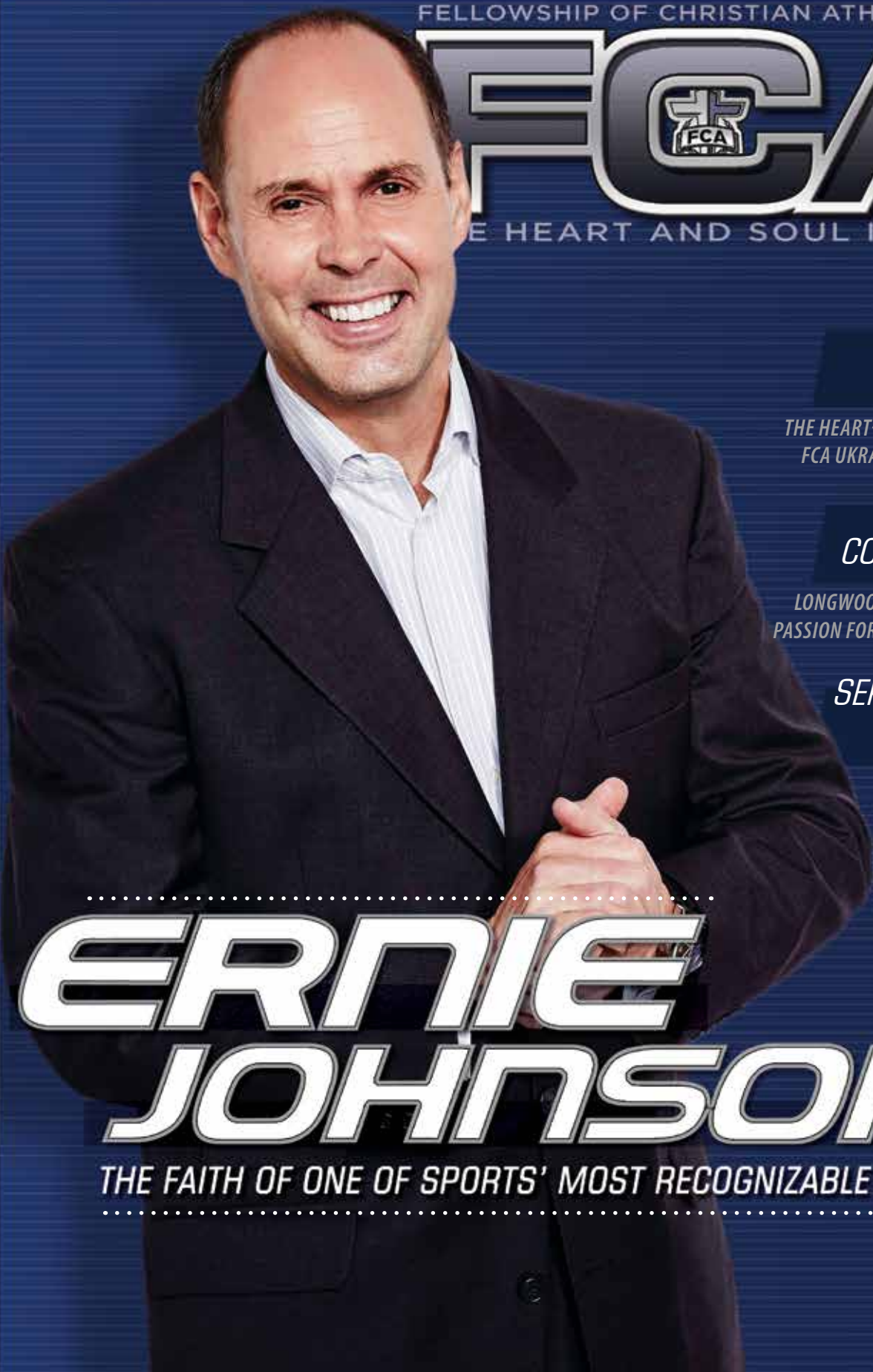


FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIAN ATHLETES

FCA

THE HEART AND SOUL IN SPORTS



PITTS

*COMMITTED
TO CHRIST*

THE HEART-WRENCHING STORY OF
FCA UKRAINE'S VOVA DEMEDIUK

.....
*INSIDE A
COACH'S HEART*

LONGWOOD COACH JAYSON GEE'S
PASSION FOR HIS FAMILY AND TEAM

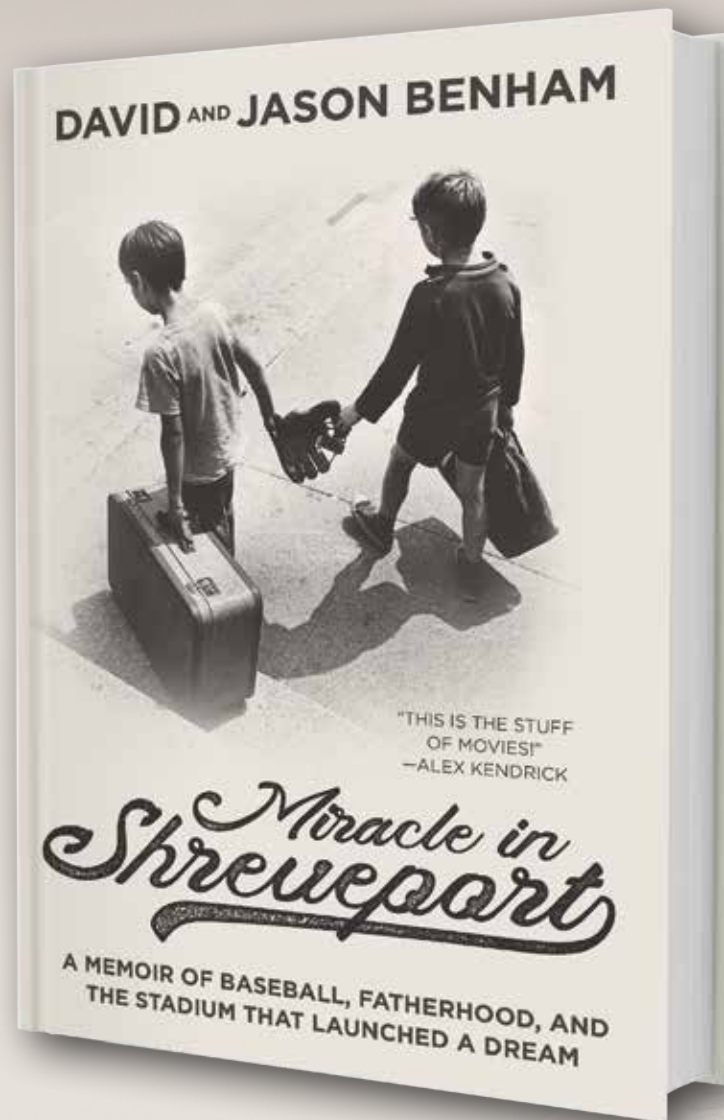
.....
*SERVING CHRIST
AND OTHERS*

EXAMINING HOW
SERVICE IS ESSENTIAL

.....
**ERNIE
JOHNSON**

THE FAITH OF ONE OF SPORTS' MOST RECOGNIZABLE VOICES
.....

A Memoir of Baseball, Fatherhood, and the Stadium That Launched a Dream



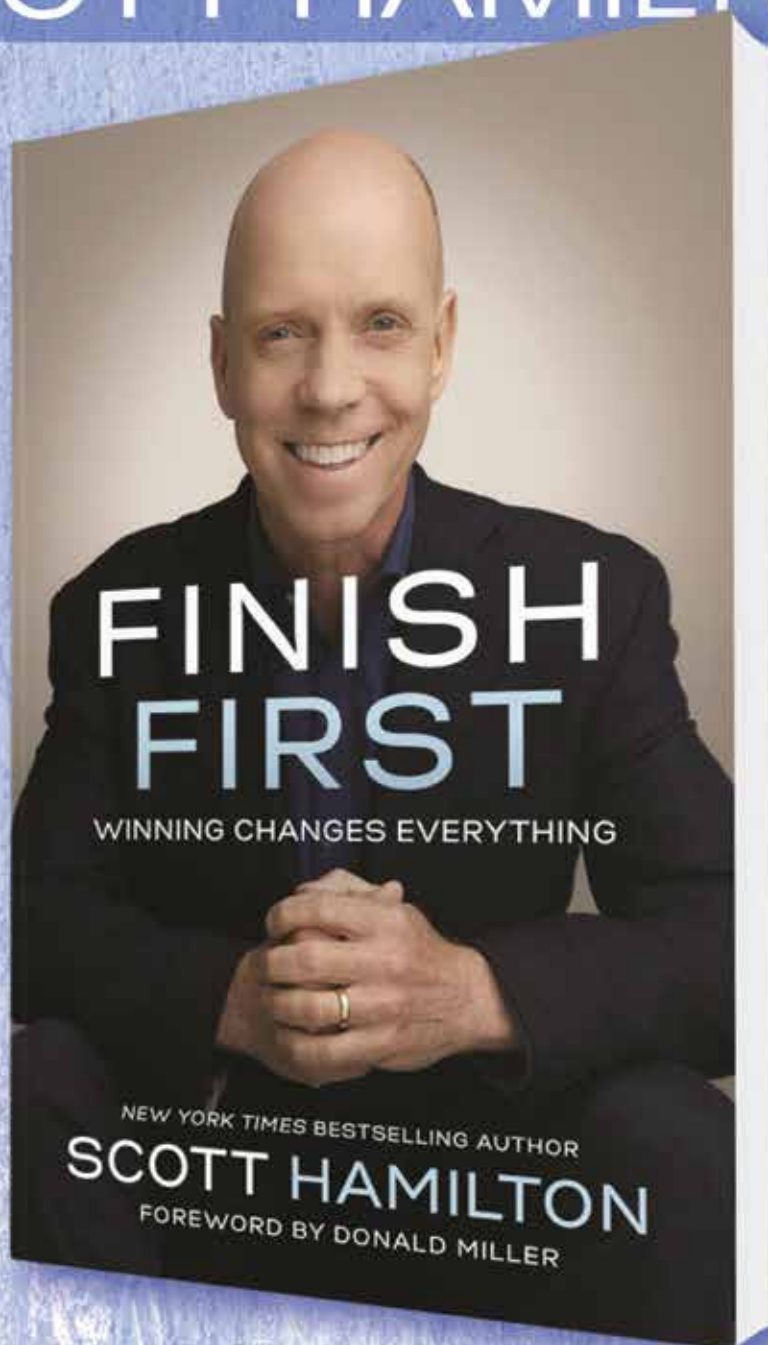
In ***Miracle in Shreveport***, twin brothers David and Jason Benham tell the story of their family's love, the power of prayer, and their dreams of playing professional baseball. In this book, the Benhams call us to remember that when we follow God's dream for us, we find it is better than we could have ever dreamed of ourselves.

