson, tight end for the Baltimore Ravens, and Cheryl Wetzstein, manager of Special Sections at The Washington Times, about faith, sports, race relations, fatherhood and a Bible verse that has been on his mind for a while. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: You and your wife Kirsten were part of Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) growing up. How did those experiences affect you?

A: We actually met at FCA at the University of Georgia. I had been involved with FCA in high school, and so had she. ...My father did a lot of speaking for FCA across the country — I am the oldest of six kids — and we would just get in the car and go to wherever Daddy was going to speak that week, and that would be kind of our vacation. So I grew up in FCA, and later, I transferred from Duke University to [University of] Georgia, and I met Kirsten, who was on the softball team. Part of the reason she wanted to be on the softball team was so she could go to FCA again.... We met, became friends and started dating, and got married in 2005 after my rookie year.... FCA has always held a special place in our hearts, both collectively and individually, because of the ministry and the influence they have using sport to spread the Gospel.

Q: It sounds like FCA gave you a community as well as a worldview and guidance on how to live your life — something like that?

A: I always wanted to be involved in sports; I wanted to play college football and move on from there. And to be a kid and go to one of these camps with high schoolers who were much older than me and see them excel at their sport, but also be people of faith — that definitely had a great influence on me.

And then just seeing how sports is kind of a universal language ... and how people of all ethnicities and backgrounds gravitate to sports ... and how, while we're doing sports, we are using our talents to glorify the Lord and be able to tell people about that....

Q: As a professional athlete, you've been through team changes, great performance days and tough injuries. Can you talk about how your faith has helped you through the highs and lows?

A: I would say [it gives] perspective. I am someone who can micromanage, I am somebody who can really get caught up in his performance. And as an athlete, our performance is judged every single day. Every single day, we come in and watch the film — what did we do well, what did we do poorly — and sometimes it can have you on an emotional roller coaster if you allow that to define you.

So, understanding who I am in Christ and understanding who I am as someone made in His image, and someone who He loves and who He died for and for whom He made purposes — that gives me eternal perspective.

So it's given me perspective, even in times when I've been hurt. Like last year, I tore my Achilles [tendon] and was out for the entire year. It was hard. I wondered why — after we had moved all the way up here to Baltimore; we didn't know anybody; my wife had to take care of me, plus five children — and it was a really hard, emotional time for all of us. And we understand that God works everything together for the good. Sometimes that good is not what we want it to be; the good might not be enjoyable. But the good is there because it's called according to His purpose. You understand



that ... and so you trust in that.

So, as an athlete specifically, it's being able to trust God when those injuries happen and to trust Him when you're at the top of your game and you win championships...

Q: You've written books on two really important subjects — race relations and fatherhood. What is your current thinking on these issues?

A: I would say both are important to all of us. We are living at a time when a third of our children are being raised without a father in the home ... and when you look at the ills of society, whether it be incarceration rates or poverty, even obesity and teenage pregnancy, a lot of those things can be directly linked to not having a father in the home. And that's not to say that if you didn't have a father in the home, you're doomed — that's not true at all — but we do see links [to not having a father in the home].

So that's something that's very important

to me, and I am challenging men. I've been in the NFL with 1,600 men every year for 14 years. I've come across a lot of men who are having babies for the first time or maybe for the second time, and guys are scared. I was scared when we had our first; I really didn't know what to expect, and I needed somebody to encourage me.

So part of my mission in writing the fatherhood book was to encourage guys — [tell them] that they are needed and that they have what it takes, even if they didn't have it demonstrated to them. And why how they treat their children and, more importantly, how they treat the mother of their children is important because children derive such self-worth from the relationship between their parents...

And, obviously, the other book, “Under Our Skin” — after the events happened in Ferguson, Missouri, a couple of years ago, we all had different emotions. ... And I expressed my anger, frustration, my hopelessness and my hopefulness, and eventually my being encouraged because of the power of God to really unite people and to allow people to repent and to forgive. That's where my ultimate encouragement comes from....

My prayer for this country ... is that we need to be honest about our history and about our current situation because of that history. Things are not great for a lot of people. A lot of people are hurting. A lot of people are offended. A lot of people are

angry for different things. And the only way we can really solve any of this is to be able to be honest with each other and be able to hold everyone to a standard of justice...

Q: You and your wife Kirsten founded the One More Foundation, which has a Hello Beautiful program for girls. What are your thoughts about those things?

A: The foundation is named One More, and the idea is about spreading the love and hope of Christ to “one more soul” by meeting people's needs. So we do events providing clothing, shelter, promoting education — my wife and I both are college graduates, so education has always been important to us — and then by partnering with other charities and supporting the work that they do.

In 2009, when we started it, we had the idea that wherever we go, we want to be a blessing to the people around us. And so we have done a few events in every place

we've been — in New England, when I was there, and Cleveland, New Orleans and now Baltimore. And what we've found is that whenever we do some sort of event, whether it's around Christmas time or Thanksgiving, a lot of times people want to help other people, but they just don't know how. So we want to be a conduit, to put people in a place where they can serve others.

With the Hello Beautiful program, my wife hasn't been as active doing this lately with the five kids, but early on, she did a lot of work with young girls on self-esteem, sexual purity, and issues like that ...

Q: Last question: I am wondering if there is a particular Bible verse that has been coming to mind in recent days?

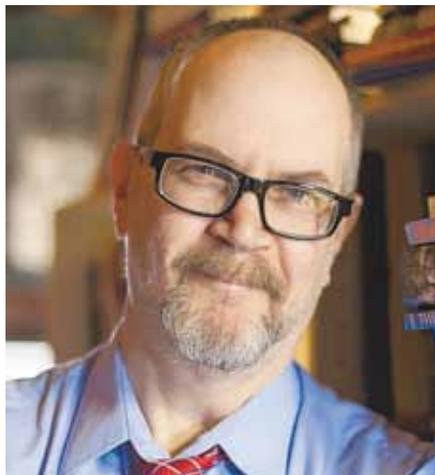
A: For the last year or so, Jeremiah 9:23-24. It says, “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, let not the strong man boast of his strength, or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this: That he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises loving kindness, justice and righteousness on the earth. For I delight in these things.”

So that verse ... talks about the fact that just because you're rich or you're strong or you're wise, don't boast in that because you think it's you. It's not you. God gives you your wealth, God gives you your wisdom. He gives you your strength. And so if you're going to boast, boast that He's done those things for you. It talks about humility. And we were just talking about at the race thing in our country now. Entering into that conversation with humility, I think, will get us a long way.

Then the second part of the verse is talking about what God delights in. ... For us, it would be kindness in how we can treat people, and justice and righteousness. He said, “I delight in these things,” so those are things that I want to delight in as a person, as a father, as a teammate, as a citizen of this country. I want to delight in those things, and I want to promote those things.

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Benjamin Watson has been with the NFL since 2004 when he was drafted by the New England Patriots. He played with the Cleveland Browns and New Orleans Saints before coming to the Baltimore Ravens in 2016. He and wife Kirsten have five children, and are co-founders of the One More Foundation, aimed at spreading God's hope and love through service to others. He is author of “Under Our Skin: Getting Real about Race — And Getting Free from the Fears and Frustrations That Divide Us” (2015, Tyn-dale Momentum) and “The New Dad's Playbook: Gearing Up for the Biggest Game of Your Life” (2017, Baker Books). Follow him at thebenjaminwatson.com and @BenjaminSWatson. This article is excerpted from the full interview online at The Washington Times.

Hank Greenberg: Heroic veteran and baseball's first 'Jewish superstar'



By Ron Kaplan

Birdie Tebbets, one of those baseball lifers, said that aside from Jackie Robinson, the first African American to break the Major League color line, no one had a tougher time of it than Hank Greenberg, the game's first Jewish superstar.

In 1938, the sensational slugger for the Detroit Tigers almost accomplished the impossible: improve on the otherworldly total of the 60 home runs the mighty Babe Ruth blasted in 1927. While Greenberg's fans were relishing the chase, the rest of the world was more concerned about the goings-on in Germany where Adolf Hitler and his fascist allies were implementing their plan for global domination, including the extermination of the Jewish people.

