

Eido
RESEARCH



'Ignition and ammunition'

Christians in Sport leader success mapping - Eido Research



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Executive Summary

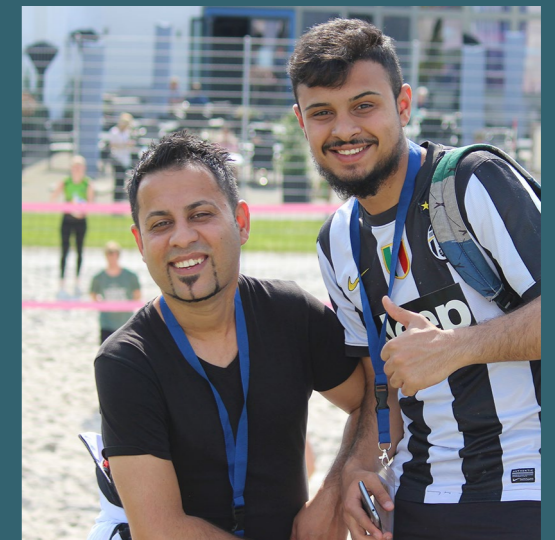
Christians in Sport have seen significant success developing leaders to reach the world of sport for Jesus. But what are the keys to these stories of success? What are the pivotal moments for these leaders? And how can Christians in Sport replicate these stories in the future?

To discover the answer to these questions, Christians in Sport asked Eido Research to conduct leader success mapping with their current established leaders. This involved an online questionnaire completed by 230 established leaders¹ as well as in-depth interviews with 18 successful leaders². This report presents the findings from this research.



¹ This group was defined as leaders who have been equipped and empowered to lead sports mission and inspire others to do the same.

² This group was defined and hand-selected by Christians in Sport anecdotally as the leaders who were seeing the greatest level of success in their sports ministry.



What are the characteristics and prerequisites of these effective leaders?

There are four key similarities that were shared by both UK and international successful leaders in their lives before meeting Christians in Sport.

1

Passion and engagement with sport: Leaders exhibited a passion for playing sport for its own sake. This was often also reflected in their high level of sporting ability.

2

Leadership gifting and experience: Leaders had both the confidence and ability to lead in various parts of their lives. While for international leaders this was in both faith and sport, for UK leaders this was mainly confined to secular endeavours.

3

A faith that can at least be activated: Leaders also had a faith that was ready to be activated. In this area, however, international leaders exhibited a more missional and confident faith, while for UK leaders, this faith was significantly less fervent and strategic.

4

Personable, teachable team players: It was apparent that all leaders were highly personable, and their engagement in team sports also highlighted their ability to relate well with others.

However, there also appeared to be some clear differences exhibited by international leaders. These are:

1

Hunger to integrate sport and faith: International leaders were significantly more passionate in integrating sport and faith in their lives at the point of engagement with Christians in Sport. Many were already engaging in sports ministry before they met Christians in Sport.

2

Humility: International leaders also demonstrated a greater level of humility in both their personal and professional lives.

3

Resilience: Given their significantly more difficult personal upbringing, cultural challenges and hindrances, as well as lack of physical resources, international leaders all demonstrated a high level of resilience.

What are the typical routes to becoming effective established leaders?

The majority of **UK LEADERS** grew up in stable Christian environments. They engaged heavily in sports and also were consistent Christians. Likewise they also excelled in leadership in sport and non-faith spheres. However, it was not until they engaged with Christians in Sport that they made the connection between sport and faith. Until this point, they tended to regard them as separate worlds. Their subsequent journey involved the following steps:

1. Introduced early on in their lives to Christians in Sport through personal introductions.
2. Returned and wanted more of Christians in Sport mainly due to the quality of the event and the inspiration from leaders.
3. Developed direct relationships with key leaders in Christians in Sport combined with first-hand experience of leadership and ministry opportunities.
4. A significant proportion experienced a short break where other responsibilities in life took precedence over sports ministry.
5. Re-engaged with Christians in Sport and further integrated into a leadership role.

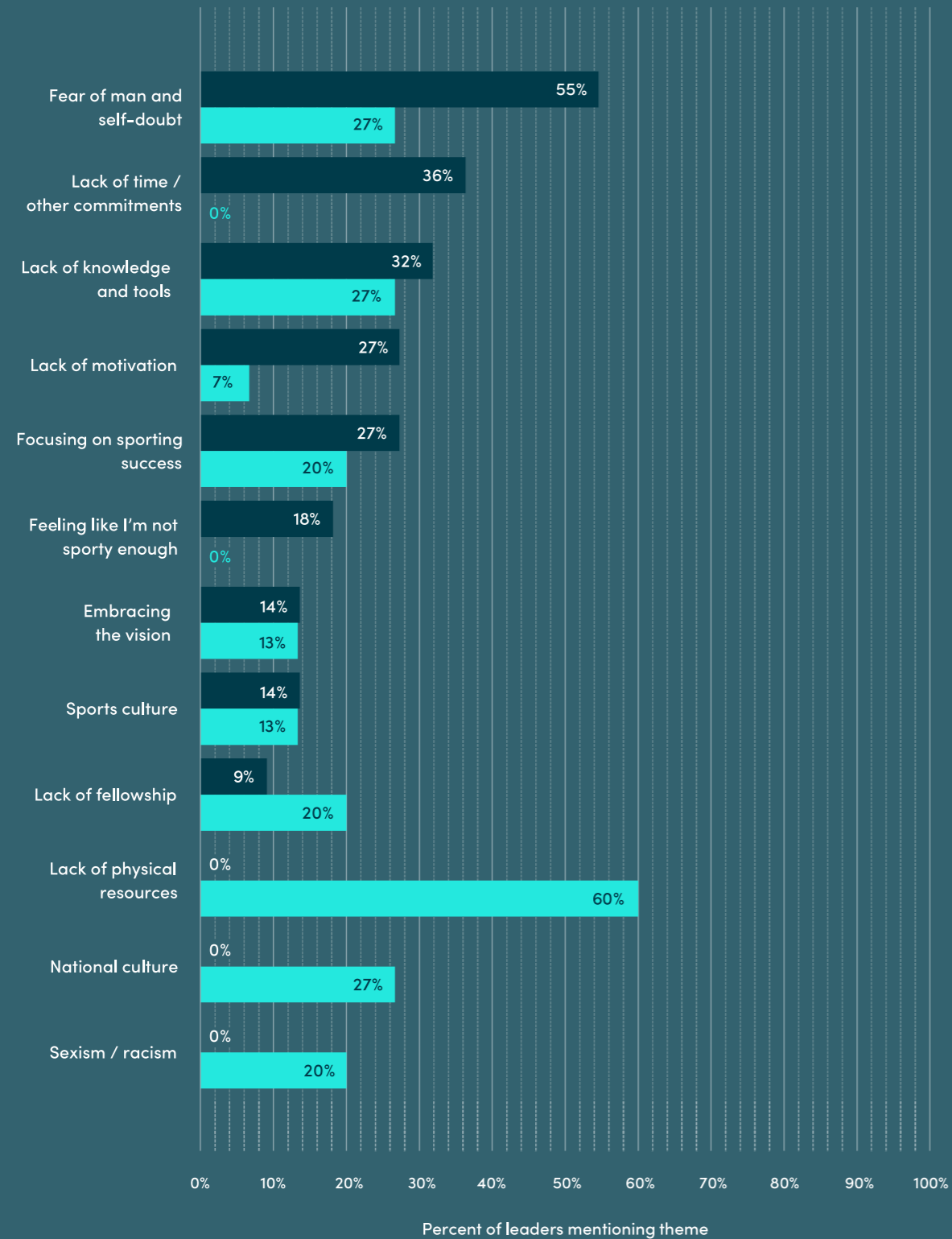
For **INTERNATIONAL LEADERS** family life was more varied, with many experiencing financial, relational, and cultural difficulties. While their engagement with sport was substantial, they had only limited exposure to faith during their childhood years. However, at a later point all leaders had a significant moment in their life where they embraced their faith fully and started to integrate faith and sport into their own lives. By the time they met Christians in Sport, they had developed significant “missional fervour” through exposure to other sports ministries and Christian sportspeople. This “missional fervour” was often heightened by the experiences of finding or recommitting to faith described above. Their subsequent journey involved the following steps:

1. Introduced later on in their life through personal invitations to a conference or event. This was often due to them having already developed a desire for and, in many instances, a practice of sports ministry.
2. Returned and wanted more of Christians in Sport for the excellent strategy and tools that were offered from these events and conferences.
3. Attended more conferences, while also developing a direct relationship with specific leaders in Christians in Sport. This also involved serving opportunities at these conferences and events.
4. For some, experienced a short break before re-engagement with Christians in Sport again.
5. Partnered with Christians in Sport in direct sports ministry, with Christians in Sport leaders visiting international leaders in their local contexts and providing both strategic and physical resources.