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CALLED TO SERVE



TOTALLY HONEST

ERNIE JOHNSON HAS BECOME ONE OF MEDIA'S TOP FAITH VOICES.

BY NATE TAYLOR

PAGE 8

When my career at FCA began in 2008 as the assistant editor of *Sharing the Victory* magazine, I was just a 23-year-old fresh-faced kid excited for the adventure ahead. I felt God calling me to that position, and over the years I have grown and matured in my walk with Him as He continued to reveal Himself to me in every new season of my life.

In 2012, I was promoted to editor, and I enthusiastically ushered in a new era for our publication under the name *FCA Magazine*. The new role gave me the opportunity to meet and interact with some of the biggest names in sports, creating memories I won't forget.

While those experiences were great, the most fulfilling part of this position has always been the actual task of completing each issue, seeing it through from just ideas to printed copies landing in staff offices, homes and business around the globe. Serving all of you, our readers, has meant so much to my family and me.

On that note, it's bittersweet for me to share that this will be my final editor's letter for *FCA Magazine*. Just as I heard God calling me to the magazine, now I hear Him calling me away (to a new position within the ministry of FCA). I'll still be serving our staff around the world, just in a different capacity.

God has called all of us to serve one another in whatever role He's given us, and it's been my pleasure to serve you all—the staff, donors, volunteers and anyone else who's read this magazine over the past decade. As I've done with every issue during that time, I pray that our work has been an inspiration and encouragement to you to listen for God's calling in your life and to follow it, wherever it may lead.

Clay Meyer
Editor

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- Northern Colorado's Kamie Ethridge steps into the FCA Zone
- ESPN's Maria Taylor answers our 6 Questions

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BY CHAD BONHAM

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Editorial Team

Shane Williamson President/CEO
 Nancy Hedrick Executive Editor
 Clay Meyer Editor
 Nate Taylor Content Writer
 Samantha Couch Editorial Assistant
 Matheau Casner Creative Director
 Kayla Weers Graphic Designer
 Nick Dunn Editorial Consultant

Contributing Authors:

Chad Bonham
 David Booth
 Jimmy Page
 Sue Ramsey
 Sarah Rennie

FCA Magazine is published six times a year by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

Subscription: \$16.99 per year

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FCA Vision: To see the world transformed by Jesus Christ through the influence of coaches and athletes.

FCA Mission: To lead every coach and athlete into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and His church.

FCA Values: Integrity, Serving, Teamwork, Excellence

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SERVANTHOOD

Integrity. Serving. Teamwork. Excellence.

Those four words—FCA's four core values—give us a foundation from which we can carry the message of Christ to coaches and athletes through the vehicle of sports. Through God's provision, the ministry has grown beyond anything we could've thought or imagined over the past six decades.

While each of the core values is fundamental to what we do at FCA (and who we are as Christ-followers), I'm excited that this issue of *FCA Magazine* is taking a closer look at the specific core value of "Serving." Think about it: No other action a person can take leaves as profound an impact on another as serving. It's a basic, essential part of the daily Christian walk. Each day, we should be committed to serving others, simply putting their needs and wishes in front of our own.

It reminds me of a lesson I've taught for years at the beginning of each new season as coach of my daughter's volleyball team: Everything starts with a serve. In volleyball, just as in tennis, the action always begins with a serve.

How great would it be if we adopted that mindset in our lives, starting every day with the thought of, "Who can I serve today?" It would be transformational in our families, workplaces, schools and communities if our thoughts, actions, attitudes and words were Spirit-led in such a way that we sought out—and acted upon—opportunities to be salt and light, serving others in all we do.

Paul states in Philippians 2:3-5 (ESV): *"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus..."*

These verses point us to another great example of serving in sports: offensive linemen in football. They are "The Greatest Position Never Seen." Their names rarely appear in the box score, you rarely know their stats, and you probably don't know their names until they're called for a penalty. Yet, they work tirelessly in the trenches serving their team.

However, all those examples pale in comparison to the greatest example and teacher of servanthood: Jesus Christ.

In Philippians 2:7 (NIV), the Apostle Paul says that Christ took *"the very nature of a servant"* when He became flesh and lived among us. And in Matthew 20:28, Jesus said, *"the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Jesus' entire life was one of service to those around Him, the most notable example coming when He washed His disciples' feet on the evening of His betrayal (John 13:1-17). It was the perfect picture of the humility with which He served the disciples. And it was followed by the greatest act of service in the history of mankind when He went to the cross, died, and was resurrected three days later. He sacrificed all of Himself in order to save us.

His example of serving others is an inspiration to me as I seek to serve my family first, followed by all those God has put in my life as a coach, church and community member, and as a part of the FCA family. With service at our core, we as FCA staff members are committed to serving coaches and athletes, coming alongside them to impact every team, campus and community by sharing the gospel, praying, and spending time in God's Word.

Shane Williamson
 FCA President/CEO



ALL ACCESS



FCA'S 2017 MINISTRY REPORT

Last year, FCA witnessed a record-breaking year across the globe, reaching far and wide in unprecedented ways. True to the ministry's 2017 theme of ONE, never before have coaches, athletes and leaders in the sports world been so unified in faith, belief, power and authority for the sake of God's Kingdom.

Sharing the impact of God working through FCA, the annual ministry report is now available with a new look to showcase all that took place in 2017 in even more dynamic ways. Visit 2017.fca.org to view the annual ministry report in its digital version and enter the world of FCA, bearing witness to what God has done through sports to reach His children.

FCAZONE

"FCA's ministry is to be a living, breathing and unapologetic example of the living Word of God. Over many years, it has drawn me closer to Jesus and taught me how to humbly pursue His grace and love."

-Kamie Ethridge
Women's Basketball Coach
Northern Colorado



THANKS FROM FCA MAGAZINE!

Want your own copy of *Called to Coach* by Charles Gee? One could be yours by subscribing, purchasing a gift subscription, or following @FCAMag on Twitter during March or April. We will randomly select five people to receive the book as a thank-you!



ASAMOAH NAMED NEW GLOBAL REGION COORDINATOR

FCA is excited to announce that Vincent Asamoah has been named the Global Region Coordinator (GRC) for the ministry's Central and West Africa Global Regions.

Asamoah was introduced to FCA's ministry while attending Baylor University. It was there that he also learned the game of basketball. Following his time at Baylor, Asamoah returned to Ghana where he led FCA Ghana for six years.

In the GRC position, Asamoah

oversees FCA's strategic development in the Central and West Africa Global Regions, which are aligned with the ministry's Southeast Central and Southwest U.S. Regions. Under his leadership, FCA has the opportunity to see lives of African coaches and athletes transformed by Jesus Christ.




To explore ways to get involved with FCA in Central and West Africa, contact Vincent Asamoah at vasamoah@fca.org.






FCA MAGAZINE RECOMMENDS


LITERATURE:

- The autobiography of the three-time Sports Emmy Award winner who hosts TNT's "Inside the NBA," which illuminates the beauty of life's surprises: *Unscripted* by Ernie Johnson Jr. → 
- A new release of the popular FCA resource that highlights how the Lord is working in top professional hockey players such as Matt Cullen, David Backus and Ryan Carpenter: *The Ultimate Victory: A Hockey New Testament* → 
- The compelling story of how Jayson and Lynette Gee's faith helped them face their son's courageous fight against childhood onset paranoid schizophrenia: *The Battle for Brandon* by Chad Bonham with The Jayson Gee Family → 

TUNES:

- A new album from a familiar name, featuring new collaborations: *A Million Lights* by Michael W. Smith → 

WEB:

- An FCA website that houses a free online hockey resource to help coaches, players and their families grow spiritually throughout the hockey season: fca22.com → 

FAITH & SPORTS CALENDAR

1

MARCH 2018

- 13** NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament begins
- 23** NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament begins
- 29** MLB Opening Day
- 30** Good Friday

APRIL 2018

- 1** Easter Sunday
- 5-8** The Masters
- 11** Stanley Cup Playoffs begin
- 14** NBA Playoffs begin
- 16** Boston Marathon

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6 QUESTIONS WITH MARIA TAYLOR

ESPN AND SEC NETWORK | @MARIATAYLOR7



- 1) My favorite Bible verse is Ephesians 2:10. It tells us that every person is a handiwork of God and that we were placed on this Earth to do works that He has already laid out for us.
- 2) I intentionally bring my faith into my work by always remembering that my job is not my identity. I find my identity in Christ.
- 3) Something most people don't know about being on TV is that there are hundreds of people who aren't on-air talent that make the broadcast happen.
- 4) The ministry of FCA is important because it reminds athletes that they are performing for an audience of ONE on and off the court or field, and that there is nothing they can do or say to gain more love than they have already been given by Jesus.
- 5) One piece of career advice I'd share is choose a career path that matches the strengths that God has blessed you with.
- 6) One piece of spiritual advice I'd share with kids is never stop praying. Even the shortest prayers can keep you close to God and relying on Him.

TOTALLY HONEST

ERNIE JOHNSON, ONE OF AMERICA'S TOP SPORTS BROADCASTERS, HAS BECOME ONE OF THE INDUSTRY'S TOP FAITH VOICES.

BY NATE TAYLOR



MICROPHONE ON, STAGE SET AND A CROWD AWAITING.

BY 1999, SUCH A SCENE ROUTINELY GAVE ERNIE JOHNSON COMFORT. AS THE LEAD ANCHOR AND FACE OF TNT SPORTS, HE PREPARED WITH EARNEST TENACITY FOR EVERY SHOW, SEARCHING FOR THE APPROPRIATE WORDS, STATISTICS AND NUANCE TO SHARE WITH HIS AUDIENCE. JOHNSON'S ENERGY AND PROFESSIONALISM IN FRONT OF A CAMERA HAD MADE HIM A HOUSEHOLD FRIEND TO MILLIONS OF SPORTS FANS.

But on this morning in late December 1999, he was nervous.

Johnson's audience (about 1,000) was a tiny fraction of his normal viewership, but this was in person, not on TV. And sports was not the primary topic. The Peach Bowl FCA Breakfast in Atlanta was an event to share the gospel of Jesus Christ to coaches and athletes before the annual bowl game.

