

ACTIVATE

SPORTS
CHAPLAINCY UK

The official magazine of Sports Chaplaincy UK & Ireland · 2025 ISSUE



Influencing the world of sport

800-plus chaplains
impacting communities

- Launching into golf
- Reports from the Nations



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Welcome

CHAPLAINCY CAN BE many things, I've learned. Getting stuck in the mud at training. Feeling a little bit in the eye of the storm as people who are part of the club you serve suffer sudden and shocking loss. Praying for players to succeed. Standing with those who have significant injuries and might be seeing their careers drawing to a close. Being careful not to over-step my bounds. Sometimes being shocked by how wide my bounds are – and plenty more besides!

Chaplaincy is a privilege and a responsibility which God and Sports Chaplaincy UK gives to me – and I love it.

I've been chaplain at Northampton Town since 2017. As such I'm now one of the longest-serving first team squad members. It's been an enormous gift to me that the club have welcomed me (and coped with me!) over these years. I've learned a lot about people, about sport, about tactics, about leadership (good and bad) and about how vulnerable we all are in the professional football family. What I keep coming back to again and again is that service

is at the heart of it all, just like it is at the heart of ministry and in the life of faith altogether.

I've had times of enormous joy and times of great sorrow in these last seven years but the greatest times have come when I've found my lane, as it were, of service, stayed in it, tried to be as faithful and open-hearted as I can and got on with being there. That's what I'll be aiming to do as the chaplaincy representative on the trustees of Sports Chaplaincy UK in the coming years. I'm looking forward to seeing what is around the corner.

Thank you to all our chaplains and supporters for their prayers and kindness. We couldn't reach the community of sport without you.



**Haydon
Spenceley,
Trustee
Sports
Chaplaincy
UK**

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Making a real difference

Chaplaincy in sport continues to impact lives and transform communities, says CEO **Warren Evans**

Bear friends and partners

ACROSS THE UK and Ireland, chaplains are doing a wonderful job in making a real difference. Their faithful presence is impacting lives, bringing hope and encouragement to athletes, coaches and sports communities. By being the hands and feet of Jesus, they are helping to transform communities, demonstrating God's love in practical, meaningful ways. Whether offering a listening ear, praying with those in need, or simply showing up consistently, chaplains play a vital role in shaping the culture of sport with faith and compassion.

At Sports Chaplaincy UK

& Ireland, we are privileged to be part of something much greater than ourselves – God's mission. As chaplains step into their various sporting worlds to be a living expression of God's love and compassion, the vision is clear: to see an expression of God's love and compassion in every community called sport.

The largest untapped mission field

The world and community of sport is a vast and dynamic space, rich with opportunity yet often overlooked as a place of ministry. It is a mission field where millions

gather, forming a unique cultural and social landscape. Yet, many within this space identify as 'spiritual but not religious'. They long for deeper connection and meaning but may not walk into a church building. This is where we, as sports chaplains, come in – bringing hope, encouragement and presence into the lives of athletes, coaches and staff.

Salt and light

Jesus calls us to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16). Salt preserves and enhances, just as chaplains bring hope and transformation. Light reveals and illuminates, just as we are called to shine God's presence in sports communities. Our mission is not about grand gestures but about showing up, listen-

ing and building trust. It is about turning rhetoric into reality – demonstrating God’s love through our consistent and humble service.

Mission and action

S – See: Do we see people the way God sees them? Not by outward appearance, but by the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

P – Pray: Prayer is our foundation. The heartfelt prayers of a righteous person are powerful and effective (James 5:16).

O – Obey: The Great Commission calls us to go and make disciples. We must be intentional in stepping into this mission field (Matthew 28:19-20).

R – Relate: Jesus modelled deep, authentic relationships. Love your neighbour as yourself (Galatians 5:14).

T – Transform: True transformation comes by renewing minds and leading others toward God’s purpose (Romans 12:2).

As Jesus walked among the people, we too are called to walk slowly through the crowd, seeing, listening and serving. It is about engaging in spirituality in unexpected spaces, and being a light in locker rooms, stadiums and training grounds. We must embrace the ministry of interruption, responding to the unplanned, and trusting that God is always at work.

God’s work

This work is not ours – it is God’s. As a charity and as chaplains, we are stewards of something divine. Each conversation, each moment of support is an opportunity for God’s grace to move. We hold it lightly, knowing that it is always in his hands.

Sports Chaplaincy UK & Ireland is more than an organisation; it is a movement of God’s love in action. The mission continues, not by our strength, but through faith, obedience and an unwavering commitment

to shine His light in the community of sport. The choice is ours: Go! Make a difference.