Barriers leaders had to overcome

We asked leaders what have been the biggest barriers that they have overcome to become an effective influencer and leader in Christians in Sport. The graph compares questionnaire data from the most successful **UK LEADERS** and

INTERNATIONAL LEADERS



What are the key roles that Christians in Sport plays in their journey?

In line with the moment of initial introduction, Christians in Sport either played a role of "ignition" for UK leaders, or the role of "ammunition" for international leaders.

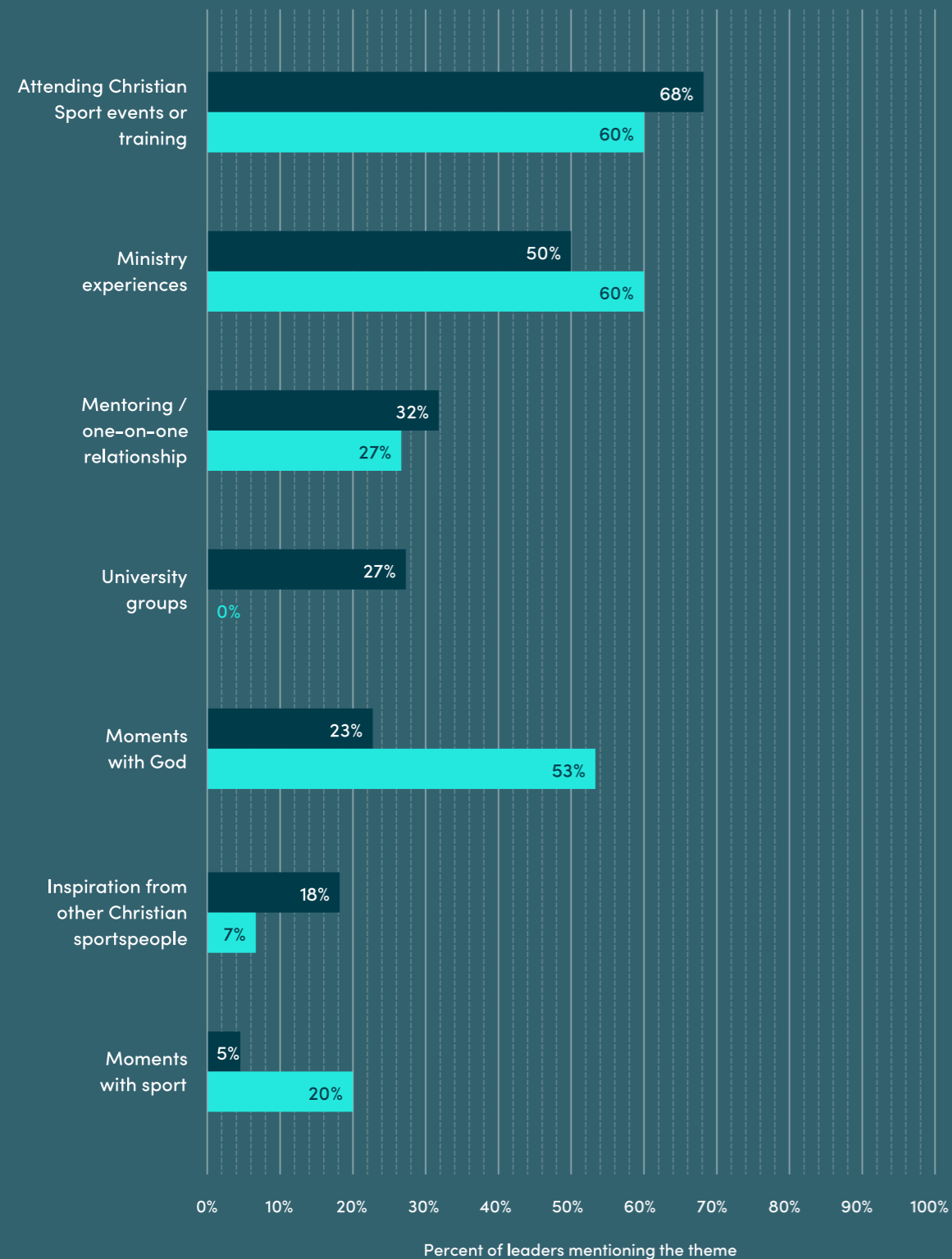
Ignition for UK leaders: Through personal relationships with staff as well as events, the vision and heart of sports ministry was shared with UK leaders. Subsequent leadership opportunities in Christians in Sport events (such as Sports Plus camp), completed the ignition process for these leaders. Further integration into leadership opportunities furthered their sports ministry success.

Ammunition for international leaders: Through either conference attendances or personal introductions, these leaders came to Christians in Sport seeking the right tools to develop their already active sports ministry. Follow-up informal mentoring likewise helped these leaders implement these tools. Finally, in-person visits from Christians in Sport, with both strategic and physical resources, catalysed international leaders' sports ministry in their local contexts.



Most significant moments

We asked leaders what have been the most significant moments in shaping their conviction and passion for integrating faith and sport. The graph compares questionnaire data from the most successful **UK LEADERS** and **INTERNATIONAL LEADERS**



What are the recommendations from this research?

Continue to be relational and provide formal / informal mentoring

Maintain the level of one-to-one relationship that is being developed between Christians in Sport staff and both UK and international leaders. Both groups referenced this multiple times in their journeys.

Continue to deliver excellence

Undoubtedly, excellence is a costly goal to achieve, and, in times of financial pressures for the charity sector, it may seem like the most obvious thing to compromise on. However, this research has shown that high-quality teaching materials and training, and professional organisation of the events itself, are not simply a "nice to have" but are in fact pivotal for both UK and international leaders.

Continue to integrate leaders into experiential roles

Experiencing sports ministry first-hand was another key moment in the journey of successful leaders. For UK leaders, having the opportunity to lead on Sports Plus camps and, to a lesser extent, university groups was particularly influential. Likewise, participating in evangelistic opportunities was one of two behaviours that was most correlated with ministry success for all leaders.

Continue to focus on UK leaders during adolescence

For most UK leaders, Christians in Sport played a key role during their adolescence. Similarly, many showed signs that their faith during this period was unstable, so to provide a moment of "ignition" was key. Even for those leaders who met Christians in Sport later in life, it was again through youth members of their family that this connection occurred.

Consider developing parents as leaders

Connected to the previous recommendation is the potential to engage parents as well as students. Adolescents who have parents who are both Christian and already engaged in the world of sport present a potential group of new leaders for Christians in Sport to engage. In addition to empowering and helping these Christian parents contribute to Christians in Sports' current "mission field", it also opens up the potential to engage with non-Christian parents. In success stories involving parents, both recommended that Christians in Sport should do the same with similar people in their position.

Temporary lack of contact is not necessarily negative

One particularly intriguing finding was the significant number of leaders who lost contact with Christians in Sport for a while before re-engaging. The reasons for this varied from other commitments to mission fatigue, but, in each case, when connection was re-established the leader only expressed an increase in sports ministry success.

Address different needs between UK leaders and international leaders

Differences in needs for UK and international leaders result from a combination of timing of contact (meeting UK leaders significantly earlier in their journey), as well as the various factors of their upbringing (i.e. international leaders experiencing more “conversion” moments, and overcoming more cultural barriers prior to engagement).

For UK leaders resulting needs revolve around a lack of identity and confidence to integrate faith and sport. For these leaders, sport is a passion, while faith is less significant in their lives. They subsequently lack the confidence or the vision to share this in their sporting contexts. For international leaders, however, needs revolve around a lack of tools and strategies to combine the worlds of sport and faith. Given their highly unique contexts, these leaders need bespoke tools for their contexts.

Be contextually focused for international leaders

The unique contexts that international leaders come from present a challenge for any systematic model. As these leaders have recommended themselves, it is important to develop specific tools and strategies for their individual contexts (including translation of materials into local languages).

Likewise, there are overlapping themes for these international leaders, such as a lack of physical resources, a general lack of support from their local church, and a lack of fellowship that also need to be contextually addressed. Here, Christians in Sports’ support (both through physical as well as strategic resources) should continue where possible.