He arrived on the recommendation of Tim Cash, a close friend. For almost two years, Cash had walked in faith with Johnson. Together, the men studied how the Bible related to their lives, one a former professional baseball pitcher and the other a famous TV host.

Cash spoke at the event the previous three years, but he had a different idea for this year, and he shared it over the phone with Atlanta FCA Area Director Sid Callaway.

"It's time for him to start sharing his faith publicly," Cash told Callaway.

"Who is it?" Callaway asked, pondering possible athletes.

"It's Ernie Johnson," Cash responded.

"Are you serious?!" Callaway shouted.

"The dude's been walking with Jesus," Cash said. "He's legit, but it's time."

FCA's event was Johnson's maiden voyage. While uneasy at first, he shared his testimony, explaining how he came to Christ at age 41. He illustrated—with his usual calm and clear tone—how God changed his life.

"The first time you're in front of a room of 1,000 people and you're delivering the gospel," Johnson said, "you grow that way."

Cash watched as Johnson showed the audience a silver coin. Imprinted on the coin was 1997, the year Johnson became a believer. He told the crowd he kept that coin as a reminder of his new birth, his salvation.

"Ernie crushed it," Cash said.

When the event ended, Cash knew he was right: Johnson's first faith message was just the beginning of God's plan.

...

Before Johnson loved Jesus Christ, he loved his father.

Ernie Johnson Sr. was a stellar relief pitcher for the Milwaukee Braves. In 1957, he helped the Braves win the



World Series. When the Braves moved to Atlanta, he became the team's broadcaster. Following him almost everywhere—to the ballpark, banquets and luncheons—was his son.

Throughout Ernie Jr.'s childhood, his father taught him to cherish life. Their bond came through sports and laughter, which sometimes intertwined. During one of Ernie Jr.'s little league games in the mid-1960s, the opposing team hit a ground-rule double over the fence. The center fielder and left fielder, Ernie Jr.'s teammates, wanted to retrieve the ball. But they got distracted when they found ripe blackberries in the woods. Their mid-game snack provided much laughter for Ernie Jr. and his father.

Ernie Jr. learned to appreciate life's "blackberry moments"—those unexpected happenings that make life extraordinary—from his father.

Later, he used his sense of humor to start a relationship with Cheryl, a bank teller in Macon, Georgia. Johnson, then working at WMAZ Channel 13, would deposit his checks at Cheryl's bank, and she agreed to date Johnson because he was funny. She reciprocated her interest by giving him crushed lollipops through the bank's drawer. When Johnson married Cheryl on Aug. 21, 1982, his best man was his father.

In 1990, Johnson received the promotion from Turner Broadcasting that propelled his career.

He began hosting "Inside the NBA," TNT's pregame and postgame show now beloved by fans for its creative format and honest, off-the-cuff discussions. Johnson's teammates on the show—Charles Barkley, Kenny Smith and Shaquille O'Neal—are all either Hall of Famers or NBA champions (or, in O'Neal's case, both). Managing and navigating the egos,



debates, stats, highlights and commercial breaks is Johnson, the host who possesses such an elegant style that “Inside the NBA” has won nine Emmys.

The show skyrocketed in popularity when executive producer Tim Kiely urged Johnson to ditch the teleprompter. “Inside the NBA,” in essence, became unscripted.

Now 61, Johnson knows his life is also unscripted, and that became the one-word title of his autobiography, released last year.

Play-by-play broadcaster Ron Thulin was one of the first people Johnson met when he joined Turner. Both newcomers to the company, the men became friends while traveling to sporting events together.

“TV is a battle of egos,” said Thulin, also an FCA volunteer in Dallas. “Everybody is kind of afraid to let their guard down. Ernie never put a guard up, and he knew I never did.”

By 1997, Johnson’s biggest purpose in life was to be the best broadcaster he could be.

“I thought that was the most important thing,” he said.

His oldest children, Eric and Maggie, asked Johnson and Cheryl why they, as a family, didn’t go to church. After talking with Cheryl, the couple decided to take their children to Crossroads, a nondenominational church they drove by all the time in north Atlanta.

Johnson was moved at the first service he attended. Pastor Kevin Myers asked the congregation two questions: Who’s the provider in your family, and are you pursuing happiness or wholeness?

Myers’ questions challenged Johnson, who knew he needed to be a better husband and father. Johnson returned to Crossroads the next three weeks, and then asked Myers to lunch. On Wednesday, Dec. 10, 1997,

Johnson had a life-changing “blackberry moment”: At an O’Charley’s restaurant, he prayed to God and became a Christian.

...

Before Johnson could talk, he needed to learn how to walk.

The following year, Johnson joined one of Crossroads’ men’s Bible studies. Each Friday morning, after hosting “Inside the NBA” the previous night, Johnson met Doug Moran and 10 other men at church at 6 a.m.

“He just happened to be one of the guys,” Moran said. “That’s the way he wanted it.”

A few months later, through a friend, Cash learned of Johnson’s newfound faith. Johnson joined another men’s Bible study, this one led by Cash, who started the group for believers who find themselves in the public eye. Johnson has been in the group ever since.

The men—including Hall of Fame pitcher John Smoltz, popular comedian Jeff Foxworthy and former Braves third baseman Terry Pendleton—discussed the Bible in a curtained-off section of JR’s Log House, a barbecue restaurant. The privacy away from other customers and potential fans created an environment where everyone could be their authentic selves. The group studied, prayed and did outreach programs.

Johnson became the designated Bible reader because the group loved the smoothness of his voice.

“He was our version of James Earl Jones reading the Bible,” said Cash, who mentored athletes for Unlimited Potential, a sports ministry, before becoming a pastor in 2011.

Johnson is grateful for both Bible study groups, which

showed him how difficult it could be to live a life of faith without accountability and camaraderie.

"It was invaluable to go through situations and see what the Bible says," Johnson said. "This [became] the road map for my life."

Cash, along with Thulin, exposed Johnson to the ministry of FCA. Since his first testimony at the 1999 Peach Bowl FCA Breakfast, Johnson has hosted the event and interviewed athletes about their faith for the past 17 years. He appreciates the mentorship and discipleship aspects of the ministry.

"Faith can't be a slice of your life," he said. "It's got to be the crust of that entire pie, so that you're viewing everything that goes on through the lens of faith. That's where FCA is at its best."

...

Before Johnson could serve the public, he needed to serve his family.

While he has unique bonds with all his "Inside the NBA" co-hosts (especially Barkley, whom he's worked closely with since 2000), none of them are his best teammates. That title belongs to Cheryl. Her "blackberry moment" of giving her life to Christ came on March 25, 1998.

Even before they became believers, Myers had explained to the couple how he saw God working in their lives when they adopted four children out of love, empathy and compassion.

In 1990, Cheryl watched a "20/20" special report on the overcrowded orphanages in Romania. Thousands of children were being neglected. Five months later, in 1991, Cheryl convinced Johnson to adopt Michael, a 3-year-old boy with special needs. Michael eventually learned how to walk and later speak. Two years later, Johnson and Cheryl adopted Carmen from Paraguay.

"She has taught me so much," Johnson said of Cheryl. "I wanted to play it safe sometimes. She had bigger dreams."

In her professional life, Cheryl has worked with Metro Atlanta Recovery Residences, a nonprofit organization helping women recover from substance addiction. In 2008, she became the president and CEO of Street Grace, a faith-based nonprofit that intends to end domestic minor sex trafficking. Through Street Grace, Cheryl and Johnson adopted Allison and Ashley, half-sisters, in 2011.

"You have to put other people first," Johnson said. "This can't be all about you."

As his faith grew, Johnson considered leaving TNT. Should he continue his career after turning his life over to God? Should he try to find a faith-based job? He asked Cheryl what he should do. She responded on his spiritual birthday

by giving him a large compass as a gift. Cheryl's handwritten note with it reminded him to remember the day he found his ultimate direction in life—and to let God direct him.

"The Lord put Cheryl and Ernie together 36 years ago knowing this would come," Thulin said. "He knew their hearts."

Johnson stayed with TNT. He knew the platform God gave him would provide opportunities for him to share his faith.

One such moment came in August 2003 when, after noticing a bump near his left ear, he was diagnosed with stage two non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Johnson met with Myers at a Starbucks. They chose to put their faith in God that Johnson's cancer battle would be for His glory. Myers also wrote two words—"trust" and "period"—on a Starbucks napkin.

Johnson used those words to create a mantra for his treatment: "Trust God—Period."

In 2006, after fans noticed his growth, he was candid about his cancer after the NBA's All-Star weekend. Six grueling chemotherapy treatments later, Johnson's cancer was in remission, where it has remained since. He returned to "Inside the NBA" on Oct. 31, 2006, and never missed a show. A year later, Johnson won the Emmy for outstanding studio host. He

could sense his father's smile over the phone that night.

"God sometimes whispers and sometimes shouts that His way is better than my way," Johnson said during his acceptance speech.

Several years later, Johnson experienced hardship again when his father died on August 12, 2011, at age 87. Four weeks later, Michael, who has muscular dystrophy, had to be put on a ventilator to remain alive. Since then, Johnson spends most of his mornings caring for Michael, now 29, at their home. With his son unable to do anything on his own, Johnson bathes and shaves Michael and helps

suction his lungs of phlegm to clear congestion.

In a moving ESPN "E:60" profile on Johnson's family, the piece features Michael's knowledge and love of cars. Every year, Johnson takes his son to the Atlanta International Auto Show. When Johnson brings Michael to his Bible study on Thursdays, some of the men bring car magazines.

"The Son of Man came to serve, not to be served," Johnson said. "Being a servant is where I find myself."

...

Before Johnson could share his thoughts with the world, he needed to write his script.

Nov. 10, 2016, was not the time for "Inside the NBA" to be completely unscripted. Executives had given Johnson, Barkley, Smith and O'Neal around two minutes each to express their feelings on the recent presidential election that left the country divided.

**"...GOD CREATED ME,
AND THAT'S WHO
I ANSWER TO.
I'M A CHRISTIAN."
-ERNIE JOHNSON**

"We realized everybody in the world is talking about this election," Johnson said. "We're going to talk about it, too."

What could be done with just two minutes?

In those 135 seconds, since shared millions and millions of times on social media, Johnson told the audience something few sports broadcasters ever have. He told the viewers he couldn't vote for Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump. Instead, he voted for John Kasich, "knowing full well [he] wasn't going to win, but I left with a clear conscience."

Then he shared the most important message.