Greenberg — 6-foot-4-inches tall and 220 pounds — ran counter to anti-Semites who claimed Jews were unathletic and weak. He was a symbol of strength for his people, both physically and spiritually. In 1934, in the midst of a heated pennant race, Greenberg decided he

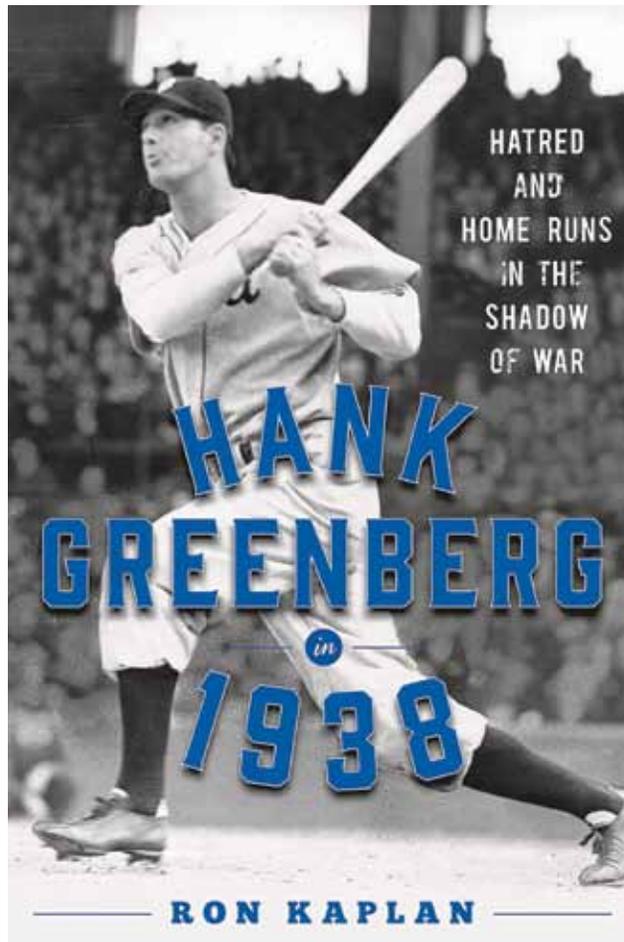
would not play on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement and the most sacred one on the Jewish calendar. It was not because he was religiously observant but out of respect for his ancestors. Alan Dershowitz, the prominent attorney and law professor, said that “Hank Greenberg was what they all said we could never be. He defied Hitler's stereotype. For that very reason, I think he may have been the single most important Jew to live in the 1930s.”

That Greenberg — who was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1956 — even chose to sign with a team based in perhaps the most anti-Semitic city in the country says something about his desire to play.

Detroit was home to Henry Ford, recipient of the Service Cross of the Order of the Eagle, Germany's greatest honor to a noncitizen. Ford was a proponent of the vicious pamphlet, “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” and blamed the 1919 Black Sox scandal on the Jewish gamblers who were ruining the national game.

Detroit also “boasted” Father Charles Coughlin, a notorious radio preacher who similarly blamed Jews for most of the problems facing the United States.

Greenberg usually faced the leather-lunged haters on and off the field with a quiet dignity, but there were instances where he would no longer tolerate the jibes. After some particularly nasty bench-jockeying by a member of the Chicago White Sox, he stormed into their clubhouse after the game, demanding the guilty party face him man-to-man. The invitation was declined. No



one wanted to face an angry Greenberg.

As the 1938 season wore on, news from Europe made its way from deep inside the newspapers to the front page. Unlike today's socially conscious athletes, Greenberg and his contemporaries rarely were asked for the opinions on current affairs. In his memoir, “Hank Greenberg: The Story of My Life,” he wrote, “Nobody expected war, least of all the ballplayers. I didn't pay much attention to Hitler at first or read the front pages, and I just went ahead and played. Of course, as time went by, I came to feel

that if I, as a Jew, hit a home run. I was hitting one against Hitler.”

Rather than wait to be drafted, Greenberg joined the armed forces in the spring of 1941. He was discharged several months later, on Dec. 5. While driving home, he learned the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor and immediately re-enlisted, the first major leaguer to do so. All told, Greenberg lost three full seasons and parts of two others in the service of his country, prime years for an athlete. He thought his playing days were over and said he almost expected to die in combat. But he did return, helping the Tigers win the 1945 World Series. He retired after spending the last season of his career with the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Greenberg always said he didn't want to be known as a great Jewish ballplayer. Rather he wanted to be known as a great ballplayer who happened to be Jewish. A number of baseball historians have suggested that as Greenberg came closer to the record in 1938, opposing managers ordered their pitchers

not to give him anything to hit, lest a Jew displace the Bambino. But Greenberg — ever the mensch — always took the high road, claiming he came up short because he simply ran out of time.

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Ron Kaplan, an award-winning journalist and blogger, is the author of “Hank Greenberg in 1938: Hatred and Home Runs in the Shadow of War” (2017, Sports Publishing). You can follow him on Twitter at @RonKaplanNJ and at RonKaplansBaseballBookshelf.com and KaplansKorner.com.



By Coach Joe Kennedy

Professional football on Thanksgiving Day has become as much of an American tradition as turkey. Yet, what happens after the game — and what is often not aired by major media networks — may be the best and most traditional way to celebrate the holiday.

Americans are generally familiar

with the story of the first Thanksgiving. The Pilgrims traveled to the New World in the 1600s seeking freedom from the Church of England and the King's rule. They came to America so they could pray and worship God in their own way. Despite initial suffering and tremendous loss, the Pilgrims joined together with Native Americans a year after their arrival and thanked God for His provision.

Today, families and friends continue to gather together and thank God for all that He has given us.

For the past 25 years, professional football players have also come together before God with thanksgiving. The Monday Night Football game between the New York Giants and San Francisco

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By Steve Silver

Does the title of this article sound like an oxymoron? If you're a golfer, when was the last time you turned to your walking or riding partner and said, "How is it with you and your faith?"

I've never asked that, even though I've been serious about my faith for many years and an avid golfer for nearly as many. Let's face it — in most cases, that question would be out of place, inappropriate and a nonstarter. Let's unpack this.

Convention and good protocol dictate that certain conversation topics belong in their proper settings. The "faith/God" topic belongs in a church setting. Sports, business, the economy, politics, family, health and many other topics are de rigueur for conversation on the course or in the clubhouse. So why not the topic of faith? Good question.

When I started seriously considering retirement 15 years ago, I had just taken for granted that my faith-life, business-life and golf-life were separate spheres, with some common friendships in each. No big deal. All three were working just fine, and I was content to moderate my conversations and interactions accordingly. Can you relate?

Then I was hit by a two-by-four in the form of my wife. As I started discussing retirement with her, she told me that I

'Growing in Faith With Golf Friends'

couldn't retire from business unless I had a ministry to take over my free time. If you knew my wife, guys, you'd understand that this was non-negotiable.

So what to do? Continue working or find a retirement-ministry gig? I'd always been involved with various church and parachurch ministries and done my fair share of leadership in them. But this was different. Those were "night jobs," so to speak. This had to be my new "day job." This could be for the rest of my life — not by my plan, and not on my calendar, but on God's. This had to be taken more seriously than business if I was to do it ... whatever it was.

My retirement ministry search started with the usual obvious candidates — my church and respected parachurch ministries and missions. None of these resonated. Being somewhat entrepreneurial, I began thinking in terms of starting something rather than



joining something. I honed in on two of those "spheres," namely — faith-life and golf-life. Maybe my ministry was at their intersection? Maybe I could merge my faith with my golf friendships in the form of a ministry? But could I do that without appearing presumptuous, alienating my golf friends and risking something important to me? There were no guarantees that I could. With the help of exploratory conversations with my pastor and a few close friends, Men's Golf Fellowship (MGF) was born in 2003.

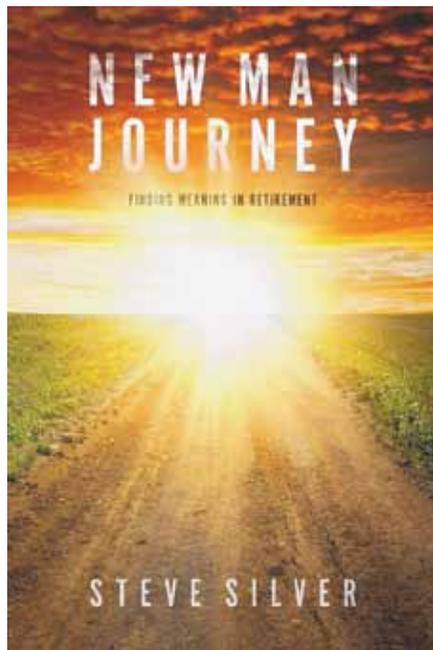
Nothing of substance starts easily, and I won't go into the learning and growing pains associated with the early years of MGF. Suffice it to say that I made mistakes — and probably lost some friends while learning to swim in this lane. Engaging in faith with peers/golf friends in my club was unnatural at first. But because God was in this and behind it, He was clearing and cleaning up the path ahead. God brought great men, some with faith and others with a glimmer, who caught the vision, got the idea, came alongside me and helped bring MGF into the parachurch ministry it is today.

Next year we are celebrating our 15th anniversary of Men's Golf Fellowship. Many men in country clubs throughout

Southwest Florida (and now in Northern MGF chapters) have come to faith or substantially grown in their faith. They have come to learn about a personal relationship with the Lord instead of an institutional, arms-length affiliation with Him. They have enhanced their relationships with one another in their clubs because of their willingness to break with convention, take a risk, change the conversation and explore their faith-lives together. What once seemed awkward is now very natural. Men are attending MGF speaker breakfasts together, inviting their golf friends to join them, bringing their wives and friends to MGF banquets and joining MGF Fellowship groups — where groups of 10 to 20 golf friends get together weekly to discuss life-issues, what faith has to do with those and what the Bible has to say about them. All of this in their golf clubs — where the MGF motto has become a reality, "Growing in Faith With Golf Friends."