Ongoing success for leaders isn’t necessarily correlated to ongoing church or sport club attendance

Another interesting finding was the lack of quantitative correlation between ongoing church attendance and any marker of success for leaders. Similarly, there was also no correlation between ongoing sport team attendance and markers of success. This finding should encourage Christians in Sport to further explore the importance of these two behaviours in their ongoing impact strategy.

Continue to encourage fellowship between Christian sportspeople

In line with earlier recommendations, there is also a clear need to encourage leaders to have relationships with other Christian sportspeople. Indeed, given the limited human resources available to provide direct formal or informal mentoring, this recommendation is likely vital for ongoing success.

It is important to note that it is fellowship with Christian *sportspeople* that appears to be key. This is evidenced in responses through a lack of correlation of church fellowship with overall success, as well as a lack of significant reference to church fellowship by leaders in their ongoing success.

Conclusion

The desire to expand their focus to international contexts presents Christians in Sport with a set of unique problems and opportunities. There is a danger that tools and methods that have worked before for UK leaders will be applied generically to international contexts. Conversely, there is a danger that future leader development will try to suit the needs of all contexts around the world and lose its strategic focus.

It is with this challenge in mind that this research has sought to understand the journeys of past and currently successful leaders. What are the typical routes to becoming effective established leaders? What are the characteristics and prerequisites of these effective leaders? And what are the key roles that Christians in Sport plays in their journey?

For UK leaders Christians in Sport meets them early, and meets them “where they are at”. These leaders, while mostly coming from Christian backgrounds and stable homes, do not typically have the confidence or passion to integrate faith and their sporting world. They are often slightly disenchanted with the Church and have noticed a lack of excellence in typical ministry circles that they have experienced in their own sporting lives. It is in this context that Christians in Sport provides inspiration and ignition, impressing these leaders with both a passion as well as excellence in Sports ministry.

In large part, what distinguishes international leaders from their UK counterparts is merely the point at which they first encountered Christians in Sport: these leaders tended to discover Christians in Sport later in life, after they had already found “ignition” through other sports ministries and Christian sportspeople. However, while they have passion, they often lack the strategic tools and ammunition required to impact their contexts. It is here that Christians in Sport plays the vital role of providing this ammunition. Through conferences and informal mentoring, leaders in Christians in Sport partner with these international leaders, serving each other.

Introduction and methodology

Since the late 1970s, Christians in Sport have helped equip and develop leaders to reach the world of sport for Jesus. Whilst this has mainly occurred in the UK, increasingly the charity is engaging with leaders from around the world. In both instances their impact strategy focuses around developing these leaders in their local communities to reach their specific contexts.

To date, Christians in Sport have seen significant success through this model of leadership development. But what are the keys to these stories of success? What are the pivotal moments for these leaders? And how can Christians in Sport replicate these stories in the future?

To discover the answer to these questions, Christians in Sport asked Eido Research to conduct leader success mapping with their current established leaders¹. This research presents the findings from this research as well as key recommendations for how Christians in Sport can increase and replicate their success in the future.

The following report presents a chronological narrative structure, and focuses on three main phases in the lives of UK and international leaders. The first phase looks at their lives before engaging with Christians in Sport. This includes their upbringing and initial engagement with sport and faith. The second phase of this report looks at the moment these leaders met Christians in Sport for the first time as well as their subsequent journeys to becoming established leaders. This includes not only interaction with Christians in Sport, but also other influential areas of their lives such as church and sports clubs. Finally, the third phase looks at these leaders today and their ongoing lifestyle and recommendations in sports ministry. This includes relationships between current behaviours and current indicators of success.

The following report presents a chronological narrative structure, and focuses on three main phases in the lives of UK and international leaders.

¹This group was defined as leaders who have been equipped and empowered to lead sports mission and inspire others to do the same.

Research questions and purposes

To provide a clear focus for this research the following research questions were identified from Christians in Sport:

1 What are the typical routes to becoming effective established leaders?

Firstly, questions looked at identifying the typical routes of effective established leaders. What do their stories have in common with each other? What are the key development moments in these stories?

2 What are the characteristics and prerequisites of these effective leaders?

Secondly, questions looked at identifying the individual characteristics and prerequisites for these leaders to take this journey. What traits do they need to have before working with Christians in Sport? What are the personal characteristics of effective leaders?

3 What are the key roles that Christians in Sport plays in their journey?

Thirdly, questions looked at identifying the key roles that Christians in Sport plays in these success stories. How does Christians in Sport help in their journey? What are the key things that Christians in Sport have done to help these effective leaders develop?

The purpose of answering these questions were as follows:

1 Enable Christians in Sport to maximise the impact of their support on leaders in the future

2 Enable Christians in Sport to increase and improve developing leaders in international contexts

Methodology

Understanding the past and ongoing stories of individuals is a complicated process that requires a diversity of research methods. With this in mind, a cross-sectional online questionnaire in combination with retrospective interviews was used for this research.

Online questionnaire

For the online questionnaire, a saturated sample of all current established leaders was selected. This involved a total of 191 UK leaders, and 104 international leaders. This questionnaire was circulated between the 13th of November 2020 and the 10th of December 2020.

The questionnaire contained questions that looked at indicators of success (the beliefs, behaviours, and experiences of leaders towards sports ministry). Likewise the questionnaire also contained questions that looked at the areas of most significant help, the keys to success, the main barriers to success, as well as the most significant moments in the journeys of these leaders.

A total of 139 UK leaders (113 valid/complete responses) and 91 international leaders (76 valid/complete responses) responded to the questionnaire, giving an overall response rate of 78 per cent (64 per cent if only valid/complete responses are considered). For both populations, further statistical analysis was conducted to test for non-response bias. These tests found no significant area of bias, and therefore the following results can be taken as representative of the whole population of UK and international leaders.



Retrospective interviews

In combination with the online questionnaire a sample of 20 'successful' leaders were sampled for an online interview. Coming from an even split between UK and international, these leaders were identified anecdotally by Christians in Sport leadership as being examples of success (stories that they ideally would replicate in the future). Whilst initially many leaders indicated they weren't able to attend the online interviews, through persistent re-sampling and reminders from both Christians in Sport and Eido Research a total of 18 leaders were interviewed.

The interviews followed a narrative structure, talking with respondents about their lives before engaging with Christians in Sport, once they met Christians in Sport, and currently.

Finalised data sources in this report

This report therefore draws upon data from three main groups of participants.

Top 20 per cent successful questionnaire respondents: Based upon questionnaire responses regarding ongoing beliefs, behaviours, and experiences in sports ministry it was possible to calculate an overall index score of success (each of these concepts contributed a third of the overall success score). Following this, all respondents were ranked in order of this index, and the top 20 per cent of UK leaders, and top 20 per cent of international leaders, were chosen to analyse their other questionnaire answers. In addition, it was also possible to compare these answers with the bottom 20 per cent of leaders.

18 selected success interviews: As previously mentioned, these leaders were anecdotally identified by Christians in Sport leadership as the leaders who were seeing the greatest level of success in their sports ministry (stories that they ideally would replicate in the future). This group consisted of 10 international leaders (a mixture of female and male, with ages ranging from 22 to 47), and 8 UK leaders (a mixture of female and male, with ages ranging from 26 to 49)

Measuring success

Beliefs, behaviours, and experiences

Before looking at interview data, and answering the main research questions, this initial section of the report uses questionnaire response data to describe the overall success level of all established leaders. It examines three main areas of a leaders' life: their subjective beliefs about their own success in sports ministry, their behaviours in sports ministry, and their experiences of success in sports ministry.

Within each section, the two main data sources for this report (as described in the previous section) are highlighted. These are: the top 20 per cent of UK and international leaders, as well as the 18 selected success interviews.

Beliefs

Leaders were asked to subjectively assess to what extent they were achieving five main areas of sports ministry success. These were: integrating faith and sport into their own lives; influencing others to integrate faith and sport in their lives; influencing others to share faith and sport; and giving sportspeople opportunities to head the Christian message.