Thank you to everyone for their faithful support.

Warren Evans

CEO

Sports Chaplaincy





Our growth in golf is on par!

New sports are opening up in England in what has been an exciting year, reports National Director **Matt Baker**



Dr Michael Bennett with new Barnsley FC chaplain Zach Zachariah

WHEN I WROTE in the last edition of *Activate* I mentioned how we felt doors were opening for chaplaincy in golf. I am therefore delighted that we have made our first two appointments in golf chaplaincy in the last twelve months.

Alan Cable has been appointed chaplain to Bexleyheath Golf Club and Derek Blois at Mundesley Golf Club in Norfolk. We hope and pray that these are the first of many appointments for us in this sport.

We have continued to hold regular online induction training evenings for new and potential chaplains including individuals who attended from as far away as China and Kenya! These have led to appointments from grassroots to elite sport and as with golf it has been exciting to have fresh expressions of chaplaincy in

walking football, mixed martial arts and boxing.

As always it is a highlight for chaplains to be able to gather at our annual conferences to share, pray together and get excellent training and insight into sport.

The October conferences in Headingley (North) and Reading (South) were no exception with the main teaching session on the impact of digital media from Robbie Hunter-Paul, former rugby league international. Archbishop Costakis Evangelou, affectionately known as the 'Boxing Bishop' led our devotions in the North, and in the South we were treated to an excellent panel discussion with chaplains in motor racing, football, cricket and rugby.

We were also very pleased that Dr Michael Bennett, Director of Player Wellbeing at the Professional Footballers'

Association, could join us and be interviewed about his career and his faith and also encourage us on the vital role chaplains play in supporting players and staff within the industry. We continue to be grateful for the support and contribution of the Premier League, Football League and the PFA in our work of sports chaplaincy.

Chaplain Alan Cable, right





Ray Montgomerie, Sports Chaplaincy Scotland Ambassador

Rush to join chaplaincy

New areas of Scotland have opened up to chaplaincy, reports National Director Mark Fleming



Thomas Davis is the first ever chaplain from Carloway FC

AFTER THE SAD passing of our patron, former Scotland manager Craig Brown, we decided to retire the title 'Patron' and appoint an ambassador, Ray Montgomerie. Ray is best known in Scottish football for being the captain of Kilmarnock FC when they won the Scottish Cup in 1997. I got to know him two years later when he signed for the club I was chaplain to at the time, Partick Thistle, and he has been unwavering in his support of Sports Chaplaincy Scotland since then. Ray is going to be helping us with fund-raising initiatives and spreading the word about our work.

We are delighted to see significant openings for chaplaincy in Scottish athletics for the first time. Our first chaplain in this sport is Chris

Barlas who represented Scotland until the age of 17. He became chaplain at Inverclyde Athletics club during the summer and this has led to interest from other clubs.

We have also been delighted to see the development of chaplaincy in the Lewis and Harris Football League. Every one of the nine clubs now have a chaplain in place. Thomas Davis is the first ever chaplain of Carloway FC.

We now number around 170 chaplains across all sports. We have never had so many people enquiring about becoming chaplains, recognising how valuable such a role can be in order for churches to build bridges into their local community.

Often these people are already busy in other areas of ministry, however, they find sports chaplaincy to be energising, a blessing rather than a burden.

Chris Barlas, left





Making an impact in challenging times

Many lives are being reached across many sports in Wales, reports National Director **Martin Lewis**

WE HAVE SEEN many new chaplains placed in Wales who are already making a big impact.

You can read on page 10 the story of Newtown footballer Kieran Mills-Evans and how chaplaincy intervened and supported him when injury struck. Others have had meaningful chats and started running carol services. We have amazing stories – not to forget those who clear weeds from car parks and become the hands and feet of Jesus.

We have another UK first in placing a chaplain at a bowls club – this has been warmly received. Another chaplain became accepted enough to be able to share Christian messages on his team's WhatsApp group.

It is a privilege for us to serve teams from international level to local clubs, male and female sport, able bodied

and all ability sport. Also big events like the Run4Wales series, the Swansea Half Ironman, Tenby Ironman and the Ceredigion Car Rally provide opportunities. One guy came and asked if we could help him find a church. Others asked us to pray with them.

Yet there have also been so many challenging situations for us to deal with – mental health, suicide and loss. We need God's help, wisdom and grace to offer support and minister into people's lives.