What is impossible with men is possible with God. What was difficult for me and others to conceive 15 years ago was already realized ahead of time by God. Where we are now with MGF is just the on-ramp of where He is taking us. The big ah-ha for me in all of this has been that God thinks way bigger than I do. I'm only along for the ride ... the greatest ride of my life!

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Steve Silver is a retired business executive, Founder of Men's Golf Fellowship (mensgolffellowship.com) and author of "New Man Journey: Finding Meaning in Retirement" (2013, David C Cook) (newmanjourney.com). He and his wife Sandy reside in Naples, Florida, and Connecticut. They have three children and six grandchildren.



KENNEDY

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49ers on Dec. 3, 1990, captured one of the largest audiences in the show's history. Prior to the game, the teams' chaplains organized what would become the first joint NFL postgame prayer circle. Not seen on television, the players bowed their heads at the 50-yard line following a tense matchup to honor God and thank Him for the opportunity to play the game. The tradition continues today.

What the Pilgrims and NFL players knew is that we honor God by giving thanks to Him through prayer, regardless of our circumstances.

The last couple of years of my life have not been easy. In 2015, I lost my job

as a football coach at Bremerton High School in Washington state, a job that I loved and felt called to, for silently praying alone on the field after games for maybe 15 or 30 seconds. For seven years, I knelt on the field and thanked God for His faithfulness in protecting the players on the field. I also praised Him for entrusting me with the responsibility of coaching my team.

After I lost my job, it would have been easy to stop giving thanks. I have a family who depends on me. I have students who watched authority figures in their school fire me for standing by my convictions. It would have been easy to get frustrated and question God.

Instead, as the Bible instructs, I rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances. That is not because my life is without hardship.

To be honest, it never has been. My current circumstances have not changed. I am still a coach without my team. A federal court said that the Constitution does not protect me even if all I want to do is take a knee and silently pray by myself for a few seconds because someone might see kneeling in silence. Still, prayer and thanksgiving are the source of my strength and hope in this battle and the ones to come.

With controversy surrounding the NFL and National Anthem, television cameras on Thanksgiving Day and throughout the holiday season are certain to focus on whether players take a knee before the games. However, they are likely to miss the players who, for an even greater purpose, take a knee after.

As a coach, I tell my players to fight harder on the field when things get

tough and to always be grateful. As an American, with all of the rights and protections our Constitution provides its citizens, I should have never had to give up everything for what I believe in. Still, I am grateful to God for his continued faithfulness, and I will never stop giving Him thanks.

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Joe Kennedy is a former football coach for Bremerton High School in Bremerton, Washington, and retired Marine. He was suspended and later terminated for taking a knee to offer a private prayer at the 50-yard line after football games. Coach Kennedy is represented by First Liberty Institute, a national law firm dedicated to defending religious freedom. FirstLiberty.org.



By Brock Huard

I had no idea that I would spend two hours talking to my old college rival Ryan Leaf. I had no idea that I would shed tears with 1984 American League Rookie of the Year Alvin Davis, a man I met for the first time right before we turned on the mics. And I had no idea that a conversation with Hall of Fame wide receiver and former Oklahoma Rep. Steve Largent would go so deeply into a broken upbringing and radical forgiveness.

Those are just some of the places where my podcast, "Above & Beyond: The Intersection of Faith and Sports," has taken me in the past year.

Tackling the junction of faith and sports in Season 1 of "Above & Beyond" is one of the most powerful things I've

710 ESPN Seattle's podcast shares authentic stories about faith and sports

done at any level of my career. It has been such an encouragement to hear so many unique perspectives of faith in sports: from Sam Ponder, host of ESPN's "Sunday NFL Countdown," dealing with cyberbullying and sexual harassment with the support of her husband Christian, a former NFL quarterback; to former Washington Redskins head coach Jim Zorn, whose players accused him of forcing his religion on them; to Mr. Leaf, whose story of not living up to the hype as a top NFL draft pick is a lot more known than his story of finding faith outside of himself after addiction and time in prison. Hearing of their pain and struggle, the providence and blessing has been such a rich experience.

In the decade-plus I've worked in sports media, I've never had the opportunity to fully explore the depth of impact my faith has had on my professional career. It wasn't until my employers, 710 ESPN Seattle and Bonneville International, approached me about starting a podcast about a topic that I was passionate about and was underserved in the media that I was able to seize that opportunity by starting "Above & Beyond."

This podcast isn't designed to be "The Brock Huard Show" — in fact, I told my producer, James Osborn, from day one to

check me if it seemed like it was becoming that. This is the Lord's platform to do what He wants to do, and it is well above and well beyond anything I could ever do alone. My goal is to keep it that way by continuing to deliver an authentic, passionate message with each episode, something that seems to resonate with those that have listened.

You would think that there would be a lot of feedback in the media world that I live in, whether it's from producers, executives or program directors, but it really is minimal. With this podcast, however, the feedback has been enormous and overwhelming. The personal emails have been amazing, and they've come from a whole spectrum of people: school teachers, people in ministry, people of different faiths, people that have no faith. To correspond with those that have been impacted, touched and encouraged is the overwhelming part.

These conversations have hammered home something I have long believed: people want authenticity.

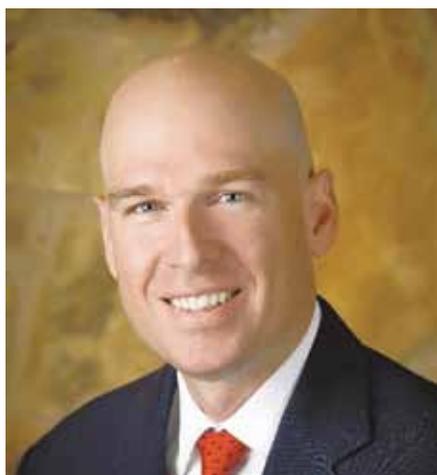
The drive to spread real, authentic journeys in faith has brought out some incredibly powerful stories, both from people that helped shape my life and faith such as legendary NFL coach Tony Dungy and former Seattle Seahawks

quarterback Matt Hasselbeck, and people I was able to get to know through the conversation we had on the podcast like major league pitcher Steve Cishek.

I've been doing my show on 710 ESPN Seattle for 10 years, but "Above & Beyond" has been a completely different animal. I've been able to let people all the way in, and the platform allows the same for the guests. Part of me is like, "Man, why didn't I do this earlier?" Ultimately, I'm just thankful to have that chance now.

The first season featured 15 very normal people — including myself — simply sharing the story of their faith. Season 2 will be equally as diverse — mentors, friends, total strangers, men, women, all ages, all backgrounds — and, frankly, I can't wait to see what doors will open.

Brock Huard is a former NFL quarterback and current ESPN college football analyst and co-host of "Brock and Salk" on 710 ESPN Seattle. His podcast, "Above & Beyond: The Intersection of Faith and Sports," can be found on iTunes or at AboveAndBeyondPodcast.com.



By Jeremy Dys

Tradition is paramount in sports. Clemson football players rub Howard's Rock for good luck before running onto the field. West Virginia University players rub a giant block of coal before the game. Notre Dame players famously slap the "Play like a champion today" sign on the way to the field.

What Cambridge Christian School, a small, 2A Christian school in Tampa, Florida, does before kickoff is more than a tradition; it's central to who they are as a school. Since the school opened in the 1960s, every athletic contest has started with prayer over the

The best traditions in football should be protected by the First Amendment

loudspeaker.

That is, until the school earned the right to play in their first state championship football game in 2015.

The competition was slated for Friday, Dec. 4, 2015, at the Citrus Bowl in Orlando, Florida, where the Lancers would face off against another Christian school, University Christian School, with a similar pre-game tradition.

Prayer before football games is central to their missions. It is meant to unite the players on the field with each other and their fans in the stands, while thanking God for the privilege of playing the game.

No one would seriously think that the teams for these two private, Christian schools praying over the loudspeaker of the Citrus Bowl would violate the First Amendment's prohibition on the "establishment of religion." No one, that is, except the Florida High School Athletic Association.

When the teams asked the FHSAA to use the loudspeaker to offer the pre-game prayer in the cavernous stadium,

the FHSAA forbade the schools from praying. The association argued that somehow the prayer could be viewed as an establishment of religion by the State of Florida since the state athletic association regulated the game played on city-owned property.

Some have argued that if private religious schools want public prayer before their football games, they should leave the FHSAA and form their own private statewide Christian athletic association. If that sounds familiar, it might be because the same people once suggested that if students want to pray in school, they should leave America's public schools and attend a religious school.

They did — and now some are calling for religious athletes to leave their league and form their own association. Where will it end?

Students should not have to form their own league to exercise the rights guaranteed to them under the Constitution. The Supreme Court of the United States has made it clear that students do not lose their constitutional rights

at the schoolhouse gate, or in this case the football stadium gate. The FHSAA is not supposed to take sides in any of their member school's athletic contests. The First Amendment requires that same level of neutrality when it comes to religious speech. Here, the FHSAA chose to be on the side that is hostile to public displays of religion.