"I never know from one election to the next who's going to be in the Oval Office, but I always know who's on the throne," Johnson said into the camera. "I'm on this earth because God created me, and that's Who I answer to. I'm a Christian. I follow a guy named Jesus; you might have heard of Him. And the greatest commandment He gave me was to love others. And Scripture also tells us to pray for our leaders, and that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to pray for Donald Trump."

Within less than a week, the clip became the most socially engaged NBA-related segment in TNT's history.

"I'm here to pray for my

leaders," Johnson said.

"That is as honest and transparent as I can possibly be."

When he left the studio that night, another thought entered his mind. He had been at Turner for 27 years "for such a time as this."

The overwhelming majority of comments from online viewers of Johnson's testimony were positive. His Twitter following ballooned, and several Christian leaders praised him. Johnson believes his tenure at TNT, the fact that people had watched him for years, helped him build equity.

Johnson's friends were encouraged and amazed.

"He glorifies God, and he does it for the good of his neighbor," Cash said. "The dude has a gift to be a peacemaker."

Thulin cried.

"He's set the bar very high for all of us to publicly stand for the Lord," Thulin said. "When Ernie did that, it made me realize I've got to be even more vocal."

More than a year later, Johnson still prays for the President.

...

Before he accepted his award, Johnson needed to share his story.

Johnson arrived in Irving, Texas, on Nov. 12, 2017, on the recommendation of Thulin. The DFW FCA wanted to honor Johnson with the Tom Landry Excellence of Character award. When asked by Thulin if he could be the keynote speaker for the annual coaches' appreciation dinner, Johnson, similar to his father, couldn't say no.

Inside the Irving Convention Center, a crowd of around

700 people watched Johnson. Rick Bowles, the North Texas multi-area director for FCA, called Johnson's presentation unique compared to previous speakers.

For 30 minutes, the audience heard Johnson narrate a slideshow of photographs.

Johnson clicked through his life's "blackberry moments." A photo of himself and his little league teammates. A photo of himself in a miniature Braves uniform, looking up to his father in his actual Braves uniform. A photo of himself pumping his left fist immediately after getting married to Cheryl.

Johnson, full of energy, encouraged the crowd to embrace the unscripted nature of God's plan for their lives.



*Ernie and Cheryl Johnson
(back row, far right)
celebrated Father's Day in
2016 with their six children
and Ernie's mother, Lois.*

Johnson clicked through his faith transformation. A photo of Cheryl smiling in the Romanian orphanage while holding Michael. A photo of his coin from 1997, representing his salvation in God. A photo of the compass and note Cheryl gave him to make sure he goes in the direction God desires.

Johnson, full of nostalgic emotions, encouraged the crowd to love Jesus Christ.

"The impact just floored people," Thulin said. "Everybody there had to really take a look at themselves and ask, 'Am I doing enough for my Lord?'"

As Bowles listened to Johnson, he also peered around at the crowd. No one in the audience was distracted. One woman wiped away tears. Some teenage boys, aspiring college football players, were weeping.

"The message was unbelievable," Bowles said, "It was just him sharing his heart."

Johnson clicked through his tribulations and triumphs. A photo of himself bald from the chemotherapy. A photo of a deteriorating Michael, bound to his wheelchair. A photo of him carrying his father's casket. A photo of himself and Cheryl smiling after 35 years of marriage. A photo of Eric's wedding. A photo of Maggie's wedding. A photo of his blessed family, including six children and two grandchildren.

Johnson, full of motivation, encouraged the crowd to, "Trust God—Period."

FCA

BRINGING IT HOME DEVOTIONAL

SURRENDER TO SERVE

BY SARAH RENNICKE

READY:

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

- Matthew 20:28

SET:

When Ernie Johnson dedicated his life to the Lord, it turned him upside down and inside out. He soaked in the teachings and love language of Christ and gave God the go-ahead to mold his heart.

While Johnson had been a believer for years, God was calling him to something more, to greater risk and deeper boldness to profess his faith and share his story in a public setting. Johnson stepped out and began sharing his testimony, his first experience coming out of service to a friend.

Since then, Johnson has dedicated his life to serving. He serves God, then his family as husband and father, and then his sphere of influence as a television personality. He holds himself accountable to the men in his small group, but also through a humble approach of loving God and others.

Johnson's mentality reminds us to live life through the lens of faith. We must die to self to resurrect a life in Christ.

Service is a state of heart, a bending

of our own will to seek that of our Father. It's when we come to the end of our own ability that we are sent out of our comfort zone, and we hear the voice of God nudging us to something unfamiliar. We reach out to do what we think we cannot, surrendering our fears for the sake of someone else.

"You have to put other people first," Johnson reminds us. "This can't be all about you."

It was never all about us.

Jesus, the ultimate picture of servanthood, bent His immortal frame in human flesh, turning down alleyways to call out to the marginalized and forgotten. He submerged His hands in water and washed the feet of His own followers. And He hung on a cross for humanity, bearing the brunt of God's wrath so we would have an eternal home in Heaven. His example should permeate our every thought and action as we mold our hearts in a posture of vulnerability and take up a servant-minded position like our Savior.

There is no better act of love than to lay down our lives for another. And, because God so frequently works in reverse, it's often in our



pouring out that our own spirit is finally filled.

GO:

- Where do you find yourself struggling to serve others when you don't want to?
- How can you show a teammate you care for them?
- In what ways can you ask God to guide you out of your comfort zone?

WORKOUT:

John 13:13-16

John 15:13

Galatians 5:13-14

OVERTIME:

Father God, I am thankful that I have the example of Jesus to show me what it means to serve. Sometimes I am afraid to leave what I'm used to and sacrifice my time, resources and words to give when it is inconvenient for me. Show me what it is to lose myself for the sake of Your gospel. Amen.

Gear Up For Spring Sports

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JULIE GOODENOUGH

ABILENE CHRISTIAN
BASKETBALL



“We want to go in and be the light of Jesus.”

“Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Over the past two decades, Julie Goodenough has found creative ways to incorporate Scripture into coaching. At Abilene Christian, each player selects one word—coupled with a Bible verse—that will serve as their motivation during the season. The day before each game, one player shares their word and verse. By the end of the season, Goodenough’s players have internalized almost 20 verses that impact their lives on and off the court.

encourage coaches to not talk down to your players. Make sure you are an encourager.

We’ve won back-to-back conference championships. We’re not soft on our kids by any means, but we do try to highlight things they do well. We just choose to be positive and optimistic, rather than negative or sarcastic. We tell our players all the time we want to go into an arena and play the game in such a way that people think when we leave, “Man, there was something different about that ACU team.” We want to go in and be the light of Jesus.

FCA: How do you share your faith with your team?

JG: We talk a lot to our players about having the words of the Lord in your heart, so that when you’re in some particular situation, that’s what comes to your mind. We have a mentor program where all of our players tell us about their dream jobs. Then we find Christian women in Abilene who have that job or are in that career path—or at least something very close. We then match those women with our players. It gives our players an adult, female, Christian role model in the community who they can become friends with and eventually use as a resource for that dream job they’re trying to get.

We also have team chapel every Thursday morning. We just meet in our locker room, but we try really hard to keep that from being about basketball. We try to just carve out that time to talk about Jesus and talk about topics that are relevant to maybe something our team is going through.

FCA: What advice would you give coaches about incorporating faith into their program?

JG: My line of advice is, “A lot of Jesus for your players, without ever saying Jesus.” Just be the most positive adult in their lives. There are times when we have to be critical, but it doesn’t mean you need to do that in a demeaning way. My staff and I, we do not use foul language. We think that’s very negative. I would

FCA: How has your family been an encouragement to you in your profession?

JG: I get so engrossed in my job, and I am very, very fortunate that my husband, Rob, and my daughters, Bailey and Macy, are so supportive of my team. They’ve always been that way. I could not do this without Rob. There’s absolutely no way. And my daughters have just grown up in this. I was a head coach when I was pregnant with both of them. They just have the sweetest spirits. They feel like they have several hundred sisters whom they got to know through this experience.

FCA: What do you hope your players say about you?

JG: I hope people remember that we try to do things the right way. My staff and our players, we try to lead lives of integrity and just be godly women, striving for excellence in all areas of our lives. I love my players. I hope they all look back on their time playing for me and just know that they were loved. I think I’m just focused on leaving a legacy of integrity, just striving to do things the right way.

FCA

ABOUT THE COACH:

HOMETOWN: Haskell, Texas

HEAD COACHING CAREER:

- Abilene Christian (2012-Present)
- Charleston Southern (2006-12)
- Oklahoma State (2002-2005)
- Hardin Simmons (1993-2002)

NOTES:

- FCA’s Kay Yow Heart of a Coach Award Recipient (2017)
- Coach of the Year Awards
 - Southland Conference (2016)
 - Lone Star Conference (2013)
- Hardin Simmons Hall of Fame inductee (2007)

FCA STAFF QUOTE:

“Coach Goodenough’s faith is strong, and it’s not just a part of her life; her faith is her life and it’s impossible to know her and not see Jesus in everything that she says and does.”

-Lisa Coleman
FCA Area Representative
Abilene, Texas

Courtesy of Jeremy Enlow/ACU Athletics



SIERRA ALLEN

ABILENE CHRISTIAN
BASKETBALL

HEART OF AN ATHLETE®



“Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.” – Colossians 3:23

Growing up, Sierra Allen's parents taught her the importance of trusting God. They also instilled in her the dream of playing for Abilene Christian, their alma mater—her father, Brent, as a pole vaulter and her mother, Michelle, a volleyball player. One of Sierra's biggest blessings in life was God orchestrating a chance for her to meet coach Julie Goodenough at an event. Sierra's prayer was answered when Goodenough offered her a scholarship.

FCA: How has your faith grown at Abilene Christian?

SA: Since my freshman year, every single morning or evening (depending on my schedule), I always try to find a quiet time just to read Scripture. That has definitely played a huge part. Just to sit and read Scripture and go into prayer with the Lord, it really has impacted not only my spiritual journey but also on the court and academically. Once I get that time, I'm just kind of at peace with everything. It's really neat how, over my four years, I've seen how much I've grown. It's not something that comes overnight. You have to work at it each day.

FCA: How has FCA impacted you?

SA: My freshman year, I remember Whitney (West) Swinford. I looked up to her, and she encouraged me to come to FCA. It was such a great feeling having people who were athletes, who were going through the exact same thing I was, and having that community to share your faith. As I've grown more and gotten to go to more FCA events, it's just been really awesome getting to sit there and even witness to the younger athletes and help them on their journeys.