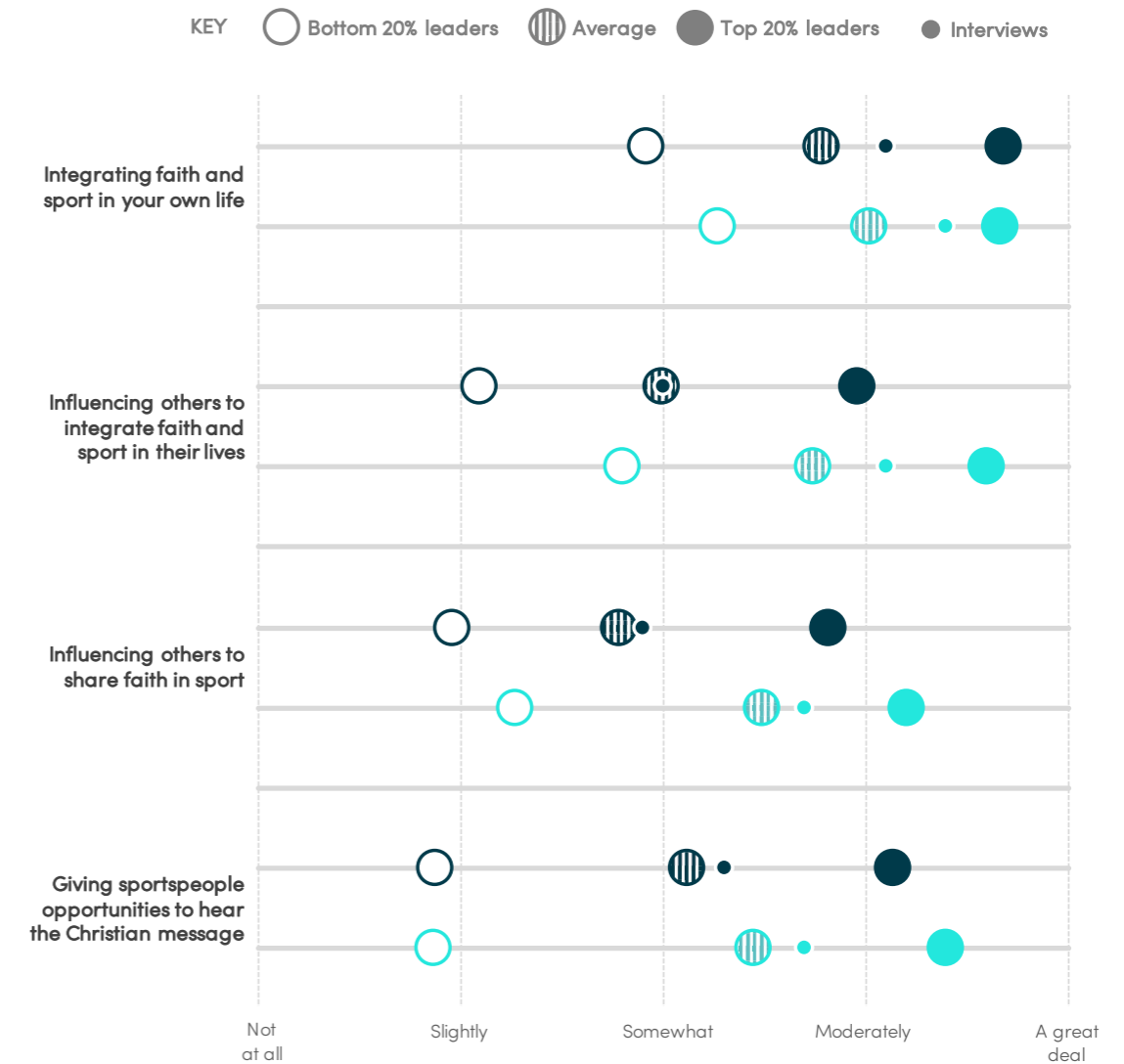
As the graph opposite shows, overall both UK and international leaders believed that the area of greatest success in their lives was the level they were integrating sport and faith into their own life. Conversely for both groups the area of least success in their lives was the level they were influencing others to share faith in sport. This is particularly true for UK leaders, who on average said they were "somewhat" achieving this.

There is also significant variation between UK leaders and international leaders. Across all dimensions, international leaders scored on average half a category higher than UK leaders. Likewise, the top 20 per cent of UK leaders didn't score as highly as the top 20 per cent of international leaders. Similarly, with regards to the bottom 20 per cent, UK leaders scored lower in almost all dimensions.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the anecdotally selected interviews for this report (as shown with the smaller solid dot), all scored slightly above average. Whilst not as high as those in the top 20 per cent, this finding shows that Christians in Sport's perception of success is mostly in line with the subjective perception of leaders.

Beliefs of leaders

We asked leaders to estimate to what extent they were achieving the following activities, thinking about the 12-months period before Covid-19. The graph compares questionnaire data from all UK leaders and international leaders.



The area of greatest success in their lives was the level they were integrating sport and faith into their own lives, whilst the area of least success was the level they were influencing others to share faith in sport.

Behaviours of leaders

We asked leaders to estimate how frequently they were doing the following activities, thinking about the 12-months period before Covid-19. The graph compares questionnaire data from all **UK leaders** and **international leaders**.



Behaviours

Secondly, leaders were asked to estimate the frequency that they were engaging in several different activities. As the above graph shows, participating in sports teams or clubs was on average the most frequent activity. Conversely, participating in evangelistic opportunities (for both groups) and sports ministry events (for UK leaders) were the least frequent activities. It is important to note however, that for the UK questionnaire this category was labelled “Christians in Sport events”, which may explain the significant variation with international leaders.

Experiences

Finally, leaders were asked to estimate the number of individuals they have engaged with in several “outcome” experiences.

As the tables below show, leaders on average were sharing about Jesus with non-Christian sportspeople more than they were encouraging other Christian sportspeople. This is likely to be due to the frequency of contact these leaders have, or do not have, with both groups.

It is likewise interesting to note that across all measures, international leaders are on average sharing about Jesus more, encouraging other Christian sportspeople, and seeing more sportspeople become believers in Jesus Christ.

Experiences of leaders

We asked leaders to estimate the number of individuals they have engaged in the following experiences with, thinking about the 12-months before Covid-19. The tables below compare questionnaire data from all **UK leaders** and **international leaders**.

UK LEADERS	Average	Bottom 20% of leaders	Top 20% of leaders	Interviews
How many non-Christian sportspeople have you shared about Jesus with?	2	1	4	2
How many Christian sportspeople have you actively encouraged to integrate and apply faith and sport in their lives?	1	1	2	1
Did any sportspeople become believers in Jesus Christ?	13% answered yes	0% answered yes	36% answered yes	10% answered yes

INTERNATIONAL LEADERS	Average	Bottom 20% of leaders	Top 20% of leaders	Interviews
How many non-Christian sportspeople have you shared about Jesus with?	3	1	5	4
How many Christian sportspeople have you actively encouraged to integrate and apply faith and sport in their lives?	2	1	4	3
Did any sportspeople become believers in Jesus Christ?	49% answered yes	13% answered yes	87% answered yes	58% answered yes

Journey before meeting Christians in Sport

General upbringing

To better understand our first two research questions (the characteristics and prerequisites of effective leaders, and routes to becoming effective), the interviews asked leaders about their upbringing, their relationship to faith and the church, and their understanding of the integration of sport and mission. (Unless otherwise stated, responses in this section draw exclusively on interviews with “successful” leaders, as opposed to questionnaire data more widely). UK and international leaders differed considerably in their answers to these questions.

UK LEADERS



Upbringing

Most UK leaders grew up in stable homes where they were encouraged to play sport. As one recalled, ‘I have always had a good relationship with my parents: Dad would drive me most nights of the week, five at least, taking me and my sister to some match or type of sports. They were both very loving and very supportive’. Many participants also remembered playing sport with their families and having strong relationships with their siblings as well as their parents.

Faith and church

These UK leaders also tended to become Christians early, with significant parental support for their faith. Six of eight had two Christian parents, and all except one had at least a single Christian parent. In the words of one participant, ‘[I] always went to church’ and ‘always believed in God’. Another similarly described how ‘church has always been a big part’ of their life ‘right through from when I was born through to being married’. Participants often credited their parents with helping them come to faith: one respondent, for example, recounted that their ‘parents read the Bible every evening with us, prayed with us, [and] gave us Bible study notes for our own morning Bible studies’. Likewise, another recalled how ‘they taught me the truths of Christianity from the word go: they taught it and they lived it’.



I always saw sport and faith in competition with each other. If you do sport, then you can't worship and can't do sport at the same time



Interestingly (and unlike international respondents), UK leaders did not tend to emphasise a particular moment at which they became a Christian, but instead focused on the fact that faith had been consistent to their lives from an early age. Once established, UK leaders' commitment to their faith also tended to persist throughout their lives. None of the leaders in our sample mentioned having abandoned their faith, although they did recount experiences which had deepened their faith or their commitment to evangelism.

