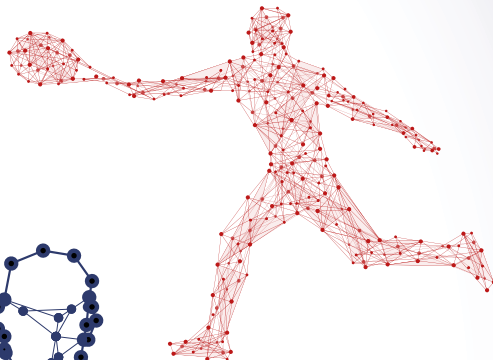


Greater Connection

2024/2025

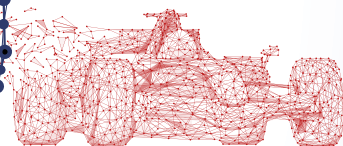
The official magazine of Sports Chaplaincy UK in England

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CONNECT THE DOTS

How Sports Chaplaincy
is the link between
sport and soul



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NATIONAL SPORTS SUNDAY

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Welcome



*Greetings from Warren Evans, CEO,
Sports Chaplaincy UK*

On both a personal and professional level, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to Matt, Christian, our entire English team, and all of our chaplains for their incredible efforts. Their work often goes unnoticed, yet it profoundly impacts countless lives

within the community of sport. Sports Chaplaincy UK & Ireland continues to serve across all the home nations and Ireland, but this publication highlights the remarkable work happening here in England. The dedication and commitment of our chaplains is truly inspiring. Please continue to pray and support this great work.

Give thanks for our ministry

WELCOME to the first edition of Greater Connection, the new magazine from Sports Chaplaincy in England. Let me start by saying what a privilege it is to be the National Director for England and to work with so many fabulous chaplains who volunteer to support people throughout English sport.

As you read through the next few pages I hope you share my joy in reading the various stories. Football chaplaincy is where it all started more than 50 years ago so it was a great privilege to interview Paul Elliott CBE, a keen SCUK ambassador who speaks of his career but also why he is such a strong advocate of chaplaincy. And whilst originally we were only involved in men's football, you will also read within these pages of how chaplaincy is growing within the women's game.

Of course we are now involved across a number of sports and so we have articles on how chaplaincy operates at a grassroots level in cricket as well as the important role a chaplain can play in supporting those who frequent gyms. Two new areas where we have developed in the last couple of years has been motor-racing and

golf so we have included pieces on exciting appointments in these sports.

Proverbs 16:9 tells us, "In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps." We need to make plans and to know where we are going but more importantly I am so conscious that we need to tune in to what the Lord is saying and follow where he is guiding our steps.

Enjoy reading Greater Connection but also please pray, giving thanks for all those involved in this great work and asking that the Lord continues to shed his light on where we should go next.

Yours in him

*Matt Baker
National Director
for England,
Sports
Chaplaincy UK*



Greater
Connection 3

Chaplains offer people

someone they can trust



Paul Elliott at Charlton Athletic, where he started his senior career

Former Chelsea and Celtic defender **Paul Elliott** now advises the FA on equality, diversity and inclusion and is vice-chairman of Charlton Athletic. He is a Sports Chaplaincy ambassador and recently caught up with England Director Matt Baker

YOU HAD a successful playing career for a number of years. What were your highs and lows?

I started my career in football in the early 80s at Charlton Athletic. I played at various clubs including Charlton, Luton Town, Aston Villa and was in Italy with Pisa for three

years, then Celtic, then Chelsea. I think I had a very good career, visited some great parts of the world and enjoyed football because I love football. I had a very serious injury when I was in my late 20s – and that was a big challenge in my life. I had a number of opera-

tions and unfortunately never got back to playing.

What was the injury?

In the ninth minute of a game for Chelsea against Liverpool, I was injured in a bad challenge which ruptured all four ligaments in my

right knee. That was the lowest point in my career as I'd just got selected to play for England. I was at the peak of my game, aged 28 at a brilliant club. I was the first black captain in the Premier League and the first black captain for Chelsea.

What sort of emotional, mental or spiritual support was there for you within the game at that time?

If I had a real regret it was not having that kind of resource to speak to somebody that's neutral, independent and had your wellbeing at heart.

Today there are a lot of support mechanisms. Where do you see that chaplaincy fits in and what does it offer that's different to other forms of support?

It's the pastoral care. That's very important. It's that neutrality. It's that independence. It's that confidentiality. And there's trust, because a lot of sports people don't trust people. And I think that you provide a framework. You provide a structure that people feel very comfortable to just have a soft conversation and you're not feeling restrictive. You're non-judgmental, which I think is terribly important. So whether someone's got faith or they don't have faith, it doesn't make any difference, you know, because you are not judged. An individual needs the care, the

independence and the trust of the conversation with a chaplain.

What would be your advice to a chaplain in terms of how they can be more effective in their sport?

Keep it simple. Believe in what you're doing. Impart confidence to the individual. I think the manner of the approach is very important I think it's about being transparent,



Paul during his days at Chelsea

being explicit and saying, this is what we are, this is what we do and this is why we do it. And this is how we feel it's going to benefit you, your life, your mindset, your sport and also your relationships with people.