I want to be successful, and I want to help my team succeed. I want to please my coaches, but what's most important is making sure that what I'm doing is leading my teammates closer to Christ.

FCA: Has your faith been challenged?

SA: My faith has really been challenged a lot. I've had to learn to find my role on the team, to find that role God is calling you to play each year. That's probably been the hardest thing, understanding where I stand and just holding my ground.

There's a lot of different individuals you meet through your time as an athlete. One thing that's been

“I'm here doing this work for the Lord.”

very challenging is standing up for what I believe in, being sure that I'm supporting the morals and standards that I want to uphold for myself.

FCA: In what ways has your coach influenced you?

SA: Coach Goodenough has always been a wonderful example. I relate to her a lot. My favorite thing about her is she wants us to excel in everything we do. She's a Division I coach, yet her most important goal for each and every one of us is that someday we're going to be amazing, godly wives and mothers. That speaks so much to her character and her love for each of us. She wants us to see God first and make sure that even after our journey here, when we build a family someday, He is the center of our household. It has been a privilege getting to play for such an awesome woman.

FCA: Why is Colossians 3:23 one of your favorite Bible verses?

SA: That's one I've always held onto. As an athlete, you get so caught up in wanting to be the star, wanting all this individual attention. You're always striving to be the best you can be. That verse just really spoke to me because, at the end of the day, I'm here doing this work for the Lord. That verse has just really blessed me. It's definitely brought me a lot of peace when I get frustrated with my performance. I try to remember it's not about me; it's about Him.

FCA

ABOUT THE ATHLETE:

HOMETOWN:

Roscoe, Texas

CLASS:

Senior

POSITION:

Forward/Center

NOTES:

- Southland Conference Commissioner's Honor Roll (2017, 2016, 2015)
- Air Force Classic All-Tournament team selection (2015)
- Big Country FCA Game All-Star and Julie Goodenough MVP Award winner (2014)

FCA STAFF QUOTE:

“Sierra's faith shines through her 24/7. She has this joy about her that could only come from having faith and hope in Jesus Christ. Her faith allows her to have a positive attitude during practices, games and just in life, no matter the circumstance.”

-Whitney Swinford
FCA Campus Representative
Abilene, Texas

**"I pursue as my goal
the prize promised by
God's heavenly
call in Christ Jesus."
—Philippians 3:14**

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DAVID BO
DETROIT



FELLOWSHIP OF
CHRISTIAN
ATHLETES
fca.org



(HCSB)

DOOTH
RED WINGS

COMMITTED TO CHRIST

VOVA DEMEDIUK HAS USED LACROSSE TO SHARE CHRIST THROUGH FCA IN UKRAINE, EVEN WHILE ENDURING IMMENSE PERSONAL TRIALS AND PAIN.

BY CHAD BONHAM



In the summer of 2013, Vova Demediuk was living the good life. He had a great job in Rivne, Ukraine, as an engineer at a nuclear power plant. He was also newly married to his wife, Sveta.

Something, however, was missing. He had recently become a Christian. Yet he knew God had something deeper in store for his life. While most would have been content with the status quo, Vova was not. He felt a burning desire to do more, to be more.

What brought that change, ironically, was a burgeoning relationship with FCA and an unexpected love affair with a sport he barely knew existed. That sent him down a winding road filled with trials, ultimate devastation, and a reveal of God's redeeming nature. For better or worse, Vova's status quo is far behind him.

...

The first steps in Vova's journey took place in 2010, when he met FCA Ukraine director Andriy Kravtsov at an FCA Camp hosted at Kravtsov's church. Vova, a new Christian, was growing in his faith.

"I didn't feel like the power plant was what God wanted for me," Vova said. "I wanted to do something more. I wanted to work with FCA. It was so great to speak about God to coaches and athletes."

By 2012, Vova's relationship with the Lord had grown even stronger, and so had his desire to make a significant career change. His heart was "exploding inside." That led to a pivotal moment with Kravtsov over coffee, where Vova could no longer contain his excitement. He reached across the table. He grabbed Kravtsov by the shirt.

"I want to be part of FCA!" he exclaimed. "I want to start a lacrosse ministry!"

Kravtsov was startled and confused: "Why lacrosse?"

"I don't know," Vova replied. "I saw it on YouTube."

"How many lacrosse players are there in Ukraine?" Kravtsov asked.

"None yet."

Vova was determined to make that last word—"yet"—mean something. His first move was to learn everything he could about the sport. He looked for



places to play in Ukraine, but found nothing. Finally, he met a man who learned about lacrosse in the United States. Vova drove six hours to spend time learning the rules from this man, who gave him his first lacrosse stick and balls.

"I wanted to be a coach," Vova said. "But to do that, I knew I needed to be a good player first."

So, Vova found some teams in Poland. The problem: The teams were nine hours away, and getting across the border could sometimes take up to six more hours. Still, Vova reached out to one of the teams and asked if he could join. Even though he had no experience, they offered him a tryout. Vova earned a chance to play and spent the next three seasons commuting back and forth.

During this process, Vova met and married Sveta. She immediately supported her husband's dream and helped lay the foundation for FCA Lacrosse in Ukraine.

Vova started coaching the sport locally. His first team was a group of 10-year-old boys, some of whom Vova was able to help lead to Christ.

In March 2014, Vova held the first lacrosse tournament in Ukraine. Three teams from Kiev participated, although none were able to field a full squad. Vova played for one of the teams and served as a referee for the other games. Most importantly, the event served as an evangelism opportunity.

"Our team could openly share the love of Christ," Vova said. "This tournament was a real breakthrough in Ukrainian lacrosse as a whole. Some teams were lacking in equipment, but thanks to Dan Britton [FCA executive director of international ministry] and the whole FCA Lacrosse team, we could share our gloves, helmets and sticks with them. It was a historic moment for lacrosse in Ukraine."

Everything was coming together. Vova was catching a glimpse of his future in sports ministry and his marriage with Sveta. Things, Vova thought, were never better.

One month after the lacrosse tournament, Vova and Sveta learned they were expecting their first child. Three months before the baby was due, Sveta received a horrifying diagnosis: She had leukemia.

Vova placed his life on hold.

The doctors gave Sveta just two weeks to live. Even if she did live long enough to give birth, the baby, according to doctors, would almost certainly have problems. The doctors recommended the couple have an abortion. Sveta refused. She instead spoke these powerful words to Vova: "Our God is strong. Our God is big. He's going to take care of us."

Kravtsov and other believers throughout Ukraine began praying for the couple. Meanwhile, a Polish hospital invited Sveta to come for treatment. The doctors there were going to try to save her and the baby. But the outlook was still grim. Most believed Sveta or the baby—or both—would die during surgery.

After doctors removed the tumor, Sveta's blood would not

clot. Then, she went into labor nearly three months early. The baby was born, weighing just one pound. She was tiny, small enough to fit in the palm of a hand. Vova and Sveta named their girl Nicole, which means "victory." At the time, no one knew how prophetic or tragic Nicole's name might become.

For the next year, Vova went back and forth between two hospitals, watching the two loves of his life fight for theirs. In one hospital, Sveta was undergoing chemotherapy. In the other, Nicole was under the watchful eye of ICU doctors and nurses.

"The pain," Vova said, "was bottomless."

The process not only weighed Vova down physically, emotionally and spiritually, but it also became a huge financial burden. He needed \$300,000 for his family's medical bills.

Kravtsov went to work. He mobilized churches in Ukraine and Poland to cover the bulk of the expenses. People randomly showed up to help, including one man who single-handedly covered the \$100,000 needed for Sveta's bone marrow transplant. An additional \$30,000 came from FCA supporters in the United States.

It was a miracle of provision that led to a miracle of life. Nicole weathered the storm, and Sveta went into remission.

Sveta's triumph, however, was short-lived. Three months after receiving a clean bill of health, her cancer returned. Less than two months later, she passed away.

Ravaged, Vova faced the daunting task of bringing his wife's body back to Ukraine. Once arrangements were made, they were able to have what Kravtsov described as a "celebration of life," where more than 3,000 people attended to support the family. Some came who didn't even know Sveta or Vova, but their influence had made a significant impact.

Vova was devastated. Less than two years earlier, everything seemed almost perfect, and now it had fallen apart.

The funeral provided a brief respite from the grief.

"In that moment, God hugged us really strong," Vova said. "He held us in His hands. It was a special time for us."

Vova spent the next year taking care of Nicole. He tried, somehow, to move forward. Nicole needed special attention for her physical development, which was challenging because of her eyesight loss at birth. Vova didn't know what to do next other than to talk to God.

"I don't want to cry all the time," he prayed. "I don't want to ask You why. I just want to live and be happy with You. Heal me, and take my pain, and give me happiness."

Vova had been faithful. God showed His faithfulness to him. At the end of his long grieving process, Vova met a woman named Marichka. "They were made for each other," Kravtsov said. The couple fell in love and got married a few months later in October 2016. God blessed Vova with a new best friend, a ministry partner, and He'd given Nicole a new mother.





“They make perfect sense together,” Kravtsov said. “They make a gorgeous couple, and Vova’s daughter has a mom who cares about her and is helping her walk through this rehab.”

Nicole, in fact, turned out to be perfectly named. She can walk, and a groundbreaking surgery restored her eyesight. Vova said Nicole isn’t the only one who has experienced a miracle throughout such an experience.

“God has been healing me,” he said. “He took my tears and gave me happiness.”



Vova and Marichka are working diligently to grow FCA Lacrosse in Ukraine. They moved to Kiev during the fall of 2017 and set a goal of starting 22 clubs in the next 10 years with Christian coaches who are committed to sharing the gospel with their players.

Vova’s vision for developing lacrosse across the country also includes deepening a relationship with the International Lacrosse Federation. Another key step is getting grants for equipment.

Britton has seen the work Vova is doing in Ukraine. As a former college and professional lacrosse player, he participated in one of Vova’s camps and saw the potential in how lacrosse can change a nation. More importantly, he believes Vova’s personal story will be the most powerful aspect of his ministry.

“Vova is one of my heroes of the faith,” Britton said. “Even though he has been through so many trials, he has grown in his faith as a result and continues to shine for Jesus. Vova always has the joy of the Lord in his heart, and

his big smile always gives you the assurance that God is in control of his life. His vision to spread lacrosse throughout Ukraine and impact coaches and athletes has given him a foundation of purpose and hope to overcome the trials.”

Perhaps more than anyone else, Kravtsov has enjoyed his close view of Vova’s incredible journey. He believes that everything Vova has overcome will guarantee his success.

