

# The Heart of the Chaplain

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## Introduction:

If you are involved in any sport, you discover very quickly that, “You can’t hide!”

Both team mates and opponents soon discover your strengths, your weaknesses, your reactions under pressure, even your funny habits.

Chaplains in sport must be fair-dinkum in their Christian faith. There is no place for pretension or hypocrisy in the world of sport, especially among Christians.

John Bunyan defined hypocrisy as, “Those who would appear in men’s eyes what they aren’t in God’s eyes. You would be congratulated as one who loves and fears God but you do not.”

In chaplaincy, character comes before competence. In 1 Timothy 3 Paul lists the qualities for character leaders. Of the 16 (by my count) 15 refer to character and to competency. Again, 1 Timothy 4:12 tells us of the importance of character in leadership.

Chaplains are to be passionate and professional.

## 1. Heart for God

First priority for a chaplain is a heart to love God (Matthew 22:37); to have an enthusiasm for the glory of God. A love for God will express a love for God’s word and joy in obeying it (John 14:15).

Also there should be a desire to spend time with God in prayer.

We learn much from athletes in their training methods, discipline and the time and effort spent to improve their performance. Our exercise for godliness should be greater according to Timothy 4:8.

## 2. Heart for the Gospel

Do we believe that the gospel is the best message that anyone could ever receive?

So we believe that Jesus has the only solution to the deepest human dilemma? – Separation from God and Death?

Have we a heart-felt desire to commitment to Christ? 2 Corinthians 5:14.

Through their experience in sport and life, athletes get a good start in understanding the gospel. Through experience they know what sin is.

Every athlete knows when they have fallen short a ‘smigler’ of their best. They accuse themselves mostly. Thrown onto the bigger screen of life, they can understand what it is to fall short of their own moral standards and what it means to fall short of God’s glory and standards: Romans 3:23.

Athletes also understand JUDEMENT.

Every event or contest puts his/her ability on the line. He/ she knows that they will be judged by the T.V. audience, by the coaches, by the crowd and the hardest of all, by their peers. They know too, that judgement will be placed on their entire career. A verse like Hebrews 9:27 connects.

They understand pain.

All elite athletes have performance with pain or through pain. In team sports they know what it is like to put their life on the line for their team-mates. NO PAIN NO GAIN is the constant theme for those at the top.

As a result they can understand the pain and sacrifice of the Cross (Isaiah 53:4-6).

Athletes appreciate VICTORY. They have reached the heights and tasted the sweetness of victory. After a victory celebration of a National Competition one basketballer said to me, “I wish they could go on for ever.”

The only victory that lasts forever is the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:57.

However, there is one part of the gospel that athletes can't get their heads around and that is GRACE. Athletes live by mottos such as:

- “Achievement never exceeds effort”
- “NO PAIN NO GAIN”
- “Put in the hard yards at training then you will see results”
- “Practice makes perfect”

They found it hard to grasp getting something for nothing. They find it hard to realise that they are loved for who they are and not for what they do or achieve.

The heart of the gospel is God's grace is through Jesus Christ – and it is the greatest message that athletes can receive. Chaplains are to be messengers of grace and people who express grace and generosity in all their relationships (Ephesians 2:1-10).

### **3. A heart for the people**

To love our neighbour as ourself Matthew 22:37; to show the generosity of God to all comers Matthew 5:43-48; to have the compassion of Christ – Matthew 9:36; to seek to understand the athlete life and its pressures, stress, pain, fears and hopes; being prepared to listen to their frustration etc. and, to pray for them.

### **4. A Humble Heart**

In the sporting world we really don't count for much. If we did, Clubs would be prepared to pay for chaplains. Our dependence is therefore entirely upon God. Isaiah 57:15, 65:5 and Matthew 5:3.

We are servants of God first, and also servant-like in our approach to sports people.

### **5. A Bold Heart**

2 Timothy 1:6

Acts 1:8

We are in situations where we have to take initiative and overcome barriers and sometimes prejudice.

### **6. A Heart of Faith**

Matthew 17:20: To have expectations about God's ability to change lives and situations.

## **7. Wise Heart**

Proverbs 1-7 and Matthew 10:16.

Wisdom in dealing with people especially Christian athletes; wisdom in dealing with conflicts passed onto us; wisdom in getting a true and godly perspective on sport.

Sport is a gift of God: No heart of the creative order for the benefit of humans. Sport can bring joy, freedom and fun. Sport can build community and help develop character.

However, on the world-wide scene there are greater issues than sport (eg. Hunger, poverty, war, unjustness, illness, struggle for survival, AIDS crisis ect.

In wisdom, we must seek God's perspective on sport and learn to discern when it is helpful and uplifting and when it becomes an idol.

Also, there is God's wisdom within sport. An international coach once said to me, "I wish all my athletes were Christians. Then they would have peace in their hearts and be able to concentrate properly."

Another international coach said that the world view of Christians enables them to put their performance in their hands: If they win, give glory to them and if they loose, then God has a reason and purpose for that and he will provide for all their needs the next day.

## **8. A Heart to let go**

To be prepared not to 'own' our ministry; being ready to train others also (2 Timothy 2:2); to be able to take a board trainee or apprentice chaplains so that the ministry can continue fruitfully.

## **9. A Thankful Heart**

Ephesians 5:20. As chaplains in sport we have so much to be thankful for. For starters we have been given great privileges and special opportunities. Above all we can thankful for the way God is working in and through chaplaincy.