At the 2015 championship game between Cambridge Christian School and University Christian School, the bleachers were filled with the players' families, friends, and fans.

Let us hope the courts stop the FHSAA's hostility toward religion from becoming a new tradition in high school sports.

Jeremy Dys is Deputy General Counsel for First Liberty Institute, a national law firm dedicated to defending religious freedom. First Liberty represents Cambridge Christian School. Its case is pending with the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Learn more at FirstLiberty.org/Cambridge.

Sport at the Service of Humanity: Pope Francis inspires a global movement



By Dr. Bernie Mullin

“Challenge yourself in the game of life, as you do in the game of sport.”

It was with these words in 2015 that His Holiness Pope Francis inspired the launch of Sport at the Service of Humanity (SSH), a global movement that embraces the unique ability of faith and sport to promote positive values, unite people for good and celebrate our common humanity, regardless of culture or religious beliefs.

The SSH movement really took off in October 2016 with the historic “Sport at the Service of Humanity: The First Global Conference on Faith & Sport.” Held at the Vatican, the event was led by Pope Francis, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach, who welcomed more than 400 leaders and influencers from the worlds of faith, sport and business. At the three-day conference, delegates discussed how faith and sport could work together for the betterment of the world. Three key themes — inspiration, inclusion and involvement — served as the framework for the discussions.

At the conclusion of the global conference, the delegates unanimously endorsed the Six Principles of Sport at the Service Humanity — compassion, respect, love, enlightenment, balance and joy — the foundation upon which the movement and its legacy program, Humanity Sports Club, is built. (<http://sportforhumanity.com/declaration-of-principles/>)

One of the most notable things about the conference was that it was not about organized religion but rather restoring faith in humanity, and revealing more of the infinite goodness that lives in most people. SSH sought to refocus the world leaders on the amazing “power of sport” — namely, sport is inherently good (for mind, body and

spirit), and sport can do good (ping-pong diplomacy, etc., and simply bringing people of different backgrounds together, whether as participants or spectators).

With all the challenges currently impacting society, particularly with scandals and corruption at the highest levels of religion, sports, politics, the media and entertainment, Pope Francis felt it was necessary and timely for faith and sport to remind and reawaken people to the massive power that these two pillars of human life can provide, especially when they work harmoniously together!

At its core, Sport at the Service for Humanity is the opportunity for us to take all that is good in faith and in sport, and marry the two for the betterment of society. We are encouraged to see that since the 2016 conference, the movement has gained momentum, inspiring individuals and sports organizations to embrace this message and take action to create impactful change and positive social transformation.

After attending last year’s conference, the NHL’s Pat LaFontaine and Los Angeles Kings’ Luc Robitaille were so inspired by the idea of infusing the universal values of faith into sport that they championed the creation of the “This is Hockey” movement and Hockey’s Declaration of Principles — a joint statement by 17 hockey organizations globally advocating the game of hockey as a powerful platform for participants to build character, foster positive values and develop important life skills that transcend the game. Not surprisingly, hockey’s initiative received a written endorsement from Pope Francis.

At the 2016 conference, a partnership between FC Barcelona and the U.N. High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) was discussed to use sport as a transformational tool to help refugees reintegrate into society. This resulted in the #SignAndPass campaign, launched with the support of soccer stars Lionel Messi and Neymar Junior, calling on supporters to digitally sign a

football online and then pass it to their friends via social media. By signing the ball, supporters add their name to UNHCR’s #WithRefugees petition, which calls on world governments and fellow citizens to make sure all refugees can have a safe place to live, receive an education and are able to work so they can provide for their families.

This June, Villanova University and the Big East Athletic Conference hosted a two-day conference for faith-based colleges in North America to come together in finding better ways to develop future leaders for our global society by emphasizing and developing the SSH’s Six Principles among student athletes and the campus community.

We have also witnessed the impact and strength of the SSH movement within communities around the globe. In September, the inaugural Rome Half Marathon Via Pacis was organized by the City of Rome, the Italian Olympic Committee and other sport

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His Holiness Pope Francis arriving at The Opening Ceremony of “Sport at the Service of Humanity: The First Global Conference on Faith & Sport,” held October 2016 at The Vatican. Image courtesy of Sport at the Service of Humanity.

Tackling life after loss: 'I have taken hold and will not let go'



By Kevin Reilly

In my recently published book, "Tackling Life: How Faith, Family, Friends and Fortitude Kept an NFL Linebacker in the Game," I tell of my story of how my Catholic faith helped me endure the challenge that ended both my athletic career and my marriage.

In 1979, as I was working to get in shape to resume my career in the National Football League, I was diagnosed with a rare desmoid tumor. The large, aggressive, cancer-like growth required the complete amputation of my left arm and shoulder and removal of four ribs. Even though I was an otherwise healthy 28-year-old, there was a strong possibility I would not even survive the 11 ½-hour surgery.

As I was being prepped for surgery that fateful day, I was approached by a Catholic priest who, in his capacity

as hospital chaplain, gave me the "last rites." I describe in my book how several other patients of different faiths in pre-op asked to join in a prayer. It seems to be a part of our nature that whatever our faith, we turn to God in a moment of extreme danger or risk. Prayer for me was consistent with my upbringing, and looking back now on the trauma of that experience, I believe my faith helped provide strength in the crisis itself and in the years of recovery.

I have had many years to adapt to my one-arm world and eventually became pretty good at it. In my speeches, I often tell the story of the hospital counselor who suggested I buy clip-on ties because I would never be able to tie my own necktie. As I tell the story, I tie my necktie one-handed — always good for a laugh and some applause. But although I survived my physical health crisis, I did not think I would make it through the depression that I experienced with the end of my marriage of 20 years. Once again, my faith became part of a support network that included friends, family and professional counseling. As a result of that experience, I made many changes in my life and believe I am a better person because of it.

I was raised as a Catholic and attended a parochial school where I was exposed to the fundamentals of my faith. I then attended an all-boys Catholic school famous for its football team. It was on the football field where my dreams were focused, but I soon found that there was more to the institution known as Salesianum than undefeated sports teams. The school was founded

by the Oblate order, followers of St. Francis de Sales. The culture was personified by the motto, "Tenui Nec Dimittam" (I have taken hold and will not let go), and led by men like my baseball coach and mentor, Father Robert Ashenbrenner, who personified the qualities of Saint Francis, "The Gentleman Saint," in his everyday life.

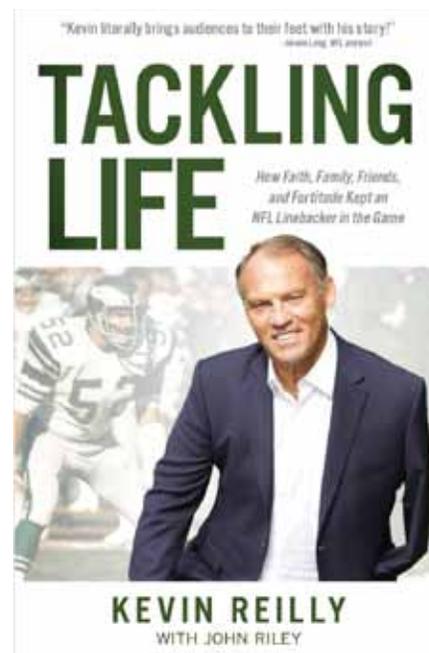
Salesianum had a profound effect on my life and many other young men, including the current commander of the Navy SEALs, a school graduate who returned to speak to the students this year. The priests, teachers and coaches taught us to respect and support our fellow man and to understand that faith can be a force for good in your life. Recalling

the quote, "You may be the only bible that your neighbor ever reads," I am hoping my book helps to spread the message.

Today, I tour the country speaking to groups from all walks of life: corporations, schools, athletic teams and faith-based groups. I tell my personal story with the hope that my experience will help others face the demons in their own life.

One speaking opportunity affected me more than any other and that was the time I was asked to address the Amputee Ward at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in 2005. Just standing before those brave young men and women was an honor I will never forget. They were looking for answers about what lay ahead, and I stood before them as an expert on life after traumatic amputation. As I got ready to speak that day, I was once again asking God for strength — the strength to make a small difference in the life of these heroes who had taken the risk for all of us. Take hold and never let go.

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Former Philadelphia Eagles linebacker Kevin Reilly is a motivational speaker and author of "Tackling Life: How Faith, Family, Friends and Fortitude Kept an NFL Linebacker in the Game" (2017, Faith & Family Publications) <http://tacklinglifebook.com>. He lives with his wife, Paula, in Wilmington, Delaware. Reach him at www.kreilly.com and @KevinReillyNFL52Eagles.



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organizations to engage the community to take a unified stand against racism and discrimination. And in Canada, youth attending the Muskoka Woods leadership program participated in a two-day workshop led by SSH facilitators, designed to inspire youth through the Six Principles to live a life that values our shared humanity.