“Vova is a faithful leader who is completely ready to take on this challenge,” Kravtsov said. “He’s passionate about his place in the ministry. The Lord is allowing that ministry to flourish.

“We’ve gone from not having the sport here at all to now having annual lacrosse training. Today, I don’t know who doesn’t know what lacrosse is. It’s been awesome to see how it’s growing. It’s not growing because we’re so good. It’s growing because God is so great.”

That’s what Vova is counting on. He knows better than most what it takes to trust in God and rely on Him for everything.

“Faith can do anything,” Vova said. “There is faith when it seems like you’ve lost everything you’re standing on—the faith that can take you through the hardships of life, the faith of that person is stronger than the faith that can move the mountains.”

FCA

STRONG

FCA SPORTS BIBLE HANDBOOK

In 2018, FCA will expand its international ministry resources with the production of the Strong *FCA Sports Bible Handbook* in eight languages: Spanish, French, Portuguese, Russian, Ukrainian, Korean, Mandarin and Urdu.

The *FCA Sports Bible Handbook* will include the same FCA Camp and Huddle ministry resources available in the *FCA Athlete’s Bible*, which is produced annually in English.



Vova, Nicole and Marichka Demediuk



MINISTRY MOMENTS & PRAYER REQUESTS FROM THE FIELD



MID-ATLANTIC

FIELD VP: **JIMMY PAGE**
MIDATLANTICFCA.ORG

Last fall, 130 staff members from the Mid-Atlantic Region gathered for its annual All-Staff Capacity Conference. We competed, learned, and grew as a team, prepared to get back out in the field to impact coaches and athletes from New Jersey; Delaware; Pennsylvania; Virginia; Washington, D.C.; Maryland; and FCA Surf and Lacrosse!



PRAYER REQUESTS:

1. For our 12 prospective staff members raising funds to become full-time staff as soon as possible.
2. For new ministry opportunities as we reach club and travel teams in every sport.
3. For our expansion of "Complete Campus Ministry" as we actively form team Huddles to reach every coach and athlete.



EAST ASIA

REGIONAL INTERNATIONAL COORDINATOR: **MARK STEPHENS**

We are praising the Lord as we continue to see great results from our outreach in East Asia, witnessing many people making first-time commitments to Christ. More than 60 leaders from



14 countries came to Singapore in December to participate in a training that covered coaches ministry and fundraising. We are excited to see these leaders put this new training in action over this year. We also produced the first-ever FCA Camp Bible Handbook in Korean, with more translations planned for 2018.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

1. For God to bring more workers for the harvest.
2. God's protection for those in restricted areas who are doing His work in East Asia.
3. Wisdom for the next steps in our ministry growth.



ROCKIES

FIELD VP: **MIKE SANFRATELLO**
ROCKIESFCA.ORG

The 45th Annual FCA Fiesta Bowl Breakfast was highlighted by keynote speaker Jonathan Evans, chaplain for the Dallas Cowboys and son of Tony Evans, the well-known author and pastor. Jonathan brought an inspiring message to more than 1,300 people. A coach and a player from Washington and Penn State, respectively, also shared how their faith in Jesus helps them on and off the field. It was a great event, and we look forward to hosting the 46th annual event in December.



PRAYER REQUESTS:

1. That leadership in Utah and New Mexico will rise up!
2. For FCA Coaches Weekend in Phoenix.
3. For Andrew Powell, our new Colorado State Director —a new season for CO FCA.



SOUTH PACIFIC

REGIONAL INTERNATIONAL COORDINATOR: **AARON FRUDE**

In 2018, staff from the Rockies Region will join FCA Philippines staff to host a Coaches Ministry Training along with a two-day sports camp in Cebu.



Following those events, the annual FCA Philippines Summit for more than 30 FCA Philipino leaders will be held in the city of Davao. We also plan to return to Australia to continue training and working with coaches and sports ministry leaders, along with a vision trip to New Zealand to work on developing partnerships with local sports ministries.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

1. For the camps, Huddles and coaches ministry taking place throughout the Philippines.
2. Wisdom for the leadership within the ID Sports Australia ministry.
3. For strategic partnerships to grow in New Zealand.

INSIDE A COACH'S HEART

LONGWOOD BASKETBALL COACH JAYSON GEE'S FAITH HAS BEEN REFINED THROUGH THE CHALLENGE OF LEADING HIS TEAM ON THE COURT AND FIGHTING FOR HIS HOME TEAM OFF IT.

BY CHAD BONHAM



AT THE END OF THE 2002-03 BASKETBALL SEASON, JAYSON GEE MADE A DECISION THAT'S DIFFICULT

IN ANY PROFESSION—WALKING AWAY FROM A GREAT JOB, A JOB YOU LOVE, TO PURSUE SOMETHING MORE.

Gee had ushered in a new era at the University of Charleston, a Division II school in West Virginia. Over his seven years there, he led the Golden Eagles to sustained success, but he had a vision of becoming a Division I head coach. When he got a call in 2003 from Anthony Solomon, his longtime friend and the coach at St. Bonaventure, offering him an associate head coach position, Gee knew he had to accept.

He took his wife, Lynette, and two young boys, Brandon and Bryan, to Olean, New York, and the family began to settle into a new community. About 18 months later, though, Brandon (age 11 at the time), began exhibiting unusual and confusing behavior.

First, Brandon was convinced many of the kids at school were "talking about him." Later that week, he made an even more troubling accusation: The teachers were also talking about him.

Jayson and Lynette, not sure what to think, took their son's claims to heart. After all, Brandon

had developed a reputation for always telling the truth. But after visiting with the school's principal and teachers, Jayson and Lynette believed them when they said no one was talking about Brandon.

Three weeks later, while Jayson and Lynette were in Texas for a tournament, Brandon and Bryan stayed with close friends in Charleston. Brandon's behavior became even more bizarre. He was suddenly reclusive, limiting conversations to a word or two. He would stare off into space. He stopped eating. Everything about him was different.

Then Jayson got a phone call. "Dad, I went to church, and Pastor Watts and Sharon were talking about me," Brandon said. "And I'm in the newspaper. They're talking about how I'm Jayson Gee's son and how I'm embarrassing you. And your former players are outside the window. They're taunting me. They're threatening to kill me.

"I'm gonna die, Dad. I just know it. I'm gonna die."

Jayson felt helpless 1,300 miles away from his son. He did his best to console him, telling him, "Son, you're not going to die. I'll come get you."

Jayson and Lynette took Brandon to his pediatrician, then to a child psychologist, then through a whirlwind of hospital visits across western New York. Ultimately, the diagnosis was rare and painfully

severe: Brandon was suffering from child-onset paranoid schizophrenia. His hallucinations were getting worse, and the voices in his head were taking over his mind.

The most startling change was his language. Brandon, the kid who once thought "shut up" was a bad phrase, now had fits of rage and profanity-laced tirades.

Initially, Jayson was in denial. He allowed Brandon to continue playing basketball, but soon his on-court behavior became an obvious hazard to other players. He also continued bringing Brandon to St. Bonaventure home games, but his presence was a distraction for those close to the program.

Finally, Jayson came to terms with reality. It drove him to his knees in prayer, where God revealed his son would be healed.

"My attitude went to a whole new level," he said. "From that second forward, I was in a spiritual trance. My son was going to be healed. I just needed to treat him as if he was going to be healed."

Jayson didn't know how or when. He just knew it would happen, and he held tight to that belief during the trying months and years ahead.

• • •

In the midst of the storm, Lynette received some bittersweet news: She was pregnant with the couple's



third child, daughter Briana. The joyous moment was muted a bit by the uncertainty surrounding Brandon's mental health.

"We had prayed for another child," Lynette said. "I started to feel like I was being blessed with one while another one was being taken away."

At home, Lynette and Bryan were afraid to have Brandon in the house when Jayson was out of town. He was increasingly unpredictable. His auditory hallucinations brought on random fits of violence, and his medication made him constantly hungry, which led to more anger and frustration.

Eventually, Jayson and Lynette made the difficult decision to send Brandon to the Western New York Children's Psychiatric Center in West Seneca, a suburb of Buffalo three hours away from Olean. Unless he was on the road coaching or recruiting, Jayson made that drive. Sometimes Lynette would come. Other times a friend would

accompany him. But usually he was alone.

During the drives, Jayson prayed a lot. He also had intense conversations with friends back in Charleston, including Keith Tyler, FCA's West Virginia director and a former college teammate.

"Jayson was the one who was holding us all together through this process," Tyler said. "He kept saying that Brandon was going to be healed. I was in agreement, but I also saw Brandon and his behavior. He was really out of it. I had to pray, 'Lord, help my unbelief.'"

After several visits, the doctors at the psychiatric center pulled Jayson aside. They were concerned he was putting himself and his other family members at risk by making the daily drive.

"I'm a competitor," Jayson said. "In some ways, that challenged me. It motivated me even more. Nothing was going to deflate me or deflect my attention away from what I believed. It made me even more determined."

There were numerous logistical challenges. As St. Bonaventure's associate head coach, Jayson would get up early and work from his office, then travel to see Brandon, and then return in time for

practices and games. He felt bad about being gone so often, so he met with the other coaches to apologize. He even offered to step down if necessary.

But Solomon, the head coach, scoffed at that suggestion.

"I told him to take care of his family," Solomon said. "That was his first priority, and we were fully supportive of that. I can't say many could have handled it the way he did. That was only through the assistance of God. His faith was strong. He was a perfect example of a man of God. He upheld his responsibilities with excellence."

Through it all, the trips to West Seneca were rarely fruitful. Jayson read from the Bible, usually the story of Joseph. He prayed over his son. Brandon would sit emotionless for a few minutes and then leave without a word.

Against the doctor's wishes, Jayson began taking Brandon out of the hospital sometimes. They'd go shoot hoops at the University of Buffalo, or go shop for shoes. The scariest moments came when Brandon would try to run away in a crowded parking lot. The most excruciating were when he'd become violent in the car, hitting and spitting on his father while repeatedly screaming, "I hate you!"

Heartbroken, all Jayson could do was calmly respond with an "I love you." Later, he saw the analogy between his actions and what Jesus spoke about in Luke 15:1-7.



Jayson Gee has been Longwood University's head coach since 2013.



"The shepherd put the entire flock at some level of risk to get that lost sheep," he said. "Brandon was lost. He was outside of the flock. I was called to go after Brandon, even if that meant leaving my job and my family to see him."