What would you say to someone in the church thinking about

chaplaincy and what would you say to a club or sport that doesn't have a chaplain?

To the church I'd say try it. I would say to people... participate and listen. To a club that doesn't have a chaplain I'd say why not? Clubs provide excellent resources but this is an additional resource that's actually giving you such a lot. It's going to enhance your performance, it's going to enhance your behaviour. It's going to enhance the way you think, the way you feel and the way you behave. So the by-product of all those benefits is going to be your personal and professional performance.

Why did you become an ambassador for SCUUK?

Belief that it could add value to empower people. And not just people at an elite level but people in society. It's away from the mainstream of a direct resource within football. Confidentiality, I think that that's a real key USP, that somebody can just go into a room and not feel like how I feel when I go in a room full of journalists, that somebody's just waiting to trip you up and embellish something and spin something. So you're not going in there with an unequivocal, open and clean heart. I think sports chaplaincy provides that platform to do just that. It enables you to be you – and that's the key.

You can feel like a
LEMON!

Chaplains need to keep going – even when they don't feel like it, says
Dotha Blackwood, of
Crystal Palace Women

THE reality is that much of the time a sports chaplain can feel like a 'lemon', which is an important point made during the training and induction sessions for folks new to Sports Chaplaincy UK.

Chaplaincy for me is a ministry of presence! Simply that. Your presence often speaks more loudly than your words. In fact, sometimes your words interrupt the good work that your presence has been doing.

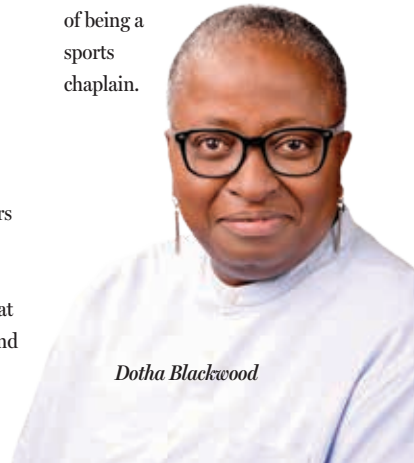
I try to go to Crystal Palace once a week and when I do, I often wonder is this really making a difference or am I just fooling myself here and wasting time? Sometimes you feel like you do not belong. Do I have a right to be here? Can I go into this place/room/meeting, or not? You ask yourself, but you do not feel like you want to (or should) ask anyone at the club; what if they say no? What then? But again, what if they say yes, then what? During the wet winter months, sometimes standing by

the pitch side, watching training, occasionally talking to 'someone' (anyone really) one wonders, why am I here? Or you may ask, how can I, (and do I need to) make 'greater connections'? What you may not immediately realise is that by just being there, you have been a positive alternative presence, and a light to others.

Then towards the end of the season, various persons say to you in passing, 'it was SOOOO good just seeing you standing there, by the side of the pitch. It made me feel like I can do this, and someone is rooting for me'. Or else they send you a WhatsApp message to say thank you for just being there. Occasionally, you may even get a telephone call to ask your advice or for prayer; or you are just the 'space' the team, staff other workers needed to 'let off steam'. Then you realise, that as 'lemon' you are the key ingredient in the lemonade that brings refreshment, restoration, and

sometimes hope to others.

So, just keep turning up, showing up, and being present, because you never know when you'll get a call (like I did) asking you specifically, to be at the training ground, or at a particular meeting, or to just 'be around' at a certain time, because your work has been recognised, you are needed, valued and appreciated. Be that presence! Light shines, it does not always have to do much to make a difference. But one should also be ready, if/when called upon to do more. That is the joy and privilege of being a sports chaplain.



Dotha Blackwood

A safe pair of hands!

Rev Andrew Scott not only plays for Ashstead Cricket Club in Surrey, he's now the club's chaplain...

I'M CALLED 'Rev' on and off the field since joining Ashstead Cricket Club in 2016. The members know I am a Christian. I say the grace at the annual dinner.

One member once thanked me for keeping the pre-meal prayer short because he is not religious! I don't drop the words 'Jesus' or 'church' into most conversations, because people would get tired of this approach and be resistant to the gospel.

I prefer to make my pastoral support at the club known in subtle

ways, when relationships have developed and opportunities arise – and they have!

Praying for someone struggling through depression, offering support over the phone to a mother whose son, who plays for the club, is currently in a psychiatric hospital and sending him a card; listening and offering prayer support to a player whose missus recently gave birth to twins – one of whom very sadly didn't survive.

Since 2020, I have also been captain for the Saturday fourth

team. Being mid-40s, I am comfortable at this level of recreational cricket! The standard is really good but relative to our first team (which often includes Surrey professionals and former England test players) the standard is quite low. Sometimes the level of language at matches is even lower!