This year we have updated our Wales club booklet and had fresh endorsements from Welsh Lions hero Gerald Davies, top sports psychologist Mikel Mellik and our new ambassador, rugby legend Nick Williams. Both Nick and Byron Hayward have helped us gain further insight into elite sport so we can be more aware of issues that affect sports

people and how to respond.

Similarly in our conference this year at Merthyr Town FC we had a blessed time. A lady shared her story of coming to faith as a chaplain walked with her for nearly three years through tragedy. She said, "I don't think I would be here now if it wasn't for our chaplain."

It is ever a joy to watch what God does and may we in Wales see more and more of his hand at work.

Nick Williams





How our prayers are being answered

Ireland National Director **Phil Mitchell** and his team are impacting thousands with God's love across a variety of sports...

WE HAVE HAD so much to thank God for... our regular prayer times have heralded many answers including new opportunities to serve at the Euro Under 19 Championships as well as minister at new clubs as far as Inishowen Rugby Club in the north, Cork City Football in the south, Oughterard Rugby Club in the west and Portavogie Rangers in the east.

We had the privilege of providing for our club chaplains over 5,000 individually club crested Bibles, putting the Word of God in sports people's hands for the first time. Our partnerships with Jesus Ministries, Made for More, Alpha, UCB Ireland and Care for the Family are adding significant value as they provide resources and support to the club chaplain.

We are honoured to be



Phil Mitchel with Reuben Walls of Trailblazers

...serving across 15 out of 20 League of Ireland Men's Football clubs, spearheaded by Drogheda United chaplain Liam McGrath and also 44 of the 48 Northern Ireland League Men's and Women's Football clubs, whilst in international football, amateur football and disability football the work continues to both deepen and expand. More rugby, hockey and cricket clubs than ever have - through Sports Chaplaincy - made

appointments in what is now approaching 350 unique roles.

Please continue to pray for all our sports chaplains and that many more will join them! We need to get close enough to people to make shouting unnecessary. Are we brave enough to get that close? If the answer is yes, the possibilities are great!

God has gifted and graced us to love and do and speak where and when he appointed us, so that we might become a bridge through which Christ may walk into the hearts of the people we love and serve in our sports clubs.

WE ARE HONoured TO BE SERVING ACROSS 15 OUT OF 20 LEAGUE OF IRELAND MEN'S FOOTBALL CLUBS

Injured footballer: everything

Kieran Mills-Evans recalls the day an horrific injury changed his life in more ways than one

A FOOTBALLER in the Welsh Premier League has spoken of the immense impact the club's chaplain had following a near career-ending injury.

Kieran Mills-Evans, centre back for Newtown AFC, was just one minute away from being substituted in a friendly game when he shattered his fibula in an horrific accident.

The 32-year-old knew instantly something was wrong when he put his foot down in a friendly just days away from the club's biggest game of the season for European qualification. Minutes later Kieran was lying in agony on the pool table in the club's bar, only to be told that an ambulance could take six or seven hours to arrive to the Welsh town. It was the club chaplain Matt Allport who was at Kieran's side, offering to drive him to the hospital to get urgent treatment.

Kieran said: "As we were driving there with my partner, Matt asked if he could pray

for me. I'm not a religious guy, and I'm not interested in all of that, but for some reason, it just seemed the right thing to do. He prayed that we would be seen straight away, and that my leg would be fixable.

"Amazingly, everything we prayed for came true. When we arrived at the hospital, Matt went to book me in and despite there being six ambulances waiting and a full waiting room, I was seen straight away."

The resulting x-rays showed that Kieran had shattered his fibula in two places above the ankle, requiring a plate and two rods. During

the subsequent five days in hospital, Matt visited every day, even waiting with him until 1am on the morning of his operation.

Kieran added: "I felt so guilty that Matt was devoting all his time to be with me, but it just shows what kind of person he is – he's just someone to lean on, he doesn't get down or upset or judge; he's just lovely company."

For the next three weeks Matt contacted Kieran every day either by text, calling or visiting in person.

"He was always there when I needed him," the footballer said. "It was the hardest three weeks of my life, but getting to know Matt,



Kieran Mills-Evans with chaplain Matt Allport

chaplain prayed came true



Kieran goes in for a tackle
Pic: Mike Sheridan

and the relationship I have built with him is the one real positive that has come out of what happened. I could talk to him in a way that I couldn't talk to my friends and family. I felt guilty about burdening them with my sorrows, but Matt was always there and went through every emotion with me.

"He even supported my partner, sending her flowers and just showing such an interest in our lives."