Sport and mission

Growing up, UK leaders faced two obstacles to integrating sport and mission: (1) a sense that sport and faith were separate entities, and (2) a personal unwillingness to engage in evangelism. One respondent, for instance, had felt that ‘there was no correlation between... church and sport’, and another had thought that ‘the idea of worship didn't include sports’ and that ‘they were conflict[ing] worlds’. Some had also encountered unhelpful attitudes from churches themselves: one, for example, found that ‘the culture with church’ could be barrier: ‘I've been to places’, they explained, ‘where if you're leaving early to go to a match it's looked down upon, or if you turn up to a service in a tracksuit or sports kit then that's not acceptable’. Others had developed similar attitudes: ‘Before Christians in Sport’, one commented, ‘I always saw sport and faith in competition with each other. If you do sport, then you can't worship and can't do sport at the same time’.

Even once participants had begun to make the connection between sport and their faith, they were often afraid to share what they believed. In the words of one respondent:

I didn't really integrate sport and faith. I was very shy and a bit of a wuss when it came to those opportunities to talk about Jesus. [My friends] knew I went to church, but that's not something that people tend to ask much about.

Similarly, another admitted that:

I was a reluctant evangelist. I think fairly early on, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen years [old], I tried talking to friends at school, friends on the rugby team about Jesus, and I had been pretty strongly dismissed, which I think may have rebuffed me for a bit. I really didn't want to go through that again. I also remember losing friends because of this.

In fact, it was often only through organisations such as Christians in Sport that leaders made the connection between sport and faith and began to share what they believed. As interview responses highlighted, this realisation was ‘probably connected to Christians in Sport’, who ‘made it really clear: “Sport is your vehicle to do this, and whether you’re a parent on the pitch-side or a supporter, think about using it as a mission field”’.

Likewise, another shared about attending a sports outreach camp where ‘it really hit home that faith had to affect the whole of my life on a much deeper level’ and where they ‘understood that this love I had for sport wasn’t just a nice thing but that it was a God-given gift and that it could be a mission field’.

In addition, qualitative data from the online questionnaire also pointed to this trend. As is highlighted later in response to the question, “what have been the most significant moments in shaping your conviction and passion for integrating faith and sport?”, 77 per cent of successful UK leaders mentioned something to do with Christians in Sport, while only 5 per cent mentioned something to do with church (and even in this example it was through a church run “Pray Play, Say” group).

INTERNATIONAL LEADERS



Upbringing, faith, and church

Somewhat differently from their UK peers, international leaders reported having a more mixed upbringing. While many mentioned that they had a ‘good upbringing with Christian values’, others commented that it was ‘very hard sometimes’. One participant said that they ‘didn’t have an easy childhood. I grew up with my mum and didn’t know my dad’. Another remarked that they experienced the ‘pressures from being in a working class family’. A final trend was that respondents were often raised in rural areas.

There were further differences in international leaders’ early experiences of faith and the church.

While most interviewees mentioned being exposed to Christianity at a young age, they also stressed that they were not particularly interested in it or committed to their faith. Several noted that they had grown up Catholic; as one observed:

I was brought up in a Roman Catholic family. I went to church every Sunday and read the Bible every day, but I knew nothing about Jesus. It was just a routine.

I was missing church in the morning and just playing sports. I had a lot of pressure to see sports as “of the devil”

Similarly, others described being raised in a ‘family that never attended the church’ or not ‘really understand[ing] about Christian[ity]’. Nonetheless, these leaders also tended to have clear moments in which they made their faith their own, which (in every case) occurred between the ages of 18 and 23. One leader, for example, explained that while they ‘didn’t have any connections to Christians growing up’, they ‘became a Christian many years later when I was 20 years old’, and another described accepting ‘Jesus into my life and Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour’ at the age of 19. At least one leader became a Christian through sport: this participant remembered receiving ‘Christ in my first years in college after playing a friendly match with a team from the United States’ who were ‘doing a mission trip’ to the country where they lived.

Sport and mission

Once they became Christians, international respondents tended to encounter more resistance to their interest in sport than leaders in the UK. Most often, this resistance stemmed from their churches’ concern that playing sport might interfere with their ability to attend church on Sundays. In the words of one leader:

When I became a Christian, one of the things I struggled with was Sundays: I was playing, so I couldn’t go to church. At that time, my church did not have the wisdom... to help me go through that. I start[ed] to see sports as a wrong thing.

Respondent after respondent described similar experiences. ‘For my parents at that time’, one leader said, ‘to stay home from church to play football was seen almost as sin’. Yet another found that ‘it looked sinful to [some people at his church] because I was missing church in the morning and just playing sports. I had a lot of pressure to see sports as of the devil’.

Despite this resistance from their church communities, many of these same leaders were eager to share Christ through sport. Notably, these participants also seemed to grasp the connection between faith and sport much more readily than their counterparts in the UK; ‘I think that integrating sport and faith was always part of me’, one leader reflected.

I think that integrating sport and faith was always part of me

Still others found that 'it was not a problem for me [because] I already believed that what I did was always a gift offering to God', or explained that they had 'realized that if God had given me this gift... I wanted to honour him with it and play the best that I could'. In some cases, this conviction that sport and faith should be unified seemed to be something that leaders had developed remarkably early: one participant, for example, recalled that they were 14 when it 'was really impressed upon me that my purpose in sport would involve being looked at for motivation' and concluded that 'God could use this'. Others benefited from exposure to institutions, such as Christian universities, which encouraged them to share their faith with those they met through sport.

As is highlighted later in this report, in response to the question, 'what have been the most significant moments in shaping your conviction and passion for integrating faith and sport', 53 per cent of international leaders mentioned a direct encounter or revelation with God, while only 7 per cent mentioned something to do with church.

Immediately before encountering Christians in Sport

In addition to asking about leaders' earlier life experience, the interviews also investigated the extent to which they were engaging in sport – and integrating sport and faith – in the period immediately before encountering Christians in Sport. Gathering this information was crucial to understanding the change that Christians in Sport had produced in these leaders' ability to witness for Christ. Once again, unless otherwise stated, this section draws exclusively on interviews with "successful" respondents.

UK LEADERS



Leadership and involvement in sport

On the whole, UK leaders were highly involved in team sport before discovering Christians in Sport. They also tended to find themselves in positions of leadership: as one reflected, 'I was used to being a team captain, for hockey [and] for the swimming team; I was a house captain, that kind of thing'. Others expressed similar ideas: 'I also did a lot of coaching, primarily swimming', another remembered. 'At the holidays, and sometimes at the weekend, I was helping at swimming club and triathlon club from the age of 16'.

Crucially, this leadership was not limited to sports activities: many of the participants we interviewed expressed a desire 'to be an effective leader across the board' and mentioned early experiences in 'youth and student leadership' or as head boy of their school.

Some were quite frank in their assessment of their own leadership ability: one, for example, saw himself as 'probably quite a natural leader anyway', who found himself in 'leadership roles in lots of different spheres of my life'.

It is interesting here to highlight the extensive 'life opportunities' that UK leaders had in comparison with international leaders. Whilst socio-economic status wasn't analysed in this research, certain private schooling and university education was far more common among UK leaders than internationals. As the above quotes illustrative, these opportunities served the UK leaders well in developing their leadership skills.

Integrating sport and faith

As discussed above, however, these leaders had generally not begun to engage in evangelism or integrate their faith with their sporting lives. Often, this hesitancy seemed to derive from a lack of spiritual maturity. As one leader observed:

What I knew at age six was what I believed at 16, which was not great. I had never properly grown in my faith. There was nobody in a position to encourage me into that, putting my faith and sport together.... It wasn't really something that occurred to me.

Other participants recalled how it could be difficult to live distinctively: 'I really struggled a lot', one recalled:

I was very much entrenched in the culture, [so] I really struggled with my faith and it probably took me having to move away from [the city where I went to university] to really start to grow as a Christian. A lot of the time I just didn't have the courage to say no.... I was living the life [the Apostle] James was talking about; it was very duplicitous.... I just felt so much shame on a Sunday morning, I knew I had been out the night before, and my girlfriend and I were sleeping together and the rest of it.

