

What is a sports chaplain? And why are they an important component of sports medicine and athlete care?

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Abstract

Why do we need sports chaplains? Competitive and professional athletes have a significant influence in the world. They are entertainers. They are battlers, warriors, who are often putting their bodies on the line, and at the limit their lives. Their performance often becomes the topic of conversation and judgement not only personally, internally at their clubs, but also in the public sector for all to scrutinise. They make massive sacrifices, not only physically to participate and compete in their sports but socially, spending long hours, and days that turn into months and years of missing family occasions - including celebrations and bereavements, all for the sake of their performance and the advancement of their careers. It is impossible to know the impact or count the cost that the countless hours of preparation and competition have on these athletes physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and for many spiritually. But who is there for these athletes as individuals? As humans, irrespective of their last or next performance? This is the role of the sports chaplain. What happens to an athlete in the following circumstances, such as: ● a loss of form? ● a season or career ending injury? ● a fall out with coach or team mates? ● or even trouble in their personal lives with family, spouses and kids? Are these circumstances the cause or consequence of a change in performance? Are they perhaps precursors to deteriorating mental health, leading to drug and alcohol abuse, or perhaps familial splits, self harm or at the extreme even suicide. This is where a sports chaplain might be able to intervene to prevent tragedy. However they are there also to celebrate with the athlete! Athletes can often find themselves isolated and may not have their close friends or families at hand to share in their triumphs and success. A sports chaplain can be a familiar and reassuring presence to congratulate them on any personal and/or athletic milestones. Who is a sports

chaplain and who do they serve? Sports Chaplains are volunteers connected to a local church. They provide free, accessible pastoral care, support and mentoring to all people at the point of need irrespective of religion, lifestyle and beliefs. The effect of Sports Chaplains is improved mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing leading to better people, better lives, better outcomes and better communities. Sports Chaplains are not sports psychologists, replacements for player welfare officers or trained counsellors. But do undertake sports chaplaincy training to be first responders to assist people in need of professional services

Biography

Matthew is a physiotherapist by profession, graduating with a BPhy from Otago university in New Zealand in 2010. He worked full time as a physiotherapist for 3 years, with a particular interest in sports working with several premier men's rugby teams and various regional and national representative athletes. He then became a volunteer with an international interdenominational Christian organisation youth with a mission (YWAM) in Biarritz, France for 7 years as a mentor and sports facilitator. Completing his sports chaplaincy training with Holistic sports in France, he has been serving high level athletes, predominantly professional rugby players as a sports chaplain for 4 years. With this combination of skills to treat and care for athletes as a whole, Matthew has a profound passion in providing, promoting and training holistic care and support for high level athletes in mind, body, soul and spirit.