Kieran believes that every football club would benefit from a chaplain, and says

**AMAZINGLY,
EVERYTHING
WE PRAYED FOR
CAME TRUE**

the impact he's had not just on him but on the younger players and other staff at the club is immeasurable.

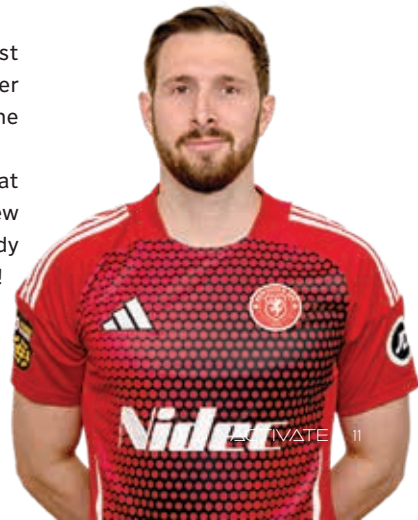
"When he first arrived at the club, nobody really knew what he was - somebody told me he was the Vicar! He doesn't force religion on anybody but he's just so supportive and we all know that we can talk

to him about anything if we need to."

Matt joined the Robins as chaplain in 2023 and was supported by the Sports Chaplaincy team in Wales.

He told Activate: "As the chaplain, my role is to offer pastoral support and a listening ear to those who need it - that role really came to life with Kieran's injury. He suffered a nasty leg break and from here I had the privilege of standing alongside him throughout his recovery.

"Kieran is great guy, a leader on and off the field. It's been quite a journey to see him battle through pain and have the courage and determination to keep going."



A great way to connect with your community

National Sports Sunday provides an incredible opportunity to link sport and the church. **Ed Jones**, a minister at Battle Baptist Church in Sussex and chaplain to Battle Town FC, explains how his town got involved...

AS A CHURCH we first engaged in National Sports Sunday in 2022, praying for our local community of sport.

Afterwards, we were asking the question, how can we make the most of this opportunity? We wanted to use National Sports Sunday as a further connection point with the local community – so we began to dream. This was the beginnings of our town's Sports Sunday.

Very simply, on National Sports Sunday, we pray for the sporting community in Battle, but the church and the football club join forces and host a day of activity, open to the whole community for all ages and all abilities.

A host of exhibition matches take place. There are tasteful opportunities from youth football through to walking football, plus a variety



A host of exhibition matches take place in Battle on National Sports Sunday

of other games and sports where people can join in. The vision is to bring the community together through sport, whether taking part or cheering others on.

Both in 2023 and 2024 God blessed us with great weather, but more to the point across the days we saw 200-300 people from

the community come together, having a great time, all because of sport.

We believe God has given us this plan to reach people and National Sports Sunday provides a great vehicle. Why not give it a go yourself, or at least start dreaming of what God might have in store for you, wherever you are?

The joys and challenges of being a sports chaplain

Suzanne Littler tells Activate about the highs and lows of chaplaincy for St Helens RF Women

Tell us about your position as chaplain. How did it come about?

I became chaplain for the women in January 2019. I received a call from a good friend Paul Johnson (Chaplain and Wellbeing Manager at St Helens RLFC) in December 2018 as an opportunity came up for the women's team. Paul asked if this was something I would like to get involved with. I gave all but two seconds to think about it and answered with an excited 'yes'. I've never looked back!

There are always opportunities to support a player, whether that's someone with stress away from rugby as the majority of the team are either working full time, studying at university or raising a family, or pressures within rugby. It is always encouraging when a player asks you to pray for them or wants to have a conversation about faith.

What have been the best moments so far?

Journeying with a player through injury/rehab and then seeing them 'smash it up' on the pitch is emotional and a moment to praise God for His provision and protection. One of the stand out moments was

when the team beat York 17-16 in the Challenge Cup semi-final with a Faye Gaskin drop goal in the 79th minute. For the first time in history a Women's Super League Challenge Cup Final would be hosted at Wembley. The girls won that final against Leeds and I felt like a very proud spiritual Mum that day!

What about the difficulties? Any challenges?

One of the challenges can be steering through commitments as working full time and doing chaplaincy voluntarily can become difficult if you don't get the balance or boundaries right.

How can others support chaplaincy and get involved?

Prayer is powerful and knowing there are people praying for your club, for conversations you have with players and staff, is so encouraging. Donating regularly to Sports Chaplaincy UK is another way to support the work that is carried out in many sports.