Some were quite frank in their assessment of their own leadership ability: one, for example, saw himself as 'probably quite a natural leader anyway'



Furthermore, many of these leaders were also impeded by a fear of what others might think and a lack of conviction of the importance of evangelism. In the words of one participant:

My own sense of pride, that's always what I've battled with, paying too much attention to other people's opinions of me, the pull of the world's approval. You want to be seen as a good bloke, especially in the world of sport. I just wanted to be seen as a good bloke in the eyes of the world on my terms, not offending anyone.

Finally, some leaders struggled to negotiate conflicting demands on their time. As one respondent explained:

Everything we do comes at a cost; it either costs you cash or costs you on your calendar. At uni, when I look back at trying to build relationships with the rugby guys, it meant not spending time with Christian friends or college friends.

Interestingly, however, no international respondents mentioned this theme, indicating that part of what may have caused UK leaders to struggle with a lack of time might have been poor time management and other priorities – in addition to cultural differences. One leader suggested as much in his open-answer responses, concentrating particularly on his struggle with 'organisation': 'I could talk to people and corral people on the pitch', he said, 'and lead people in that way, but as I said earlier, organisation was never really my strength.... That's always where I've felt the most support and help; that's where I need it'.



INTERNATIONAL LEADERS



International leaders were also highly engaged in sport and leadership in the period immediately before discovering Christians in Sport. However, in most other respects, international leaders' experience was remarkably distinct.

Integrating sport and faith

As discussed above, international leaders tended to be much more open about their faith and evangelistic than UK respondents. One respondent, for example, discussed how even before interacting with Christians in Sport they took on an unofficial chaplaincy role on their sports teams: 'one of the functional ways I got into chaplaincy', they explained, was that 'I became the person who would typically pray before the games, but this was before I even knew about what a chaplain was!' Likewise, another participant remembered how she would sometimes have some very 'heart-to-heart conversations' with the coaches and offer to 'pray or ask them, 'Do you mind if I pray for you about this problem or topic?'' In addition to their openness to talking about their faith, these leaders seemed to have a clear sense of God's calling, discussing how God might be leading them to serve in specific places – 'God gave me the vision that we had to go back to Pakistan', one said – or simply God's 'calling' and 'vision' for their lives more widely.

Exposure to sports ministry and Christian sportspeople

When asked about how they had begun to unify their faith and sporting lives, international respondents pointed to three principal causes: (1) exposure to Christian sports ministry, (2) other Christian sportspeople, and (3) zeal following a moment of conversion or re-commitment to their faith.

While Christians in Sport often "ignited" the faith of UK respondents, other organisations and individuals tended to fulfil this role for international leaders. In fact, international leaders mentioned the theme of exposure to Christian sportspeople and ministries more than any other, with 8 of 10 respondents discussing it.

Sports ministry

In several cases, international leaders had encountered other sports ministries before discovering Christians in Sport. These ministries were vital in enabling them to boldly integrate their faith and sporting lives.

One Latin American leader, for instance, noted that:

God put... in my life this guy, this missionary that... was a PE teacher, also [a] basketball coach. This is why it was so easy for me to understand [that] I really want to go forward to do the same thing that he is doing because I saw the value... I saw his work, what he did... And I saw that this was my model; I want to work also like him, doing the same thing he is doing.

Similarly, another respondent first came across sports ministry through a well-known overseas mission agency:

We were with [this mission agency], and they had a sports branch that was just starting... combining sports and faith, and we were encouraged to go. We also met some people from other organisations [similar to Christians in Sport], but from the US who had heard about us out there in the Middle East... [We] started playing football straight away, and we saw what a great connection point that was, so I think that was first there on the mission field [that we made the connection].

In addition to mission agencies, international leaders noted that they had been inspired by university ministries with an emphasis on sport, church-organised sporting events, individual missionaries, and Christian universities. As one respondent explained,

I was actually at a Christian university, so they really integrated sports and faith. Our coach was a Christian, they encouraged us to read things that were grounded in the Word, and we were encouraged to pray even during the games. How we played on the pitch was meant to be an opportunity to witness. At the end of a game, we would choose a particular player and hand out our testimonies to them on a card, so each of the players [could] testify about what God was doing in their lives.

In one rare instance, a supportive church even seemed to provide a venue for a leader to explore his interest in sports ministry:

I continued to be part of sports but not as a player in a federation or a team, just with friends and my church. At that time, I started to get involved in sports ministries. Bringing teams to other places to play sports. Organising tournaments, football, futsal and sometimes basketball. Christian churches that bring other people besides Christians, non-Christians to come and watch and play.

This is why it was so easy for me to understand... I saw his work, what he did... and I saw that this was my model



Other Christian sportspeople

However, not all international leaders were exposed to other sports ministries before coming across Christians in Sport, and those who were not often began to unify their interest in faith and sport through relationships with other Christian sportspeople. One leader, for instance, recalled how his father's example helped him to make the connection between sport and faith:

My father was committed to the local church as a leader but also to the sports club as the director, so my father and mother, they always did things like bringing me to the sports club on Sunday morning and then the church in the afternoon.

As this leader explained, his father's influence was particularly important because his church did not support his involvement in sport: 'my father was always really encouraging and told me I needed to use the gifts God gave me where I am', he said. 'My father was really supportive, but the church was not'.

Likewise, another leader shared how playing on a team with other Christian athletes inspired him to share his faith:

Our team had about 10 athletes [who were] committed Christians, we would ask each other a lot, 'What are we showing people? What kind of light are we shining?' When you travel a lot together as a team with these same goals, you speak about these things often.

In time, this respondent decided to form a discipleship group:

We were together for about two or three years with the same coach, and in the third year, we said we would start a fellowship group. I suggested it out on the track to my coach, so I decided to take it seriously alongside my coach and another athlete.

As this leader concluded, even before he was introduced to formal sports ministry, 'for a long time, I believe that [I was]... doing sports ministry even though [I] didn't know it was a thing'.

For a long time, I believe that I was doing sports ministry, even though I didn't know it was a thing



Zeal

As we shall discuss in our questionnaire data below, more than half of international leaders (53 per cent) claimed that significant “moments with God” were crucial to their development in sports ministry. These moments – whether conversion experiences or decisions to recommit to their faith – also seemed to infuse leaders in our interview sample with a unique zeal for evangelism. One respondent, for instance, seemed unable to contain her enthusiasm even years after the event:

My life turned around; I felt like I was seeing in colour for the first time. I was happy before, but it was just a whole new world opening up: “God exists, he can talk to me through his Holy Spirit!” [I] started reading the Bible, being passionate about Jesus, and wanting to share my faith with others.

Another spoke of his renewed commitment to Christ in equally vibrant terms:

It was this big joy, like a child you want to share with [everyone]. Like Christmas, when you share a gift. It was the same, and for me [it clicked]... “Okay, I have to share the Gospel with my teammates. I have to try to show them that there is a God who love[s] us, who give[s] us the Son”. This can change their life because my life was changed, and my teammates see the difference in the way I was playing.

For these respondents, a desire to share Christ seemed to flow directly from the joy of a newfound faith – an experience less common amongst UK respondents, who (as we shall see below) did not seem to share the moments of passionate conversion or re-commitment to faith emphasised by international leaders.

Hindrances

Nonetheless, many international leaders still faced real challenges in the period before encountering Christians in Sport, including a lack of resources and cultural obstacles such as a separation between faith and sport, opposition from other religions, and sexism.

Amongst international leaders, the notion that sport and faith should be separate was a serious barrier. As one respondent reflected,

At that time, sport was not looked at very well, and it was a big deal missing church on Sunday, so I didn’t have support from church or family friends; people worried that I was taking sports too seriously.

My life turned around; I felt like I was seeing in colour for the first time... it was just a whole new world opening up



It can be difficult as a woman to lead men... there’s the cultural burden... it was especially strong when I didn’t have a team around me



Others shared similar stories, noting that sport could sometimes be seen as an ‘idol’ without much potential for ministry. One leader remembered how his pastor wanted him to be a leader within the local church rather than pursue his call to sports ministry:

He [the pastor] was not happy about that. He was praying for... leaders in the church, and he was [like] ‘Okay... you will be the leader’. ‘No, I am going to Nepal to do Sports Ministry’, and he was like, ‘No, no, no, no, no’.

In at least one case, opposition from other religions was an impediment to sharing Christ through sport. As one respondent explained:

In our context, [my country] is majority Muslim. Among the nominal Christians, it was easy to integrate sports and faith, but among the Muslim community, it was really a case of being well trained: you need to be well prepared spiritually; you need to know useful terms and language to be able to connect with the Muslim community. It was a great challenge.