As we move forward, I challenge each and every person to find ways to bring the Sport at the Service of Humanity's Six Principles to life, both on and off the playing field. By incorporating the principles of compassion, respect, love, enlightenment, balance and joy into our daily lives, we can create a society of inclusion and involvement, and inspire those around us to do the

same. For leaders in sport, the challenge is to model these same principles in the way they administrate or coach and to openly and formally incorporate these values within every game and practice so they become naturally imbedded in the way "the game of sports is played."

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Bernie Mullin, Ph.D., is Chairman and CEO of The Aspire Group, a global management and marketing consulting business focusing on the sport and entertainment industry. He is a founding director of the Sport at the Service of Humanity Foundation. For more information on the Sport at the Service of Humanity movement, upcoming initiatives and the Declaration of Principles, visit: www.sportforhumanity.com or follow us on Twitter (@sport4humanity) and Facebook (@6principles.sport4humanity)



His Holiness Pope Francis, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, IOC President Thomas Bach joined by faith leaders and young athletes at The Opening Ceremony of "Sport at the Service of Humanity: The First Global Conference on Faith & Sport," held at the Vatican, October 2016. Image courtesy of Sport at the Service of Humanity.

An Olympic medalist's credo: 'Success is really being the best you can be on a daily basis'



By Rajeev Ram

Sports has always been part of my life. In fact, I do not have a memory of life that was before sports, and specifically tennis. The same can be said about faith.

I grew up in a Hindu household, and the thing about the Hindu faith that is different from others is that it is more a way of life rather than an organized religion. Going to the temple on a schedule or praying on a schedule was not really part of it. What was a big part of it was understanding that respect was of the highest priority, and that the most important thing when performing any task was to understand

what your responsibilities are and realize that the result or outcome is out of your control.

I was one of the lucky ones in that my parents never pushed any extra-curricular activity on me. They let me choose the sports I wanted to play, the friends I wanted to make, the girls I wanted to date or, just in general, which direction I wanted my life to go in. The thing that was important was that no matter what path I chose, I was to try my best in anything that I do, respect it and everyone around me in the process, and finally I was supposed to enjoy it. This, and not winning and losing, was deemed as being most important.

They also let me pick the people to whom I would turn to help with my tennis. I feel like they would have interfered if they thought I made an unhealthy choice, but as of yet they have not. A teacher is another person, along with parents, that Hinduism puts in the highest regard. I am lucky to have formed lifelong relationships with some of my coaches, and they have nothing but my utmost respect for the influences they each have had in my life.

Yoga and meditation are cornerstones of the Hindu faith. Removing yourself from the stresses of the uncontrollable can have a very calming effect on the mind, and this is the aim

of yoga and meditation in their most basic forms. The elementary thing that one can control is breathing, and this alone can have a mind-calming sensation. That is why breathing is always the first step in any yoga or meditation exercise.

As I became more serious in my tennis and the level went up, the stresses and pressures became more. As a junior, it went from playing at my local club to playing at the state level to national and international competitions. After that it was collegiate tennis and then professional tennis. There was a certain added pressure once tennis became my job. Before that it was still a glorified hobby, but once I decided to make it my choice of career, there was no going back. I must say that any of this added pressure was purely self-inflicted. Throughout my entire tennis life, my parents have been strong in their stance for me to do it as long as I enjoy it and only do it for myself. As the stakes became higher, it was ever more important for me to revert to the mindset of what got me to that point in the first place — controlling what I can control. At the highest level of sport, when the skill level is equal, winning and losing happens by the smallest of margins, and the difference generally lies in factors such as energy level, competitive spirit and preparation. Again, taking care of these details

is what brings success over a long period of time.

But what is success actually? This is possibly the most important thing that I feel like my family, teachers and faith have taught me.

More than number of titles and trophies or money, success is really being the best you can be on a daily basis. That is our duty and our goal, and at the end of the day, that is all we can ask of ourselves. True happiness lies in knowing that you gave it your all in your chosen field, and when it is all said and done, there are no regrets. As of right now, using this as a measuring tool, I am proud to call myself extremely successful.

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Rajeev Ram is an accomplished U.S. professional tennis player, winning the Indiana state singles championship as a teen and two National Collegiate Athletic Association titles in college. Throughout his career, he has won a total of 15 ATP World Tour titles, two in singles and 13 in doubles, and a 2016 Olympic silver medal in Rio mixed doubles with Venus Williams. In 2010, he partnered with a tennis organization in Carmel, Indiana, to create EntouRaj for Kids and raise money for college scholarships and tennis programs. In 2014, EntouRaj for Kids became an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit. @EntouRajforkids

Book Review: '42 Faith: The Rest of the Jackie Robinson Story

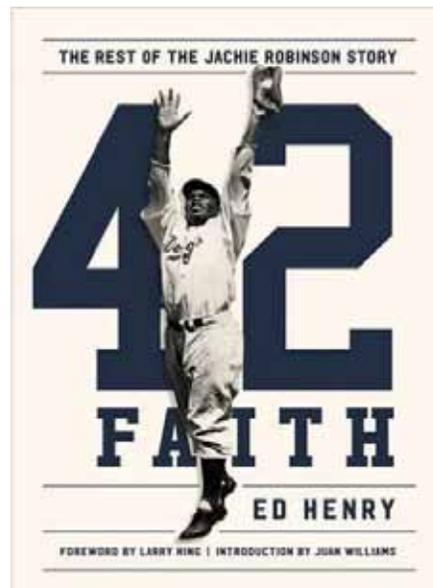
By Michael Taube

Jackie Robinson's inspirational story has long been immortalized in books and movie adaptations. He broke major league baseball's color barrier on April 15, 1947. He played for the Brooklyn (now Los Angeles) Dodgers from 1947-1956. He won many individual awards, as well as the 1955 World Series, and is a member of the Hall of Fame.

Yet, it appears there's even more to the story about this remarkable sports hero.

Ed Henry's book, "42 Faith: The Rest of the Jackie Robinson Story," reveals that religion played a significant role in keeping Mr. Robinson grounded, focused and determined on the baseball diamond. Fox News Channel's chief national correspondent used original materials contained at the Library of Congress, including previously unknown sermons, interviews and an unpublished (and revealing) manuscript.

Mr. Robinson's daughter, Sharon, told him that "the family wanted me to use as much material as possible ... because her mother donated them to the library so



that the public can see his legacy."

They will, in a whole new light.

During the "ugly days of his time as a Dodger," according to Mr. Henry, he "leaned on the Bible and his personal faith to get him through." It was a trait that he shared with Branch Rickey, the team's owner, who "had his own habit of slipping into churches wherever he traveled." This shared interest in Christianity served as the foundation for this important relationship that changed the face of the game they both loved.

Mr. Rickey gave Mr. Robinson "a little hint" when they first met that "there was a divine inspiration for his push to integrate baseball." Mr. Robinson's unpublished manuscript alludes to Mr. Rickey "talking to me about the promise he had to God and to himself when he was teaching sports at college." Although this was a reference to Charles "Tommy" Thomas, who "helped shape the executive's feelings about racial injustice," the sentiment carried over

into his important decision to bring Mr. Robinson to the big leagues.

It's no secret that Mr. Robinson faced various roadblocks in the quest to desegregate baseball. Clay Hopper, the manager of his minor league team, the Montreal Royals, "openly declared that African Americans were not human beings" in 1946. He was called many vile things in public, from his Army days to his baseball nights. There were also issues with other baseball players, who didn't want to play with a black man, and even some teammates.

Through it all, he refused to be intimidated.

Again, it was religion that seemed to soothe his shattered nerves. "42 Faith" contains many thought-provoking speeches, interviews and writings that prove Mr. Robinson's belief in God made him stronger — and a better ball player.

"I am not the most religious person in

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By Ray McKenna

Reimagining sports through faith

concluded that sports, with its rituals and psychological attachments, has many of the same effects on spectators as religion does!

Jesus' teachings often turned the prejudices, customs and traditions of his day upside down to set them right side up. For example, he explained that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. Similarly, sports are made for man and not man for sports. A proper understanding of sports requires a radical change of emphasis to see sports as a true gift from God.

With this Godly perspective, we may begin to take the many relevant Scriptural passages and church teachings and assemble them as the foundation for a coherent faith-based approach to sports. For example, Saint Paul's epistles are rich with sporting analogies; these analogies, of course, point to more important spiritual realities of salvation and eternal life.

Perhaps the best description of sports ever written come from Pope Pius XII in "Sport at the Service of the Spirit," July 29, 1945: "Sport, properly directed, develops character, makes a man courageous, a generous loser, and a gracious victor. ... Sport, rightly understood, is an occupation of the whole man... perfecting the body [and] the mind ... to be subservient to the service and praise of his Creator."

In other words, we need to turn our current perception of sports upside down, which will only serve to stand it right side up. Instead of its current maniacal focus on winning at all costs, the balanced and historic perspective of valuing competition for its own sake must be reintroduced.

Further, famous athletes have historically accepted and even appreciated being considered role models. More recently, basketball legend Charles Barkley famously opined that athletes are not and should not be viewed as role models, and most of the media focus their gaze on athletes who engage in disreputable activity.

