

CHRISTIANS IN MEN'S PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

REPORT



CONTENTS

- 3 RESEARCH CONTEXT
- 4 CHRISTIANS IN MEN'S PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL
- 6 RESPONSES BY LEAGUE
- 8 CHRISTIAN FAITH IS PRESENT IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL
- 12 KEY CHALLENGES
- 14 FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES



RESEARCH CONTEXT

There are two primary reasons for this new research.

Firstly, Christians in Sport co-sponsored and facilitated a pioneering global research project, conducted by Eido Research, over a nine-month period in 2023–2024. The aim was to better understand professional sport worldwide and identify where and how ministry is taking place within these sports. This was the first attempt ever, to our knowledge, to gather this kind of data. A total of 235 partners responded from 88 countries. From this, the research identified 13 of the most significant sports globally, mapping ministry currently happening by country and sport. Football was designated as the most significant sport globally.

Secondly, this year Christians in Sport celebrates its 50th anniversary (1976–2026). From the earliest pioneers in the mid-1970s, the organisation has consistently focussed on men's professional football and as they look forward wishes to better understand the landscape in which they work alongside any future opportunities.

Building on both this long-standing focus and the earlier research commissioned, this landmark new study was conducted to understand, within the top six tiers of professional football across England and Wales, whether there are Christians in clubs – and, if so, what their spiritual practices look like, including Bible study and prayer meetings within the football club environment.

CHRISTIANS IN MEN'S PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

A LANDMARK NEW RESEARCH PROJECT BY
CHRISTIANS IN SPORT, WITH SUPPORT FROM
EIDO RESEARCH

There are Christians throughout men's professional football.

Three in four clubs (75%) have Christian players in the first-team squad. At the same time, Christian footballers often face pressure and scrutiny, and many can feel isolated from fellow believers.

This is the first study of its kind, conducted by Christians in Sport with help from Eido Research. It builds on the 2024 Global Elite Sport and Ministry Mapping study, which explored Christian activity across elite sport globally. We are very thankful for the work of Tobi Sho-Silva, who served as the assistant researcher for this project.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This new research focuses on the English men's football leagues and seeks to better understand Christianity across the professional game. It examines:

- Mapping Christian players across the leagues
- Their spiritual practices within the context of the football club (including Bible studies and prayer meetings)
- The challenges they face and future possibilities

The research scope covered 164 clubs across the top six tiers of professional football throughout England and included a small number of Welsh clubs within these structures.

WHO RESPONDED

134 clubs responded to the survey, including 90% of Premier League clubs. Seven in ten responses (71%) came from players themselves. The remaining responses came mainly from club staff and/or chaplains.

A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

The landscape appears very different from when Christians in Sport was established in 1976, when there were, at best, only a handful of known Christian players across all professional leagues

RESPONSES BY LEAGUE

League	No. of Clubs	Response Rate
Premier League	20	90%
Championship	24	71%
League One	24	67%
League Two	24	79%
National League	24	100%
National League North	24	88%
National League South	24	79%
Total	164	82%



CHRISTIAN FAITH IS PRESENT IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

KEY STATISTICS

CHRISTIAN PLAYERS

75%

of clubs have Christian players in the first team squad.

42%

of clubs reported Christian players in U23/U21 squads, the Academy or amongst staff.



40%

of clubs regularly host Christian activities (like Bible studies and prayer meetings), including 50% of clubs in the Premier League.

37%

of these Christian activities are led by players.

Numbers attending activities vary between clubs with as many as

14 attending regular Bible studies at one Championship club and

12 at one National League South club.



AN EARLY GATHERING OF
CHRISTIAN PROFESSIONAL
FOOTBALLERS

THEN



75% OF CLUBS

INCLUDE CHRISTIANS
IN THEIR FIRST-TEAM
SQUADS

SQUADS



NOW



KEY CHALLENGES

THE CLASH IN CULTURES

The biggest challenge faced by players was the conflict between the dressing room culture, peer pressure and Christian living including temptations and moral pressures. Professional football has a very strong team dynamic and players commented on the difficulty of the tension between being a trusted member of the group and yet not compromising personal Christian faith. A number specifically mentioned the challenge of being accepted and not joining unhealthy dressing room banter which risks strained relationships, feelings of Christian isolation and the difficulty of standing firm in their faith.