This respondent went on to share that he himself had faced pressure to convert after another influential Christian player had converted to Islam: ‘there was a time then that they were really pressuring me to convert, too’, he said, ‘and there was so much pressure that I had to choose between my faith and my profession’. In fact the pressure this leader faced was so intense that he was obliged to leave his country for a time to play on another team abroad.

Finally, some leaders shared that sexism and racism could sometimes impede their ministry. As one woman observed:

In [my country’s] culture, it can still be difficult as a woman to lead men, even leading different parts of ministry. Youth pastors and staff would come and work with us, and I found it really difficult: it is still a very new thing here. It’s more that it was unusual than [that] the people made it difficult for me: people were kind with me, but there’s the cultural burden, and that was especially strong when I didn’t have a team around me.

While international leaders may have been more successful in integrating sport and faith, they still had real needs – albeit in radically different areas from the UK respondents discussed above. While UK leaders’ greatest needs seemed to be for spiritual maturity, confidence in sharing their faith, and guidance in managing their time, international leaders tended to be most hindered by a lack of resources and societal barriers to integrating faith and sport.

Differences in passion for integrating sport and faith

While international leaders were undeniably more passionate about evangelism and integrating faith and sport than UK leaders, this seems to be primarily a function of the point at which they came into contact with Christians in Sport. While UK leaders tended to discover Christians in Sport as young adults or university students in need of “ignition”, international respondents came into contact with Christians in Sport later in life, after they had already been “ignited” and disciplined by other ministries and Christian sportspeople. In most senses, therefore, international leaders were not intrinsically more evangelistic or committed to their faith than UK respondents; they just discovered Christians in Sport at a different stage in their spiritual development.

They may be, however, two senses in which international leaders’ experience really did differ from their UK counterparts’. First, these respondents’ moments of conversion or recommitment seemed to leave them with a degree of zeal that UK leaders lacked – even later in their lives when they decided to make their faith their own (for which, see below). While UK leaders became committed to and serious about evangelism, some international leaders seemed to be driven by a kind of infectious energy after their moments of conversion or recommitment to faith. Secondly, many of these international leaders encountered real opposition, either to their faith (as in the example of the leader from a Muslim-majority country above) or to their conviction that faith and sport could be integrated (as was the case with churches which resisted leaders’ decisions to play sport). In these instances, research has shown that opposition can serve to harden leaders’ resolve – an experience which may have partly accounted for the discrepancies seen between UK and international respondents.



Summary

For both UK and international leaders, there are both important similarities and differences in their journeys before meeting Christians in Sport.

What are the characteristics and prerequisites of these effective leaders?

Based upon the interviews there appear to be four main similarities that are shared by both UK and international successful leaders.

- 1 Passion and engagement with sport:** Leaders exhibited a passion for playing sport independent from their faith. This was often also reflected in their high level of ability.
- 2 Leadership gifting and experience:** Leaders had both the confidence and ability to lead in various parts of their lives. While for international leaders this was in both faith and sport, for UK leaders this was mainly isolated to secular endeavours.
- 3 A faith that can at least be activated:** Leaders also had a faith that was ready to be activated. In this area, however, international leaders exhibited a more missional and confident faith, while for UK leaders this faith was less fervent and strategic. This difference primarily resulted from the fact Christians in Sport encountered international leaders later in life, after they had already been exposed to other sports ministries and Christian sportspeople.
- 4 Personable, teachable team players:** While not necessarily explicitly stated in the above transcripts, it was apparent that all leaders were highly personable. Likewise their engagement in team sports also pointed towards them being good team players, and able to relate well with others.

This difference primarily resulted from the fact Christians in Sport encountered international leaders later in life, after they had been exposed to other sports ministries

However, there also appear to be some clear differences exhibited by the international leaders. These are:

- 1 Hunger to integrate sport and faith:** International leaders were significantly more passionate in integrating sport and faith in their lives. Many were already engaging in sports ministry before they met Christians in Sport.
- 2 Humility:** International leaders also demonstrated a greater level of humility in both their personal and professional lives.
- 3 Resilience:** Given their significantly more difficult personal upbringing, cultural challenges and hindrances, as well as lack of physical resources, international leaders all demonstrated a high level of resilience.

What are the typical routes to becoming effective established leaders?

With regards to the typical routes, in line with their contexts international and UK leaders showed strong similarities.

The majority of UK leaders grew up in stable Christian environments. They engaged heavily in sports and also were a consistent Christian. Likewise they also excelled in leadership in sport and non-faith spheres. However, it was not until they engaged with Christians in Sport that they made the connection between sport and faith. Until this point, they tended to regard them as separate worlds.

For international leaders family life was more varied with many experiencing financial and relational difficulties. While their engagement with sport was substantial, they had only limited exposure to faith during their childhood years. However, at a later point all leaders had a significant moment in their life where they embraced their faith fully and started to integrate faith and sport into their own lives. By the time they met Christians in Sport they had a significant 'missional fervour'.

Engagement with Christians in Sport

While the previous section examined leaders' lives before meeting Christians in Sport, this section focuses on their lives during and after this first interaction. This includes their engagement with Christians in Sport staff, events, online resources, and additional training. The section also considers other possibly influential areas of leaders' lives, including church and sports club engagement. For the most part, findings in this section draw upon interviews with "successful" leaders, although we have also included some quantitative data and graphs from the top 20 percent of questionnaire respondents. When we are citing data from the questionnaire, we have marked it explicitly.

Introduction and interaction with Christians in Sport

UK LEADERS' INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIANS IN SPORT



Introduction

The majority of UK leaders first encountered Christians in Sport early in their lives (during secondary school or university). These introductions tended to happen through personal connections. Four leaders, for example, first discovered Christians in Sport through their church or youth leader. As one participant recalled:

It was one of the church leaders that introduced me to Sports Plus, she went as a leader herself with her sporty son. She was also a teacher at my school and the swim coach which meant she knew who I was because I was on the swim team at school.

Another respondent remembered how a youth leader at their church had put them in touch with a Christian hockey player at the university they were planning to attend, and a third described how a church friend had introduced them to the organisation:

There was a girl at my church who had grown up going to the camps and she was encouraging me to go along and get involved with Christians in Sport... the church sent me and I ended up going along to the camp.



Yet another leader was introduced through their junior school: 'back in junior school', this respondent explained, 'Christians in Sport were doing local "Pray, Play, Say" youth groups, I remember going along a few times'.

Interestingly, even the two leaders in our interview sample who discovered Christians in Sport later in life tended to hear about it through personal connections (in both cases, younger relatives). 'The first real engagement was when my nephew had been on a Sports Plus camp', said one leader. Another had a similar experience: 'we really got involved when we signed them [our children] up for Sports Plus', they said, 'and we got involved with helping out and leading there as well'.

Why did they want more?

Once they discovered Christians in Sport, there were broadly two reasons why UK leaders returned. The first was their surprise at the quality of the events and content. Throughout the interviews and online questionnaires, this was one of the most consistent and frequently mentioned attributes of Christians in Sport. One leader, for instance, described the first time they attended a Christians in Sport event:

I saw my friend there and she was one of the emcees on the first evening, and I was arriving late. I ended up sitting at the front and as soon as it started I was blown away by how well they did everything. I've been going consistently for six years now. I wish I had got involved earlier.

Referring to Sports Plus training camps another leader mentioned, 'I have to say the specific training camps were absolutely top-notch... I'm not sure if they do it anymore but I really wish they would because it was fantastic... I just remember the training and leadership stuff that went on there was fantastic'. Another leader mentioned, 'I realised that the coaching was superb, the standard of coaching and teaching were very good, both very impressive, very professional for a kids camp, high standards throughout. You develop confidence in them very quickly, and that's probably why I gravitated towards them. I work in a demanding profession with exacting standards, so I'm drawn to well-run outfits like Christians in Sport'.

I was blown away by how well they did everything. I've been going consistently for 6 years now. I wish I had got involved earlier



This high level of quality was often juxtaposed with the lack of quality and seriousness that many leaders had experienced in other ministry areas. 'Church sport culture is a bit naff, playing football in the park wearing a pair of jeans', one respondent said:

So to go along to a place where others loved sport so much was so big for me... The passion and vigour that I saw people had was unparalleled... and so compelling to me because I had that too, and seeing these people then showing that same level of passion or more for their faith, I was like, "Yes, I want that too".

Another highlighted the authenticity of the people they met through Christians in Sport: 'At Christians in Sport events I got to meet real human beings who were also Christians', they said.