Suzanne Littler says it's encouraging when a player asks for prayer



Find the right balance

Sports chaplaincy can be tough, and service with a smile goes a long way, jokes Wythenshawe FC's **Andy Campsall**...

WHY DID THE football team invite the chaplain to the match? Because they needed some holy assistance with their crosses!

Being a sports chaplain at Wythenshawe FC isn't just about spiritual wisdom, it's also about showing up with a bit of humour. If you're going to have a role that's part spiritual advisor, part therapist and part honorary team mascot, you've got to bring some laughs to the table... or, in this case, the dressing room.

As chaplain I'm not just there to offer deep, profound life advice like 'thou shalt not lose possession'. It's more like, 'Thou shalt chill out mate; it's just football.' I'm there during training sessions, subtly reminding the players that having a go at the ref probably won't score points with God. I'm also there on match day, providing moral support

and hoping for a little divine intervention for penalties!

When tensions are running high, it's good to try and lighten the mood. I'll happily pretend to bless the ball

YOU'VE GOT TO BRING SOME LAUGHS TO THE TABLE

before kick-off just in case anyone needs a little extra help bending it like Beckham.

But it's not all jokes, there are the tough moments when a player gets injured, or a game doesn't go our way. That's when I step in with a bit of wisdom and compassion and a hint of fun, kind of like a referee for the soul, making sure we don't

lose our way in the heat of the game.

At the end of the day, being a chaplain is about balance. Whether it's helping players spiritually or having a laugh, I'm there to remind the team that while football is serious business, it's still okay to have fun along the way.

Proverbs 17:22 says: "A happy heart is good medicine, and a joyful mind causes healing."



Andy Campsall is the chaplain at Wythenshawe FC

I HAVE THE GREAT privilege of being chaplain to Portsmouth Women's Football Club. I joined the club at the end of the Covid lockdown in March 2021 and have pretty much enjoyed every moment since. Given that I love Jesus, people and football, it's a perfect fit for me!

As I see it, my role involves supporting anyone in the club, whether team or staff, both pastorally and spiritually, whether the person has faith or not. Relationships are really important, and so a lot of my time is spent chatting and getting to know people and some of what's going on in their lives. As a result of that when times get hard, people are much more ready to talk to me about their situation. Over the years, I've been able to signpost people to the NHS mental health support, talked and listened to those going through bereavement, health issues and family troubles, as well as general life situations.

We've had an exciting and challenging time in the last twelve months, having just been promoted to the Championship this year. There are lots of changes and adjustments as we move to being full-time and the jump from tier three to tier two is huge. I



My role is more important now!

As women's football expands, so does the need for chaplains, explains

Debs Smart, of Portsmouth FC...

feel as though my role is even more important now, to be there for both the players and staff, to be a sounding board for emotions, and to remind people that they are loved because of who they are, not because of whether they are successful or not.

And I feel hugely excited when people ask questions about what and why I believe. I meet regularly with one member of staff and always pray at the end of our meet-

ing. Recently I was able to share my testimony which led to further questions.

Another member of staff and I ended up having an amazingly deep conversation about forgiveness and how costly it is.

I am incredibly grateful for this role... it feels such a privilege to be involved in the club and the people there. I long for more to know Jesus, and I pray that I can be a part of bringing that about.

YOU REALLY CAN MAKE A BIG IMPACT AS A CHAPLAIN

Assistant National Director for England **Christian Wienkamp** continues to lead by example in his role as chaplain at West Brom.

TELL US ABOUT your at West Bromwich Albion. How's it going?

I've been the club chaplain at WBA now since 2021 and I've already seen many managers, coaches and players come and go. I'm well used to the transient nature, and you're often having to build relationships time and time again. It's a privilege to be involved with the club and wider within the industry and I feel my role has been really embraced. Through being a consistent presence at the training ground and home match days, I'm continuing to sow into relationships and get involved in as much as I can within the life of the club.

How has chaplaincy changed over the years?

Sports chaplaincy in the UK has developed significantly, expanding its reach and deep-



ening its impact within the sporting community. Initially concentrated in professional sports, chaplaincy has expanded into motorsport, golf clubs, amateur clubs and leagues, gyms, and health clubs with around 800 chaplains now serving their local sports communities. This expansion reflects a broader recognition of the importance of pastoral, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing in sports.

What do you think are the biggest challenges for chaplains now?

Sometimes, the ambiguous nature of the role can offer certain freedoms but also presents challenges. In cases where chaplaincy is not fully embraced, chaplains can feel undervalued or misunderstood. I think it is crucial to stay approachable and adaptable while showing clubs the positive impact you're making.