Yet, the sports world continues to

produce excellent role models such as Mike Piazza, Simone Biles, Tim Tebow, Clayton Kershaw, Russell Wilson, Philip Rivers and Mike Sweeney, even though their positive example usually garners little public notice.

Tim Tebow created a major controversy a few years ago by simply kneeling in prayer during his games. While he was most likely attempting to provide a strong witness to his Christian faith,

in terms of their immediate, tangible benefit, Tim Tebow's witness allowed thoughtful observers to discuss and explain more significant aspects of faith in sports.

Like Tim Tebow, faith-filled athletes, coaches and other participants in sports need to consciously speak and act provocatively to convey that God remains at the center of their sporting activities. In this regard, they must learn a les-

If God is not the reference point for sports, sports will unavoidably devolve into idolatry, worshipping man as a demigod. This has been our experience over the past many years in sports, as all of its problems — such as fan violence, domestic violence, illegal performance-enhancement substances, excessive commercialism — are traceable to the unfortunate de-emphasis and removal of God from sports.

Our society incorrectly puts star athletes on a pedestal of fan and media adulation and then feigns surprise and disappointment when the athlete falls or is pushed from that pedestal.

Further, the world of sports is currently adrift in a secular free fall, and some cogent commentary suggests that sport has become a religion in and of itself. If this sounds hyperbolic, consider some facts.

Naming has always carried great significance to Christians. Recently, a couple in the United States named their child "ESPN" in honor of the ubiquitous worldwide sports network. Similarly, from the catacombs to Christian cemeteries, burial of the dead has also carried great spiritual significance. In 2012, NBC sports reported that many sports fans were now being buried in NFL and MLB team logoed coffins. Excessive hero worship of prominent athletes may be fairly equated to deification. An academic study at Murray State University



Former Washington Nationals pitcher Craig Stammen instructed kids at a recent Catholic Athletes for Christ summer camp. Photo courtesy of Catholic Athletes for Christ.

fan reaction and some media coverage of his prayer on the field focused on the efficacy of the prayer. For church leaders, it presented a teachable moment on prayer. Asking whether prayer leads God to favor one team or player over another in a contest reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the purpose and value of prayer. It implicitly reduces prayer to petition (asking God for a gift) and ignores the other significant purposes of prayer — worship, thanksgiving and forgiveness.

While our disordered sports and media culture inevitably views all things

son from the marketing genius of Nike, which has taken Christocentric themes such as "Cross-Training and Witnessing" and used them to sell shoes and sports gear.

Christians and all faith-filled believers must reclaim sports by placing God at its very core and believing everything else will fall in its proper order.

Ray McKenna is the founder of Catholic Athletes for Christ, a Catholic sports ministry (catholicathletesforchrist.org). He is a Washington-based attorney, husband and father of seven children.

JACKIE

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the world," he noted in his unpublished manuscript, "I believe in God, in the Bible and in trying to do the right thing as I understand it." While he expressed certainty "there are many, many better Christians than I," few could match his ability to turn the other cheek and turn a negative into a positive.

Mr. Robinson also made some interesting comparisons between sports and religion. In his unpublished manuscript,

he wrote, "My concept of religion is of people having faith in God, in themselves and in each other and putting that faith into action. If you can find a better example of those four things than a team of sportsmen working as a unit, I'd like to know what it is."

Meanwhile, there was a "prayer army" (to use Mr. Henry's phrase) standing with Mr. Robinson. His personal papers include letters from ministers, reverends, churchgoers and others that contain Biblical phrases as well as enormous pride in his accomplishments.

This strong attachment to religion continued well past his retirement.

He told the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1962, "... as the first Negro in the majors, I needed the support and backing of my own people. I'll never forget what ministers like you who lead [the] SCLC did for me." As well, in a speech to a church in New Rochelle, N.Y., in 1967, Mr. Robinson noted "I am not out to be anybody's martyr or hero" — a common theme in his public life — but argued that "[i]f the church of the living God cannot save America in this hour of crisis, what can save us?"

Mr. Henry's intriguing book has added an important new chapter in Jackie Robinson's life and career. We now

understand the faith that family, friends and fans put in his God-given abilities provided additional strength to his own commitment to faith.

This book review by Michael Taube first appeared online in *The Washington Times Commentary* section on July 9, 2017. "42 Faith: The Rest of the Jackie Robinson Story" is written by Fox News Channel Chief National Correspondent Ed Henry and published by W Publishing Group (imprint of Thomas Nelson/HarperCollins).

Coaches, athletes, fans and faith in the watching world of sports



By Shane Williamson

Coaches and athletes impact a watching world through their sport and the lives they lead on and off the playing field. These two areas are interconnected in ways that may not be apparent at first glance but, in reality, cannot be separated.

In our hero-worshipping nation, one man had a revolutionary idea 63 years ago. He said, “If athletes can endorse shaving cream, razor blades and cigarettes, surely they can endorse the Lord, too.” So Don McClanen, the founder of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), formed an organization that would help Christians strengthen their faith so they could serve as role models for the youth and athletes of our nation. He knew that faith was critical to sound thinking, decision-making and guiding people of all ages to a life of true freedom.

I have been blessed to live my life in sports through the Fellowship of Christian Athletes for the past 25 years to help bring the life-changing message of Christ to those who may have never heard about the true freedom He offers. As a husband, father, coach and athlete, God has used faith teaching to grow and change my life, marriage and family in many positive ways. Every aspect of my life is a testament to the impact the Lord can make through a God-centered sports organization like FCA.

I became a Christ-follower as a Fellowship of Christian Athletes camper in 1985 at Black Mountain FCA Camp in North Carolina. I was mentored in my faith by a coach and also served as a Camp Huddle Leader. I then followed God’s calling into coaching where I witnessed many lives changed by the Lord through the ministry. I joined FCA as a staff member in 2002, and now I can say what an honor it is to lead FCA as the

first president to come from field staff. I am blessed to interact with our 1,500 staff around the world who are committed to keeping our eyes fixed on Christ, the Author and Perfector of our faith (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Through FCA, we also have the privilege to see Christ’s impact on some of the greatest sports leaders of our generation. For example, Dabo Swinney, Clemson University’s football coach and friend of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, shared with FCA about his faith and last season’s journey to the national title. Dabo is one of the best examples of how one man’s faith in Jesus Christ has made a difference not only in his own life but in countless players’ lives and in the lives of millions of fans.

After the 2016 College Football Playoff National Championship Game in Tampa, with 74,512 roaring fans inside Raymond James Stadium, and more than 26 million more watching on TV, Mr. Swinney said: “Only God can do this. If anybody thinks anything different, they’re really missing it. This is nothing that I’ve done. Truly, only God can write a script like this.”

“As great as that moment was in Tampa,” Mr. Swinney told FCA Magazine’s editor Clay Meyer, “it pales in comparison to the journey it took to get there. It’s always how you get there.”

Our magazine editor Clay added, “... [Dabo’s] childhood was not easy, coming from a broken home and struggling with a difficult relationship with his father. But throughout the difficulties that no young man should face, Swinney found peace in Jesus. He began attending an FCA Huddle at his Alabama high school, and, in 1986, gave his life to the Lord after attending an FCA meeting. Jesus never promised that the life of the Christian would be easy, but today, Dabo Swinney



PHOTO CREDIT: FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIAN ATHLETES

puts his faith in Christ in all things...”

In eight seasons at Clemson, Mr. Swinney has led the Tigers to eight straight bowl games, two consecutive national championship games and the school’s first title since 1981. And Mr. Swinney gives all of his success and the glory to God.

“I think God has honored the way we’ve done things,” Mr. Swinney says. “I believe that with all my heart. That’s why I said what I said: ‘Only God can do this.’ We serve a big God — big, powerful — and He’s real, and I know that. To experience what I’ve experienced is surreal, but it’s comforting because I know that He is (real). I know He loves us. We’re imperfect people, but I know God has a plan, and I just try to live my life in a way that can hopefully be an encouragement to others.”

The cultivation of Christian principles by FCA in local communities and nationwide is accomplished by encouraging, equipping and empowering others to serve as examples and to make a

difference in sport and in all areas of life. Reaching approximately 2 million people annually on the professional, college, high school, junior high and youth levels, FCA Values are the at the core of the ministry.

Relationships with coaches and athletes demonstrate steadfast commitment to Jesus Christ and His Word through the four FCA Values:

- Integrity: We will demonstrate Christ-like wholeness, privately and publicly. (Proverbs 11:3)
- Serving: We will model Jesus’ example of serving. (John 13:1-17)
- Teamwork: We will express our unity in Christ in all our relationships. (Philippians 2:1-4)
- Excellence: We will honor and glorify God in all we do. (Colossians 3:23-24)

There is One who makes all things possible, who changes lives and who blesses and protects those who follow Him. And He even does this through the exciting world of sports, reaching coaches, athletes and fans around the globe.

Shane Williamson is the President of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. For information on how to bring FCA to your school or campus, visit www.FCA.org where FCA camps, FCA gear and FCA events can also be found.