• • •

At the end of the 2005-06 season, Jayson accepted an offer to join head coach Gary Waters at Cleveland State. By then, Brandon had moved to a new day treatment facility in Olean. Even though he was still unstable, the Gees took another leap of faith and traveled from New York to Ohio.

In Cleveland, several miracles began to unfold.

Lynette took Brandon to a child psychologist, who introduced them to a study being conducted at the National Institute of Mental Health. A new treatment plan slowly improved Brandon's condition.

But then Jayson received a call from Brandon's treatment facility. Brandon had locked himself in a room, and the caretakers were going to physically remove him and put him in a straightjacket if he didn't come out on his own.

When Jayson arrived, he went into the room and was shocked. His son spoke clearly and sensibly for the first time in three years.

"Dad, do you know these people here are crazy?" Brandon said. "You've got to get me out of here!"

Jayson began shouting and rejoicing. He grabbed Brandon's arm and led him out of the room, past a host of confused onlookers.

"He's fine! He's fine!" he exclaimed. "We're outta here!"

There was still some recovery left, but Brandon was ready to return to his normal life. Over the course of several years, he and his siblings ended up at Cornerstone Christian Academy in Willoughby Hills, Ohio, where he and Bryan starred on the basketball team. Brandon learned to drive. He attended his senior prom. He overcame his pre-existing learning disabilities to graduate.

Eventually, Brandon coached

youth basketball and later attended college. He completed ministry training in Kentucky, and he began volunteering as a junior counselor at a day treatment facility for adults with mental health issues in Farmville, Virginia. Brandon is also participating in a men's Bible study group at New Life Church.

them down on the ground, and shares this message: "You think the person who wears these shoes is a college basketball coach. I'm not a college basketball coach; I'm a Christian coach. You think the person in these shoes runs a basketball program. I don't run a basketball program; I run a ministry. You think the person in these

**"Keep believing in God.
Don't let the world tell
you anything differently."**

-Jayson Gee

"I don't think I'd be here today if it wasn't for my dad," Brandon said. "My parents and family members prayed me out of the hospital. My dad had the faith to come see me every day, after I spit on him and did all of that stuff. I don't know where I'd be without him."

• • •

In 2013, Jayson's professional diligence paid off. He was offered the head coaching job at Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia. Longwood had competed at the Division I level for just nine years, with only one winning season during that time. Jayson knew what he was getting into.

His journey with Brandon, however, has proved to be helpful.

"It was the training ground, not the complaining ground," Jayson said. "If Brandon can be victorious, then we can take the 349th program out of 350 and make it a winner. The odds were far greater for Brandon."

When Jayson speaks in public he sometimes takes off his shoes, sets

shoes has players. No, no, no. They're my sheep, and I'm their shepherd."

Bryan is one of Jayson's players. The mindset that gave Jayson the strength to visit Brandon daily now helps him deal with the challenges of coaching a fledgling Division I program.

In 2015, FCA recognized Jayson with the prestigious John Lotz Barnabas Award. The following year, a book titled *The Battle For Brandon* was published. A documentary of the same name (narrated by actress Jennifer Garner) is set to be released later this year and is being developed into a script for a feature film.

Jayson uses his story to minister to anyone who will listen. His message is simple, but powerful.

"Stay the course," Jayson said. "Keep believing in God. Don't let the world tell you anything differently. Trust in what God says to you, regardless of what the doctors say, regardless of what your friends say, regardless of what your family says. Trust God's voice over all."

FCA

WANT TO APPEAR in the next TeamFCA profiles? Contact your local FCA staff member or email us at mag@fca.org!



DAVID FALCO

**Huddle Coach
Brookings, SD**

FAVORITE BIBLICAL STORY: “The story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17 because David was victorious against the giant through his faith in God.”

CHRIST-LIKE QUALITY WORTH EMULATING: “Forgiveness. It shows grace and strengthens all of my relationships.”

BEST THING ABOUT FCA: “It has made me a better coach because it helps me keep things in perspective and be a positive influence on my players. That also carries over into the other relationships in my life.”

I FOLLOW JESUS BECAUSE: “He is my Savior and His sacrifice has washed away the sins of this world. Being a Christian gives me strength to succeed.”

FAVES

Joshua 1:9, football, **Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups**, hiking, **fall**



NATE MARANO

**Huddle Leader
Denver, CO**

FAVORITE BIBLICAL STORY: “The story of Moses, beginning in Exodus 2, because of his extreme faith in God when he had so little faith in himself to be the leader and person he was meant to be.”

CHRIST-LIKE QUALITY WORTH EMULATING: “Humility. I try to show humility through my actions and language to others.”

BEST THING ABOUT FCA: “It has given me a community of believers and friends at school that I otherwise would have never gotten to experience.”

I FOLLOW JESUS BECAUSE: “I believe He is the way, the truth, and the light, and He is my only hope of salvation.”

FAVES

Hebrews 12:1-2, lacrosse, **In-N-Out Burger**, ultimate frisbee, **summer**



DIANNE LANGFORD JAMES

**Local Board Member
Worcester, MA**

FAVORITE BIBLICAL STORY: “The story of Job because of his unshakable faithfulness to God. He lost almost everything, but never lost his faith in God. In turn, he was blessed indeed.”

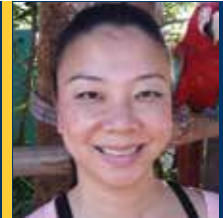
BEST SPIRITUAL ADVICE: “Without a doubt, put God first! Be consistent, persistent, and have resilience.”

BEST THING ABOUT FCA: “I am inspired and excited because of FCA’s mission and vision. Through FCA’s leadership and volunteers, so many athletes will have a fruitful relationship with God.”

I FOLLOW JESUS BECAUSE: “He is my Lord and Savior. He is the way, the truth, and the life.”

FAVES

Jeremiah 29:11, basketball, **lobster**, strawberry ice cream, **walking**, fall



LE CHAU WILBANKS

**Administrative Assistant
Homestead, FL**

FAVORITE BIBLICAL STORY: “The parable of the lost sheep in Matthew 18. This is a simple parable of Christ’s joy over our salvation and our relationship with Christ as sheep and Shepherd.”

BEST SPIRITUAL ADVICE: “Pray, and don’t lose hope. Trust in God to bring you through the battle.”

CHRIST-LIKE QUALITY WORTH EMULATING: “Patience and trust. I pray and ask for both of these in His timing. As long as I have faith in the Word, I can trust in Him and be patient.”

I FOLLOW JESUS BECAUSE: “I love Him! Jesus died for me so that I could have life. He is my Savior.”

FAVES

Ephesians 4:4-6, football, **tennis**, lunch, **Hard Rock Stadium**, fall

Spring 2018

College Guide

bit.ly/FCAMagCollegeGuide

For many students, the quest to find the right college is a stressful process. Why not let FCA help you out?

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"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." - 1 Peter 4:10 (NIV)

Have you ever been around someone who is "next level" in terms of their passion for what they do? You know, the type of person who has become an expert in a particular area, but still has a very sharp focus on growth and improvement—someone who eats, breathes and sleeps what they love to do? Some people are passionate about technology. Others love building things or fixing cars or financial planning. Some are consumed by healthcare or justice or teaching. And for some, likely many of you, it may be sports. They can't stop thinking about it or talking about it.

I know people like that, and they inspire me. Somehow, though, I'm even more inspired when they use their talents and passion to focus on helping others. This brings them a greater sense of purpose and begins to make a difference for those around them.

That is the essence of serving. There are countless examples of this in Scripture, but I love the passage in 1 Peter 4. Paul is talking about living our lives for God instead of for our own selfish pursuits. He encourages us to take a look at all the ways God has gifted us, and use those gifts to serve others. Serving is about what we can do to meet the needs of others. It's about what we can give, not what we can get.

God wants to connect the way He has wired us to what we do. He wants us to take the things we are most passionate about and use them for the good of others and, ultimately, His glory. When we operate in our natural gifting, it typically brings us life and bears much fruit. Others always benefit.

When I think about people like this, one jumps out immediately. Her name is JoAnn, and she is a close personal friend of my wife. She's a personal trainer and life coach who lives out the value of serving.

Everything JoAnn does is focused on one thing: results. She consumes information about the best workouts, and then tests them for effectiveness. She learns about nutrition for muscle gain, weight loss and sports performance. She tailors her advice for her clients' specific needs, knowing what works for people in their teens, their 40s, or even their 80s. JoAnn is a student of optimal health and vitality and has helped people from all walks of life, from athletes looking to maximize their potential to mothers seeking the energy to work full-time while raising a family. She also helps people rehab from injury and recover from illness.

JoAnn, simply, serves.

In turn, so many people are blessed by her because she is using her unique gifts and talents—the things she is most passionate about—to help others fulfill their potential and get the results they desire. Nothing brings her more satisfaction than helping someone else. And she does all of this behind the scenes, never seeking the spotlight or credit. Instead, she wins when her clients win.

Over the years, while observing the professionalism and practice of JoAnn and other personal trainers like her, there are several qualities they all have in common.

SERVING REQUIRES HUMILITY. Those who serve always think highly of others and elevate their needs ahead of their own. Even though they are experts, the best will never make you feel inferior for not knowing what to do. In fact, it's quite the opposite; they'll make you feel special. (Romans 12:3)

SERVING REQUIRES LEARNING. Those who serve are always seeking knowledge and wisdom because others are depending on them. Leaders are made to serve others and need to "stay ahead" of those they serve with insight and knowledge. (James 1:5)

SERVING REQUIRES COMMITMENT. Those who serve have an unwavering commitment to others' success. They don't give up when challenges or obstacles arise. In fact, those bumps in the road energize them to help you overcome. They reject excuses and encourage you to do the same. (Luke 14:18)

SERVING REQUIRES BELIEF. Those who serve believe things will get better, even if the circumstances are rough. Oftentimes, they have enough belief for the two of you. Their optimism overcomes our doubts. (Luke 1:37)

Those who serve give others everything they've got. It's an act of love to lay down your life for another. Using the gifts and talents God has given you is a powerful way to make a big difference for others. And serving others is the most effective way to steward God's grace in your life.

Our strengths and talents are not primarily intended for us, but for others. When it's all said and done, God might just accomplish something pretty important and make a lasting difference for others through you.