Again, I try to be a witness in subtle ways. I get the usual comments: "Rev's just returned from his latest crusade!" and "Could you pray harder for sunshine?" Beyond the banter I think some people are genuinely interested in faith and spiritual matters, but not in going to church. Being a player/captain is certainly not essential to the chaplaincy role, but I believe it sets the tone by ensuring a safe environment for junior players and adds credence to a chaplain being trustworthy, and a safe pair of hands (pun intended)!

In our club pavilion is an old photo of the Rector. He was 'blessing' the instalment of the entrance gates. It encourages me that although I'm more inclined to bless people rather than objects, there was a Christian presence at the club in the late 1800s.

There is a lack of awareness of the Christian faith and its relevance nowadays. Therefore chaplaincy has a vitally important role in incarnating God's love to all.



Rev Andrew Scott in action for Ashstead Cricket Club



Alan Cable, right, with Bexleyheath Golf Club General Manager Gary Tait and greenkeepers and groundsmen Mike and Rob

Getting into the swing of being a chaplain

Chaplaincy is ever increasing in golf. One such committed to the cause is *Alan Cable*

FOLLOWING chaplaincy modules initially with Urban Revs in Australia in June 2022, I came onboard and was accepted by Sports Chaplaincy UK after meeting with CEO Warren Evans later that year in London.

Since then, the pace of change has not slowed, culminating with studies in Contemporary Chaplaincy at Waverley Abbey College.

Having been a pro-golfer previously and having a period away from the game, I reached a stage which led me to consider a return to the profession, this time in an entirely different capacity.

Based in Kent and affiliated with the Kent Golf Union and Golf

England, I have been based at Bexleyheath Private Golf Club since September, and have been club chaplain since March 2024, which is proving to be an absolute privilege.

The club and the condition of the course has been described in many reviews as a 'little gem' (which it most certainly is), tucked away in Kent and less than 20 miles or so from the centre of London since 1907. The membership and the staff are among the friendliest and welcoming you will find at any club, something which has been extended to me since the day I came on board, creating a warm atmosphere to all who visit.

I am usually on hand 3-4 half

days per week at the club, and since arriving have always been made to feel accepted by all members. At the moment the club is in the process of building a more visible junior section which will take a while to come together and which I hope to assist with.

I tend to make myself available to all staff and members whenever required so 'being here' has become a vital ingredient of my ministry, empathy as we all know being 'golden'. Sports Chaplaincy UK and I remain privileged in extending our resources to everyone here, not only as listening ears, but also as helping hands, caring hearts and focused on the wellbeing of all.

Motorsport chaplaincy is moving up a gear

Sports Chaplaincy's motorsport presence continues to grow quickly. *Rev James Rigby* tells us more

SPORTS chaplaincy has seen a really big uptake in motorsport over the last year and it has been amazing to see how God is at work in reaching this community.

In 2023 we served the Historic Sports Car Club over eleven events during the racing season and saw significant openness and acceptance to our chaplaincy team, people seeking us out and welcoming conversations about faith as well as many prayer opportunities. We have seen Christians within the community encouraged to be more open about their faith and even testify publicly in one case about how God helped in winning a championship. As the



team lead I have been so encouraged by this and those who have joined our team to become chaplains in motorsport.

Two of our team members – Rev Marcia Wadham and Dave Limbrick – have also taken the initiative to start serving a second club this year, the Castle Combe Racing Club, which has embraced chaplaincy as the answer

to their welfare needs. We are seeing chaplaincy welcomed and requested more and more within motorsport and are always looking for more people with a heart to serve this community to join us.

Our dream is to see teams of chaplains serving across the country each weekend at as many motorsport events as possible, if you know anyone who might be interested please get in touch! Please join us in praying for our team of chaplains to grow and for God's future plans for this amazing ministry.





Coffee and chat at Xcel

Agnes and Cleide supporting swimathon

Fit for purpose

Sports Chaplaincy continues to reach gyms – and is seeing amazing results, writes *Mark Blythe*

WE WERE invited to provide chaplaincy services at Elmbridge Xcel Sports Complex, Walton on Thames more than ten years ago. It was an interesting time of developing trust and understanding of why we were there for the staff, the members and our team!

The centre attracts over 2,000 visitors a day and provides a pool, gym, squash courts, gymnastics, badminton, football, basketball, cycling, climbing wall, workout rooms, play areas and a cafe! What a facility!

People are creatures of habit, so week after week we go to the same classes, do the same sport, use the same locker, sit in the same café seat etc. By being there regularly we meet people through a nod, a

smile, a weather comment, a chat or a coffee.... and build friendships!

When the centre needs extra hands for an event we try to help. We like to be a benefit to the centre by being there and serving in a variety of ways.

Our 'Christmas Wrap & Chat' day is hugely popular. Staff and members bring their gifts and

while they do their workout we wrap their presents for free. This is by the entrance so we can't be missed and generates lots of chats about why we do it - what an opportunity at Christmas!

Recently one of our walking footballers sadly died on the pitch. It's been a horrible time and we've been able to support many players, friends and staff through this difficulty. It's not all roses, but our presence at Xcel is appreciated and we're able to serve our community.



Christmas Wrap & Chat was popular

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