PHOTO CREDIT: FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIAN ATHLETES



Relying on faith to find ‘common ground’ in sports



By Liz Darger

Sports are typically a zero-sum game. For one side to win, the other side has to lose. Any gain by one team requires a deficit by the opposing team. It sounds divisive, doesn't it? But what if sports could unify? What if college athletics could bring together “sides” that are often seen as being at odds to dialogue and find common ground?

As an athletics administrator at Brigham Young University, which is sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I have the blessing and responsibility to weave my testimony of Jesus Christ and his restored gospel, into my work with our 630 student-athletes.

One of the four major educational goals listed in the BYU Mission Statement is that “All students at BYU should be taught the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Any education is inadequate which does not emphasize that His is the only name given under heaven whereby mankind can be saved. Certainly all relationships within the BYU community should reflect devout love of God and a loving, genuine concern for the welfare of our neighbor.”

As our athletic department and student-athletes have reflected on this, we have asked ourselves the following question: How do my relationships reflect devout love of God and a loving, genuine concern for the welfare of my neighbor?

The past year, as an athletic department, we have made a concerted effort to educate and dialogue with our student-athletes about ways they can show love and respect to those within and outside the BYU community, focusing on the following areas of diversity and inclusion: race and ethnicity, LGBTQ, and persons of other faiths.

Much of this focus came on the heels of BYU's participation in National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) Common Ground II, a think tank that brings together LGBTQ advocates with athletic administrators, largely from faith-based institutions, to explore the often-divisive issues of religious freedom and gender identity and sexual

orientation on college campuses. My participation in Common Ground started me — and BYU — on a journey to both gain and share perspective on this important national discussion.

Hosted at NCAA headquarters in Indianapolis, Common Ground began with all 40 participants standing in a circle. A facilitator called out statements like “Join me on common ground if you are the oldest in your family.” Those who shared that characteristic stepped forward. But the statements quickly turned much more personal. “Join me on common ground if you consider yourself spiritual.” About two-thirds of the group stepped forward. “Join me on common ground if you are Christian.” A little less

I stepped out of the spotlight and back into the circle.

The activity continued with other sensitive statements. My heart sank when multiple people stepped forward for this: “Join me on common ground if you've ever attempted suicide because you thought it would be better to be dead than to be gay.” Emotions were raw, and I could feel the pain in the room.

We participated in a few other activities throughout the day designed to break down barriers. The last activity of the day we discussed “trigger phrases” for both faith-based people and LGBTQ people. This exercise spurred some emotionally charged dialogue, and at one point I felt particularly singled out.

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The No. 7 ranked Brigham Young University women's volleyball team celebrated its fourth-straight West Coast Conference championship with a 3-0 victory over Loyola Marymount University. Photo credit: Brigham Young University

than half. Then, “Join me on common ground if you are Mormon.”

I was the only one to step forward.

All alone, with everyone staring in silence, I felt anxiety welling up inside. What were they thinking? How were they judging me? I felt exposed and isolated, like I didn't belong. I realized that this is how it might sometimes feel to be a member of a minority group or the LGBTQ community — judged, exposed, vulnerable, alone.

The facilitator, recognizing the tension in the room, suggested we stop for the day. I could feel the tears welling up. I tried to hold it together and was succeeding until Dr. Pat Griffin, who is a long-time advocate of LGBTQ rights in college sports, turned around, looked me in the eye and asked, “Liz, are you OK?” It was a remarkable gesture by someone I had met only hours before. Although Pat comes to this issue from a very different perspective than I, in that

meaningful moment she showed a “loving, genuine concern for the welfare of her neighbor” and taught me an important lesson about how I can do the same.

Upon my return to campus, I was able to report on the many significant experiences and important dialogue that took place. BYU Athletic Director Tom Holmoe, expressed a desire for us to examine how we might better educate, support and model inclusive behavior for all of our student-athletes, especially those in minority groups or who identify as LGBTQ.

We invited NCAA Director of Inclusion, Dr. Amy Wilson, to visit BYU so that we could learn from her and further build understanding. In the two days Amy spent on campus, she met with students, faculty and administrators from all areas of campus.

The result of these amazing experiences is that we have added diversity and inclusion curriculum to our beginning-of-the-year team meetings and our freshman student-athlete health course, helping us better accomplish the BYU Mission Statement educational goal that “all relationships within the BYU community should reflect devout love of God and a loving, genuine concern for the welfare of our neighbor.”

We created a Diversity and Inclusion Council that works hand in hand with our Student-Athlete Advisory Committee to examine the unique needs of our minority student-athletes, to educate and promote unity within our department, and connect our minority student-athletes with resources on and off campus.

I love my Savior. My testimony of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ is that every person on this earth is a child of a Heavenly Father and Mother with infinite worth and potential. The purpose of mortality is that we might learn how to become more like them. Each day, in my professional and personal life, I hope my devout love of God shows in the way I treat others, particularly those with different lived experiences. I am incredibly grateful to work for an athletic department where I am encouraged to express my faith and teach the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sports are typically a zero-sum game. The NCAA Common Ground Initiative seeks to be the exception, and BYU is honored and grateful to be a part of it.

Liz Darger is Senior Associate Athletic Director at Brigham Young University Athletics (BYUCougars.com).

‘God made me for China’: Eric Liddell, beyond Olympic glory



By Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr.

The medal ceremony at the Olympics is a moment of rare pomp and ceremony in this informal age. The ceremonies represent both climax and catharsis, with athletes awarded the coveted gold, silver, and bronze medals placed around their necks.

It was not always so.

When Eric Liddell, “the Flying Scot,” won the 400 meter race and the gold medal at the 1924 games in Paris, there was no awards ceremony. Back then, the medals were engraved after the games and mailed in a simple package to the victors. But even without the medal ceremony, there was glory. Liddell instantly became a hero to the entire United Kingdom and was recognized as one of the greatest athletes of his age.

Americans of my generation remember Eric Liddell largely because of “Chariots of Fire,” the 1981 British film written by Colin Welland, produced by David Puttnam, and directed by Hugh Hudson. The film was a surprising success in both Britain and the United States, winning four Academy Awards including Best Picture. The musical score for the film by Vangelis won another of the Oscars, and its theme is still instantly recognizable to those who have seen the movie.

To its credit, “Chariots of Fire” recognized Eric Liddell’s Christian faith and testimony. His story is inseparable from the drama of his refusal to compete on Sunday, believing it to be a breaking of God’s commandment. Though this determination was well-known before the 1924 Olympics, it became internationally famous when heats for Liddell’s best race, 100 meters, were scheduled for Sunday.

The dramatic plot of “Chariots of Fire” presented a personal competition

between Liddell and Harold Abrahams, another top runner who had experienced the agonies of anti-Semitism as a student at Cambridge. When Liddell withdrew from the 100 meter event, Abrahams won, bringing Britain glory. Liddell had become a figure of ridicule, with everyone from athletic officials to British leaders unable to persuade him to sacrifice his moral convictions for the Olympic glory he was promised.

Liddell was left to run the 400 meter race, an event for which he was not favored and to which he knew he brought liabilities in terms of his racing form. But run he did, and he ran right into the history books, winning the gold medal with a personal story that shocked the world, even in the 1920s. His intensity of Christian conviction was already out of style and often ridiculed, but Eric Liddell

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Those who have seen “Chariots of Fire” well remember how it ends, with the magnificent and sentimental music of Sir Hubert Parry’s anthem “Jerusalem” and William Blake’s famous words: “Bring me my Bow of burning

gold; Bring me my Arrows of desire: Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold! Bring me my Chariot of fire!”

Then the screen fills with these words in text: “Eric Liddell, missionary, died in occupied China at the end of World War II. All of Scotland mourned.”

The end.