What would you say to someone who is considering becoming a chaplain?

You really can have great impact in your sports community, and it is a privileged role. You'll have the unique opportunity to walk alongside people in some of their most vulnerable and significant moments and you can make a big difference. Go for it!

**GLOBAL
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SUNDAY**
21 SEPTEMBER



UNITING FAITH AND SPORT AROUND THE WORLD

GLOBAL SPORTS SUNDAY was once again a powerful and inspiring event, bringing churches and sports communities together in a unique way.

Congregations across the world dedicated this special day to praying for athletes, coaches, sports chaplains and the broader sports ministry, recognising the impact of sport and the size of the mission.

Churches not only prayed for those involved in sports but also emphasised the role of sports in bridging cultural and social divides. Australia, New Zealand, USA, Germany

and the UK are just some of the countries that took part, with encouraging reports being received of unity and excitement for the mission ahead.

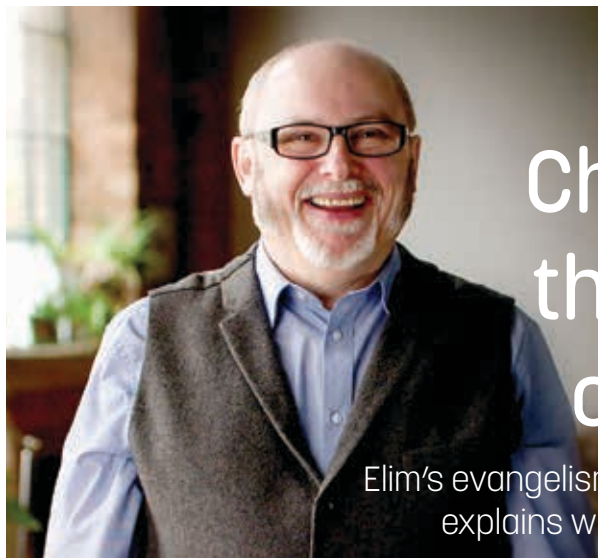
In many places, churches invited local sports clubs and organisations to participate in the service, creating a welcoming environment for athletes and sports enthusiasts.

One church leader said: "We invited sports clubs and organisations in our community to attend the service. They came to attend the service, and we had lots of fun. The suggestion to play a game

together worked very well. Thank you! Some people also wore their favourite sports team's jersey. We also had a special prayer for them and invited them to stay for coffee after the service. It was a joy and privilege to join in with Global Sports Sunday!"

Global Sports Sunday was more than just a day of prayer – it was a celebration of the unifying power of sports and faith.

As churches continue to embrace sports as a means of ministry, the hope is that more lives will be impacted and drawn closer to God through the shared love of sport.



We need Christians in the sporting community

Elim's evangelism director **Mark Greenwood** explains why he's a fan of chaplaincy

I'M 16 YEARS OLD and I am playing in goals for Fairfield Community School in Bradford. He is 16 years old and he is playing in goals for Tong School. I am 5ft 5in and he's about 6ft5in. I was the better goalkeeper, he may differ in his opinion of course. His name? Warren Evans, the current CEO of Sports Chaplaincy UK.

We didn't know each other at the time, but in a matter of a few years we would become close friends, working on lots of cross-church events over the years that followed, as well as being in an accountability group together for many years, and, we are fellow Bradfordians!

Since getting to know Sports Chaplaincy more during Warren's leadership,

I am more convinced of the critical nature of showing Jesus' kindness to the sporting community. I have the privilege of knowing a number of professional sports people (most retired now).

I have seen firsthand the pressures that sports people, and their families, are under. With all of this, of course, comes the impact on supporters and the broader sporting community. Whether it's supporters (Bradford City and Bradford Bulls Rugby League for me) as well as Worcester Warriors (my daughter played for the development squad), the supporters really do go on a rollercoaster ride, especially with many clubs going into administration and then liquidation in recent years.

For many involved in sport at all levels, it really can have an impact on many aspects of life.

My daughter also represented the county at national level in sprints, hurdles and javelin. Several times a week parents are almost managers and assistant coaches to their children as they travel around the country with their loved ones.

I am the Director of evangelism for Elim churches UK and we are massive fans of chaplaincy – it is an amazing opportunity for the church. When you think of how many people around the UK are involved in sport, of all ages and cultures, there is no better place for Christians to be than in the sporting community.

NATIONAL SPORTS SUNDAY

11 MAY 2025

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