FCA

PASSIONATE PURPOSE:

1. What are you passionate about? What gifts and talents has God given you? What do you love to do?
2. How can you use your passions and gifts to serve others? In what ways can you use your gifts to bless others and make a difference?

about the author: JIMMY PAGE

Jimmy Page serves as the Executive Director of Field Ministry-West Division for FCA. As a 20-year medical fitness leader and former National Director of FCA Health and Fitness, he models and promotes principles that lead to abundant health and life. Jimmy is an author of *True Competitor*, *One Word*, *Wisdom Walks*, *Life Word*, and *Called to Greatness*. He and his wife, Ivelisse, started a cancer foundation called believebig.org following her victory over cancer. They live with their children in Fort Collins, Colorado. You can email Jimmy at jpage@fca.org.



GOD'S IN CONTROL

BY DAVID BOOTH
DETROIT RED WINGS

"Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people." - Colossians 3:23



While my mother, Karen, was in labor with me, my father, Michael, was watching a Detroit Red Wings game in the hospital. So I can say, quite literally, that hockey has been a part of my life since the moment I came into this world.

Naturally, my parents—both avid Red Wings fans and season-ticket holders—played a key role in developing my love for hockey. More importantly, though, they helped lay the foundation for my walk with Jesus, too. That established an identity early, understanding morality and what truth was, which really helped me later in life.

The Bible talks about training kids when they're young and giving them a foundation. When you're told the truth, and when you live by the truth, that's something that cannot be taken away from you. That's what happened to me. I didn't have to find pleasure or happiness in things that I could lose. What was so attractive about Christianity is that your joy comes in all circumstances.

And I found a *lot* of joy playing hockey.

When you're a young kid in Michigan, you always hear how hard

it is to make it to junior hockey, college, the minor leagues, and—last but not least—the NHL. Knowing that, I was never really focused on the NHL as my “end goal.” I just really enjoyed the game. I loved playing with my friends. I knew God was in control of everything, so He had a plan for my life and whatever was going to happen in hockey.

For college, I was originally pursued by Michigan, but before committing there, I took a visit to Michigan State. They offered me

***“Jesus Christ
accepts us no
matter where we're
at or who we are.”***

a full scholarship and I accepted. I think that was a way of God handling my life, because I was able to get involved with Athletes in Action, where I matured in my faith. Phil Gillespie was the leader and a great mentor. He really invested in the athletes and took time to make sure each person understood what the gospel meant. Yes, the hockey was also good, and I developed those skills. But looking back at Michigan State, I'll always remember how much I grew in my faith.

When I made my NHL debut with the Florida Panthers in 2006, it was a special moment for my family and me. I remember watching all those

games as a child, watching “Hockey Night” in Canada and the rivalries between the Red Wings and Toronto Maple Leafs. That's when I was like, “Man, I'm playing with some of the players I watched growing up.” I was 21, playing with 35-, 36-, 37-year-olds, just trying to fit in.

That was tough to do back then, but I always knew I had my family and my faith as my support. Jesus Christ accepts us no matter where we're at or who we are. That was comforting, and that's what kept me going, continuing to see His favor in my life.

Now, a decade into my NHL career that has spanned four different teams, I can say that I've truly been blessed by the relationships I've made with teammates and the things I've experienced as a professional athlete. The joys haven't come without trials, though, especially when it comes to injuries. I've had a couple concussions. I've broken my knee a couple times. I've broken my foot, my ankle, my hand. Those are times when I've realized I'm not as strong as I think I am. I can't do it all on my own. I think of 2 Corinthians 12:9: *“Each time he said, ‘My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.’ So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.”*

That verse is a constant reminder that God's in control, and He has our best interests in mind for us. He always keeps calling us back to Him, through little ways that draw us closer to Him.

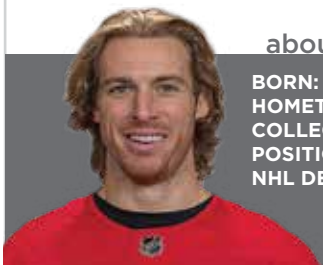
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about the author: DAVID BOOTH

BORN: Nov. 24, 1984
HOMETOWN: Detroit, Michigan
COLLEGE: Michigan State
POSITION: Left Wing
NHL DEBUT: Nov. 20, 2006

NOTES:

- In 10 NHL seasons, has played for the Florida Panthers, Vancouver Canucks, Toronto Maple Leafs and Detroit Red Wings.
- Two-time World Junior Championship Gold Medalist (2002, '04)
- NAHL Rookie of the Year (2001)
- Involved with FCA Hockey, takes part in bi-weekly Huddle calls with other professional players, and helps lead bi-weekly Huddle discipleship calls with junior players.



DIRTY LAUNDRY

"It is what we learn after we know it all that counts." – John Wooden

In my 30th year of coaching, I came upon a small booklet titled, "Captains — 7 Ways to Lead Your Team." Bruce Brown, the author and founder of Proactive Coaching, a company devoted to helping coaches create character-based team cultures, articulated in just 21 pages the seven insightful keys that could influence the culture of my team.

I purchased several copies and gave one to a player who would be a captain during her upcoming senior season. Much to my delight, she embraced the seven concepts.

The first key notion of the book is to "be the first to serve, and the last to be served." For years, similar to many other teams in any sport on any level, our team held the tradition of making freshmen carry the dirty laundry and clean the locker room. But my captain came to me with a proposal.

"Coach, we need to change something," she said. "Those are acts of service, and they should be the responsibility of those who have been here the longest. Serving our teammates needs to be viewed as a privilege."

In that moment, a cultural shift began. The notion of entitlement was replaced with servanthood.

First Peter 4:10 (NIV) says, *"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."*

God gifted and instructed each of us to use our gifts to serve Him and others. You may not be the biggest, fastest or strongest, but you can still serve. Author Jon Gordon puts it this way: "You don't have to be great to serve, but you have to serve to be great."

At Ashland University, we won the NCAA Division II national championship in 2013. A couple years later, prior to the start of the 2014-15 season, I knew it would be my last. There was one senior and one junior who had been a part of the national championship team, and



I revealed my retirement intentions to the senior, Taylor, before sharing with the rest of the team.

After all, Taylor and I were going to end our respective careers together.

That year, our young team improved throughout the season, eventually finding itself in the regional title matchup, one win away from the Elite Eight. We played our hearts out, but it just was not meant to be. My 35-year coaching career ended, as did Taylor's stellar playing career. After shaking hands with our opponents, Taylor and I walked off the court arm-in-arm. It was a bittersweet moment.

Soon, however, Taylor demonstrated to me what it had all been about.

As I started walking back from the postgame news conference, I saw my team approaching at the end of a long corridor. Taylor was in the middle of the group. As they got closer, I could see her carrying both bags of dirty laundry, one over each shoulder.

"Coach, we offered to help, but she wouldn't let us," another player told me. "Taylor said, 'Nope, this is my last chance to serve you as my teammates.'"

How powerful!

Taylor had just finished the final game of her career, but instead of thinking of herself in that moment, she chose to serve her teammates.

Two years later, when the freshmen and sophomores on my final team were juniors and seniors, Ashland went 37-0 and won another national championship, the program's second title in five seasons. Honoring

their accomplishments, the statue pictured was dedicated along with this inscription: "This sculpture is a symbol of the spirit, faith and unselfish play of the team as depicted in the Divine Servant. 'Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.' Mark 9:35"

Jesus said He did not come to earth to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45). As we strive to follow in His steps, may we, like Taylor, make serving others a daily priority.

FCA

about the author: **SUE RAMSEY**

Sue Ramsey's commitment to excellence is overshadowed only by her deep faith. In 35 years as a coach, including 20 as the head coach at Ashland University, Ramsey won the Division II national championship in 2013, following a runner-up finish in 2012. Ramsey's holistic approach to coaching helped her earn an induction into Athletes in Action's "Hall of Faith" in 2013. She also received the Carol Eckman Integrity in Coaching Award in 2012 and the FCA Kay Yow Heart of a Coach Award in 2011.

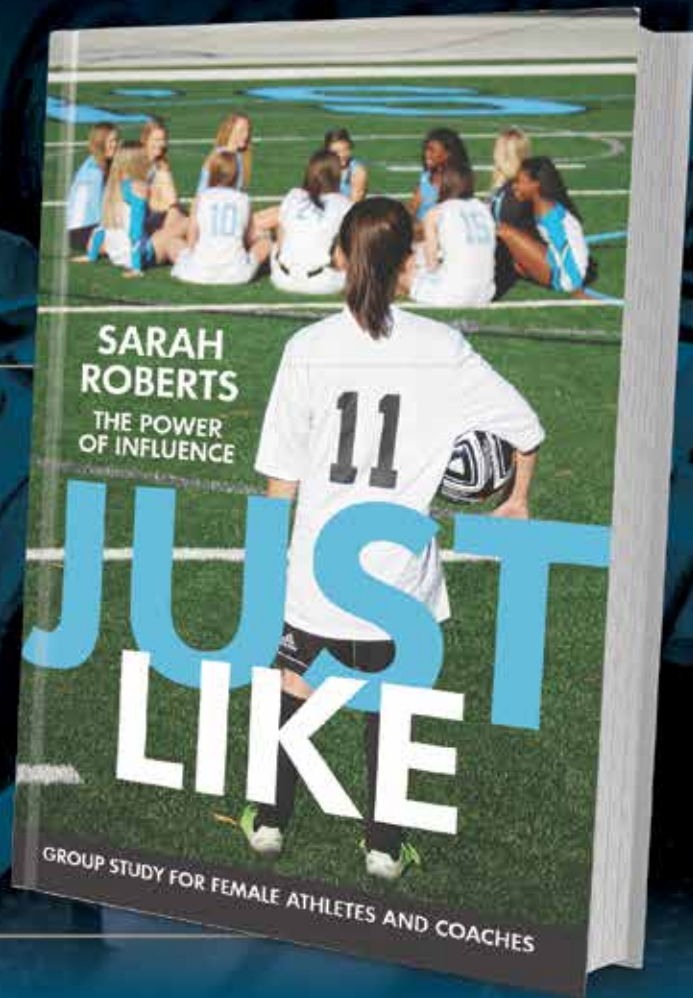


SPIRITUAL STRENGTH TRAINING

JUST LIKE

Influence is the capacity to affect the character, development, or behavior of someone. The athletic world is one of the largest powers of influence in society when it comes to the development of character and behavior in athletes, coaches, and fans. The struggle is God wants to use this influence as a platform for Him instead of a pedestal for us. In *Just Like*, we pair up the power of God with the platform of athletics using the stories of biblical characters and college and professional athletes. These stories will both encourage and empower female athletes to become women of influence by having character and integrity during trials and triumphs. We are shown throughout the entire Bible, men and women who used their influence for both positive and negative and we each must decide who we will choose to be *Just Like* on this journey as Christian Athletes.

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