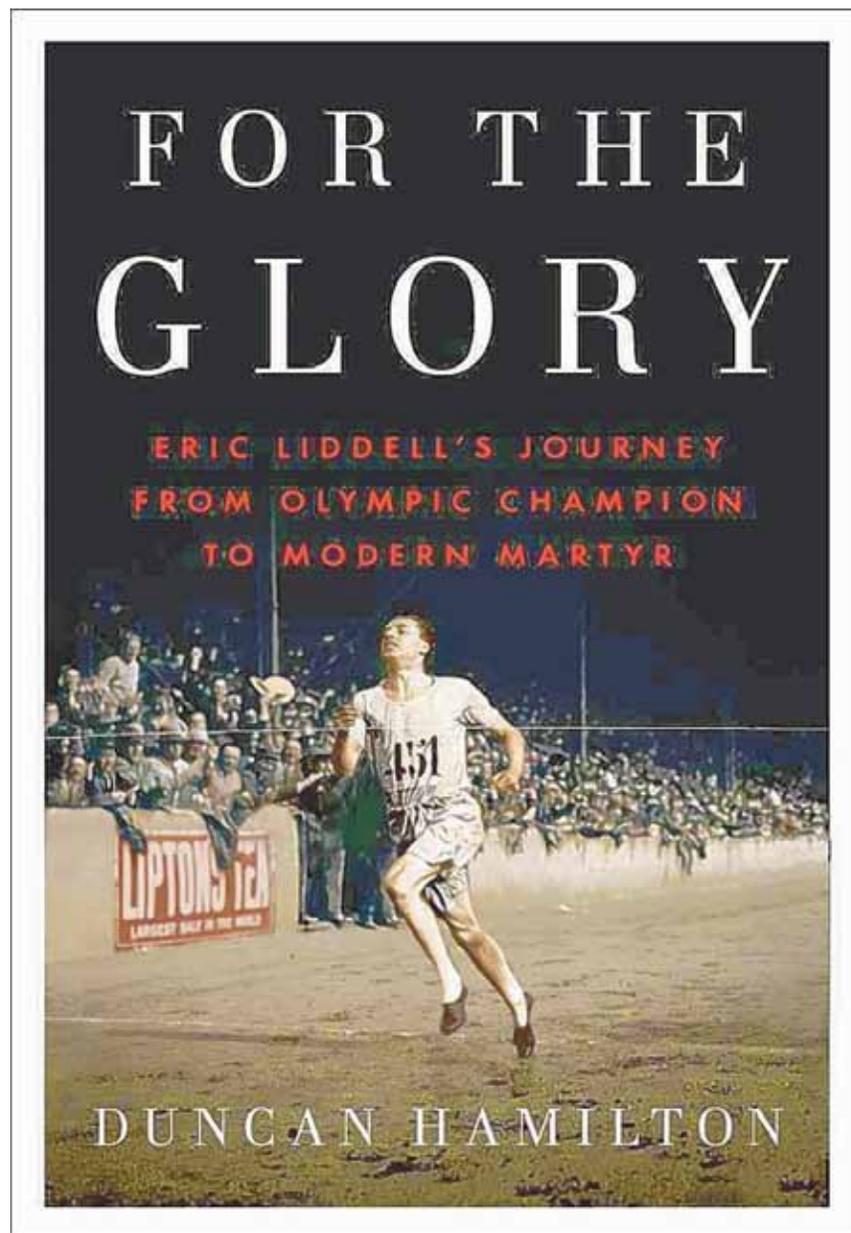
But in those few words was the real story of Eric Liddell. Yes, he was one of the most famous athletes of modern times and the Olympic glory of Scotland. He was also a Christian who refused to compete on Sunday and refused to compromise. Unquestionably, Eric Liddell was made to run. And yet, more than anything else, Eric Liddell believed that “God made me for China.”

Many Christians are proud to quote Liddell’s most famous lines from Chariots of Fire: “God made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure.” God did make Eric Liddell fast, and he ran for God’s glory, but those words were not actually from Liddell. They were written by Colin Welland and put in the voice of Liddell, as played by actor Ian Charleson.

What Liddell did say, and more than once, was that God made him for China. This is what the viewers of the movie never learned. Liddell was born in Tientsin, China, to missionary parents in 1902. James and Mary Liddell were in China under the commission of the London Missionary Society. As Duncan Hamilton, author of a very fine new biography of Liddell explains, as a young boy Eric Liddell simply considered himself to be Chinese.

Later, Eric and his brother would be sent to boarding school near London and would know their parents only through correspondence and brief visits. But China was always on Liddell’s heart. As a student at the University of Edinburgh, Liddell became very well known as both a runner and a preacher. He was especially powerful as a preacher to young men. Liddell spoke passionately but conversationally, explaining that the best preaching to young men took the form of a simple talk, in Duncan Hamilton’s words, “as if chatting over a picket fence.” But Liddell’s clear biblical and evangelical message came through, and powerfully.

He preached before, during and after his Olympic glory. He returned to graduate from the University and Edinburgh shortly after the 1924 Paris games and made preparation to go to China as a missionary, also under the



LIDDELL

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direction of the London Missionary Society.

He taught school, preached and eventually found a wife, Florence. With her he had three daughters, though he was never to see the third. After decades of internal warfare and turmoil, China was thrown into the horrors of Japanese occupation during World War II.

Those horrors are still unknown to many Americans, but much of China was submitted to massive rape and murder by the occupying Imperial Japanese forces. Liddell eventually sent Florence, then pregnant with their third child, and their two daughters to Canada for safety. It was just in time.

Along with members of the China Inland Mission and many others, Christians and non-Christians alike, Eric Liddell was forced into a foretaste of hell itself in the Weihsien Internment Camp. He would die there shortly before the end of the war. In the concentration camp, Liddell

became legendary and his witness for Christ astounded even many of his fellow Christians.

As Hamilton writes: “Liddell can sound too virtuous and too honorable to be true, as if those who knew him were either misrepresenting or consciously mythologizing. Not so. The evidence is too overwhelming to be dismissed as easily as that. Amid the myriad moral dilemmas in Weihsien, Liddell’s forbearance was remarkable.” He became the moral and spiritual leader of the horrifying reality with that camp.

“Chariots of Fire” was released when I was a seminary student. Like so many other young Christians, I saw the movie and was greatly moved by it. But, even then, I wondered if Liddell could really have been what so many others claimed of him.

Not long thereafter, a professor assigned me to read Shantung Compound by theologian Langdon Gilkey of the University of Chicago Divinity School. Gilkey was in many ways the opposite to Liddell. Gilkey was a theological liberal whose father, famously liberal, had been the first dean of the chapel at the University of Chicago.



PHOTO OF ERIC LIDDELL COURTESY OF ERIC LIDDELL CENTRE IN EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND

Langdon Gilkey had gone to China to teach English after graduating from Harvard. He found himself interred with Eric Liddell.

In Shantung Compound, Gilkey analyzed what happens when men and women are put under extraordinary pressure. He argued that the worst moral dilemmas in Weihsien came not from their Japanese captors, but from the prisoners themselves. His point was that, for many, if not most, of the captured, the experience brought out the worst in them rather than the best. He changed the names of those inside the camp when he told their stories.

There were a few moral exceptions. Gilkey wrote of one exceptional individual, a missionary he named “Eric Ridley.” Gilkey wrote: “It is rare indeed when a person has the good fortune to meet a saint, but he came as close to it as anyone I have ever known.” Gilkey described how Liddell had largely single-handedly resolved the crisis of a breakout of teenage sexual activity in the camp. In the midst of a moral breakdown, with no societal structures to restrain behavior, few even seemed to want to help.

Gilkey made this observation: “There was a quality seemingly unique to the missionary group, namely, naturally and without pretense to respond to a need which everyone else recognized only to turn aside. Much of this went unnoticed, but our camp could scarcely have survived as well as it did without it. If there were any evidences of the grace of God observable on the surface of our camp existence, they were to be found here.”

Gilkey had renamed individuals as he wrote about them, but he described “Eric Ridley” as having won the 400 meter race at the Olympics for England before going to China as a missionary. Eric Ridley was Eric Liddell, and Langdon Gilkey was writing of a man he has observed so closely as a living saint. I realized that Langdon Gilkey had told the most important part of Eric Liddell’s story long before “Chariots of Fire.”

Gilkey closed his words about Eric Liddell with these: “Shortly before the camp ended, he was stricken with a brain tumor and died the same day. The entire camp, especially its youth, was stunned for days, so great was the vacuum that Eric’s death had left.”

Liddell indeed died of a brain tumor, suddenly and unexpectedly. The cause of his death only became clear after an autopsy. Eric Liddell died in the nation where he had been born. Indeed, he has sometimes been listed as China’s first Olympic medalist. He never saw his third daughter.

“God made me for China.” Eric Liddell lived his life in answer to that calling and commission. As Duncan Hamilton explains, Liddell “considered athletics as an addendum to his life rather than his sole reason for living it.”

“Shortly before the [Chinese concentration] camp ended, he was stricken with a brain tumor and died the same day. The entire camp, especially its youth, was stunned for days, so great was the vacuum that Eric’s death had left.”

Eric Liddell ran for God’s glory, but he was made for China. He desperately wanted the nation he loved to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ and believe. David J. Michell, director for Canada Overseas Missionary Fellowship, would introduce Liddell’s collected devotional writings, “The Disciplines of the Christian Life,” by stating simply that “Eric Liddell’s desire was to know God more deeply, and as a missionary, to make him known more fully.”

Christians must remember that Olympic glory will eventually fade. There will be medalists for all to celebrate. But, will there be another Eric Liddell? At the very least, his story needs to be told again. The most important part of his story came long after his gold medal arrived by mail.

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This op-ed by Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President R. Albert Mohler, Jr., Ph.D., first appeared on albertmohler.com on July 25, 2017 and is reprinted here with permission. Duncan Hamilton’s 2016 biography, “For the Glory: Eric Liddell’s Journey from Olympic Champion to Modern Martyr,” is published by Penguin Press.



Eric Liddell and Florence Mackenzie were married in 1934 in Tianjin, China. This is the same place where Liddell was born in 1902 to Rev. and Mrs. James Dunlop Liddell, Scottish missionaries with the London Missionary Society. Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons

Raise a glass
(or 6...)

Levin 

IN THE
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