THE PUBLIC SCRUTINY

Job performance in professional football is very public and players highlighted the pressure of constant scrutiny by colleagues, peers, the media, and fans. They also spoke about the challenge of handling criticism, managing emotions well, and holding onto their Christian identity when it feels tied to performance. Issues around Christian identity were often compounded regarding injuries, selection and uncertain futures given the number of short term contracts.

THE ISOLATION

Players felt isolated, lacking Christian community and support. Busy training schedules and short term contracts often make it hard to establish and maintain church relationships. They also described some practices in their clubs that restrict aspects of their faith, making it harder to live openly as Christians.

THREE TENSIONS CHRISTIAN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALLERS HAVE TO NAVIGATE

“Our beliefs can segregate us quite easily from other teammates. The challenge is to maintain healthy relationships whilst always following the Lord’s will. It’s to be firm in your faith when the majority may act and talk in a completely different way.”

Professional Footballer

“Staying in faith through all the highs and lows that come with the game, also removing yourself from certain graphic conversations around the changing room that sometimes are inevitable you’re involved in. Also it’s not the norm so sometimes can make you feel like an outsider compared to other teammates”

Professional Footballer

“I feel that throughout my career we as players are always scrutinised and judged based on both internal and external individual opinions... The journey can sometimes be very stressful, draining, and mentally challenging.”

Professional Footballer

“We feel the pressure to be good role models for younger players and wider society...”

Professional Footballer

“For myself, the challenge is that I am all the time around people that don’t follow Jesus. I will hear stuff that I don’t want and see things that I don’t want. I am not able to talk, worship, or pray with a brother in Christ at the club.”

Professional Footballer

“A lot of families in the academy struggle with the balance of playing on Sundays and attending church or age focussed church sessions...”

Member of Staff (Championship)

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

TO BE ROOTED IN JESUS

In navigating culture clash and public scrutiny respondents want to remain rooted in Jesus, to stand firm in faith and witness with confidence. Many respondents also want to be Christian role models for teammates and wider society, but they need more courage and confidence to do so. They would value practical help studying the Bible, advice on how to share their faith, and prayer.

CHRISTIAN SUPPORT

To help them with the isolation, respondents desire a Christian community to help them grow and remain steady in their faith. Almost two in five wanted more fellowship with other Christians in football through prayer meetings, Bible studies and regional or online meetings. They also valued the encouragement of chaplains and mentors who supported them and helped to normalise Christian presence in clubs.

FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

Fifty years ago, Christians in Sport was the only organisation operating within a parachurch context in professional football. Today a number of sports ministries are either well established or have recently emerged to invest in this area, including Ambassadors Football, Ballers in God, F3, Sports Chaplaincy UK as well as most recently POA following the global elite research project referenced earlier. Opportunities now exist not only within the professional game but also within the expanding area of football academies.

In light of this growth, there is potential for greater networking, collaboration, and resource development to help Christians follow Jesus more confidently both within and beyond the world of football. At the same time, there is an important opportunity to ensure that parachurch ministries work alongside local churches, where long-term discipleship and spiritual formation takes place.

WHEN ASKED WHAT WOULD HELP THEM MOST, PLAYERS HIGHLIGHTED..

“The challenges we face is not having enough knowledge about Christianity as a whole in professional football.”

Professional Footballer

“The development of a simple, shareable toolkit for clubs to use with players and staff. This could include guidance on how Christian groups can meet during the week (online or in person), alongside suggested discussion themes and conversation starters. The aim would be to make it easy, flexible and consistent for clubs to support a Christian presence, regardless of size or resources.”

Professional Footballer

“I just joined the club two months ago and trying to get about six others to join a bible study together...”

Professional Footballer

“A national network to support Christians who do not want to partake in requests that go against their faith, so they are not battling on their own”

Professional Footballer

Related Publications

Spiritual Game Plan: Competing with Joy and Godliness (Graham Daniels & Jonny Reid)

Academic Work

Jones, L.; Parker, A.; Daniels, G. Sports Chaplaincy, Theology and Social Theory Disrupting Performance-Based Identity in Elite Sporting Contexts (2020).

Daniels, G., & Parker, A. (2023). Christianity, Identity, and Professional Football.

Parker, A., & Daniels, G. (2025). Religion and the Rise of Sport in England

Daniels, G., & Parker, A. (2025). Identity Formation in Elite Sport: Christianity, Professional Soccer and Personal Integrity

