

FOCUS

The Magazine of Enfield Evangelical Free Church

Aiming to glorify God by calling and equipping people to be fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ

A Question of Sport?

For many, whether they like it or not, this month will be dominated by sport. The newspapers and television coverage will be full of the World Cup and the Wimbledon Championships. June will also see the F1 European Grand Prix, US open golf championship, the Henley regatta and cricket between England and Australia. Some people will be rubbing their hands together with glee over the prospect of so much sport. Others will be tearing their hair out or showing no interest at all. Whatever we think, it is worth taking note of what Jesus says. He was once asked about what is most important, and answered, *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength"* (Mark 12:30). Clearly, sport isn't the most important thing in the world. But, sport can illustrate what is most important.

The Game

Watching talented sportsmen and women competing against each other can be a great experience. As we do so, it reminds us that the Lord made each one of us and has given us the ability to enjoy life and the world.

"He richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment"
(1 Timothy 6:17).

But the importance of our lives goes far beyond this. God also made people to live in relationship with Himself, living under His rule and caring for other people and the world He gave us to enjoy.

The Failure

Even the greatest sports stars fail – despite all their practice, training and best efforts. There will be many examples this month of competitors falling short. There will be countless missed shots and wayward passes. This is not just true in sport. Even when we try hard we fall short of God's ways and His standards—

"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"
(Romans 3:23)

The Foul

Not only do sports men and women fail when they try their best, frequently they deliberately go against the game's rules. So often they reject regulations set by the sport's governing body and dispute with the referee or umpire. In life generally it's only too easy to see men and women abandoning the way they were meant to live before God. People want to go their own way, make up the rules themselves and desire to remove God from His rightful place in their lives. The Bible puts it like this—

"There is no one righteous, not even one"
(Romans 3:10).

The results of our rejection of God are apparent everywhere, not just on the sports field. The consequences are evident in the injustice and suffering we see around us.

The Penalty

In the game there is a consequence of going against the rules. It might be points deducted, a red card or some other punishment. In life, the Lord sees

all that goes on and He will not stand by for ever and let wrong-doing go unpunished. God promises that one day he will judge the fouls and failures of all. He will not let the guilty escape justice.

If we are honest with ourselves, who can claim that we have always 'played' fairly and completely by God's rules?

The Champion

The ultimate moment of every tournament is the crowning of the champions. But not even the best of players and teams are perfect. Great winners still miss some shots and concede fouls. In contrast, the Lord Jesus is a perfect champion. He never did anything wrong. He always loved God His Father with all His heart, soul, mind and strength. Unlike us, He kept the rules perfectly. Jesus came as God's gift to a world where people have failed, have fouled and should pay the penalty. The good news is that God's love found a way that we could escape the judgement and be given a fresh start - through Jesus' death on the cross.

"God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes on him should not perish, but have eternal life"
(John 3:16).

Jesus died to take the penalty that our fouls and failures deserve, enabling us to know God in love and friendship as we were created to do.

The Match Point

The point of all that Jesus has done is that we might receive forgiveness as a result of what He has done. We can't receive forgiveness and new life by trying to be better or from joining a church like we join a sports team. All that Jesus offers comes as a free gift. It's not something we deserve it. It cannot be earned—

"It is a gift from God"
(Ephesians 2:8).

Have you received this gift? If so, rejoice in this more than sport. If not, will you accept God's gift now – even before the start of Wimbledon and the World Cup?

David Williams