These last two quotes start to illustrate the second main reason that leaders stayed after their first encounter. As well as the quality of delivery, UK leaders valued meeting people who ignited and connected with their passion. 'I don't remember much of the teaching back then but I remember the impact of those role models', said one leader. 'Here was the group of people that I had things in common with', another emphasised. A third seemed to particularly appreciate finding a community of other Christian sportspeople: 'I was going to church regularly, but I had no real friends there', they said: 'the people I encountered at church didn't really do anything outside of the church bubble at all'.

A final group of respondents underlined Christians in Sport's enthusiasm for faith and sport. 'The passion I saw at Sports Plus far exceeded what I would see at church', said one respondent, and another seemed to echo their words: 'being able to go along to a place where others loved sport so much was so big for me', they said, 'to see leaders who just loved sport, to be able to talk about cricket in a way that I could never talk about it at church'.

For these leaders, Christians in Sport seemed to be attractive because it filled a vital niche that their churches had been unable to occupy. 'I really benefited from a group of people who were like minded, we weren't necessarily meeting up outside of that group we didn't become a social group, but there was something about having a group of people who understood my journey and my struggle and the world that I was in. That was something that I didn't really find at church at that point, it felt like at church they had very different priorities and we weren't really compatible', summarised another leader.

INTERNATIONAL LEADERS' INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIANS IN SPORT



Introduction

For international leaders, their first encounter with Christians in Sport happened later in their life journey. As has already been described, these leaders had already developed a missional fervour, with many already engaging in some form of sports ministry. Their introduction to Christians in Sport also differed from UK leaders. In these international instances, leaders were either introduced through friends and other Christian sportspeople, or through general conference attendances connected with their own developing ministries. One leader, for example, discovered Christians in Sport after they began to organise tournaments at the age of 24:

Straightaway we were connected with the European movement, that was ECSU, something that Christians in Sport and myself are a part of. I went to a gathering in Barcelona and... met some people from Christians in Sport there.

Yet another recalled how:

About a year after I got injured, I heard about a sports conference that was being held in [my country], and someone I knew got in touch with me and said I might want to go to the conference because it was all about sport and faith, and that was my first contact with sports ministry in general and that was also the first time I met Christian in Sport staff.

A final leader had a similar experience: 'in 2015, I think I met some of the individuals from Christians in Sport, and then met Graham Daniels at a conference in Dubai', they said.

Someone I knew got in touch with me and said I might want to go to the conference because it was all about sport and faith



Why did they want more?

If an “ignition” was key for UK leaders in returning to Christian in Sport events, it was a sense of “ammunition” that was key for international leaders in what they got from their first encounter with Christians in Sport. ‘This is why I started to be intentional with Christian in Sport: they could teach me’, one leader said. ‘I wanted to know more about what they do in Europe. The biggest benefit with Christians in Sport is that they are able to give new strategies to implement’.

Indeed while international leaders did reference the joy of meeting similar minded people, they tended to describe these interactions through a more strategic lens than UK respondents. ‘It wasn’t just that I could see other Christians operating in that sphere, but also having the materials, a system, a plan and having the support from a whole community doing the same thing, it was revolutionary’, said one leader. ‘One of the things that has really disappointed me in the church culture, is the lack of accountability, there has been no focus on a thing that you’re trying to achieve, no goal set and no strategy, but for us in sports that’s how you think, you always have a goal, some outcome that you are working toward’, said another leader. ‘Going to other places to see how things can really be was very inspirational and so important to see it in practice, and Christians in Sport had such a huge role in this, they invited me to their camp and I spent a week just taking notes of everything in their daily schedule, and the next year we started our own camp in Romania’, said a third leader.

Similar to UK leaders, international leaders also referenced the level of quality and clarity of Christians in Sport’s vision and mission. This, however, was again articulated through the lens of providing solutions and tools for their own situations. ‘One of the major inspirations was the clarity of the vision and the plan, how well organised the structure of the plan was. The way that they explained it and also the way that they actually ran it’, said one leader. ‘They didn’t just talk about discipleship, they actually do it, they walk with players intentionally’, another agreed.

This is why I started to be intentional with Christian in Sport. They could teach me. I wanted to know more about what they do in Europe. The biggest benefit with Christians in Sport is that they are able to give new strategies to implement



Journey to becoming an effective leader with Christians in Sport

UK LEADERS ONGOING INTERACTION WITH CHRISTIANS IN SPORT



Ongoing interaction with Christians in Sport

As has already been described, for UK leaders the combination of high-quality events with inspirational Christian sportspeople was a key feature in their first engagement with Christians in Sport. However, as these leaders continued to interact with Christians in Sport, it was the direct relationship they developed with inspirational leaders that was perceived as the most helpful next step.

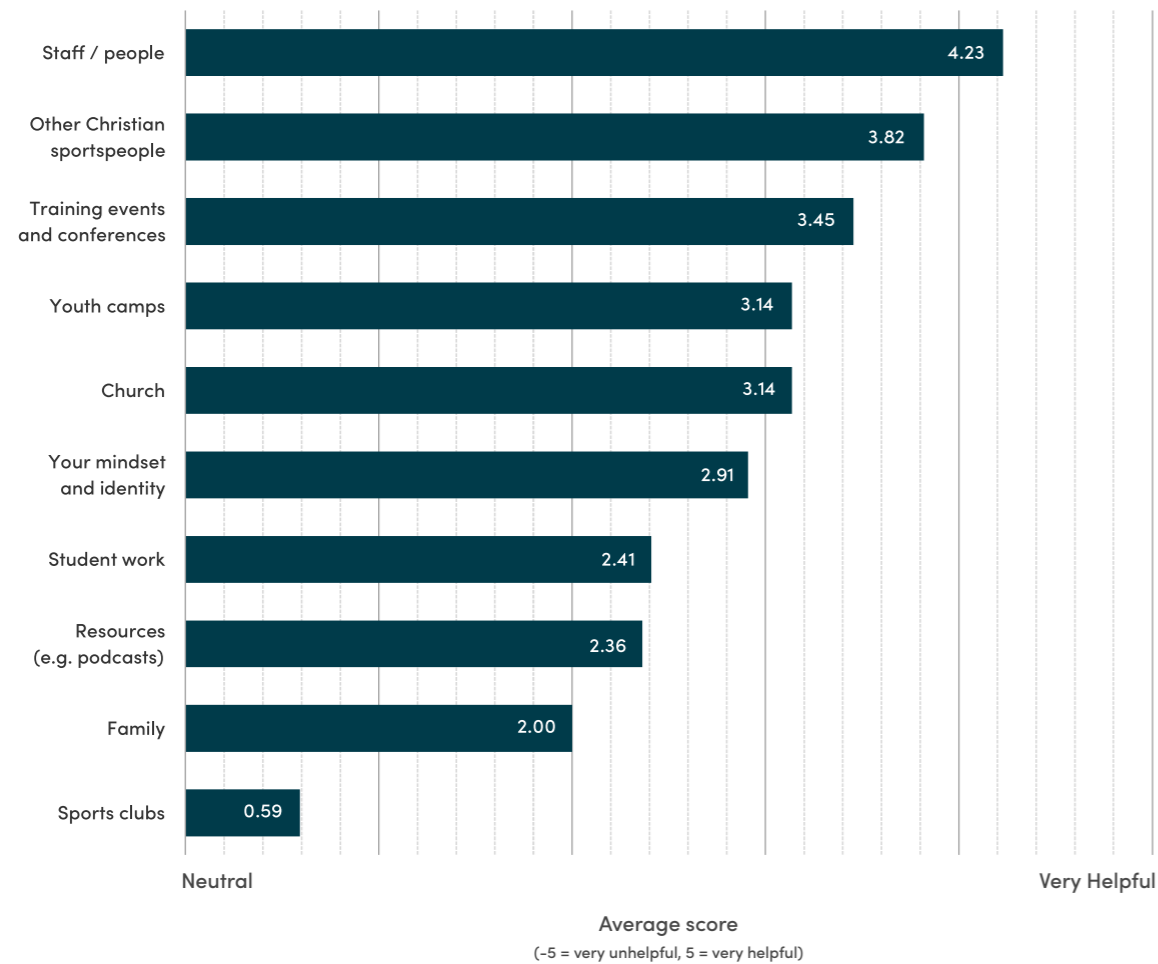
Seven out of eight leaders mentioned a personal contact they developed with a Christians in Sport leader, and centred their subsequent story around this relationship. ‘I benefitted the most from just reading the Bible a lot with this guy Owen to be honest: you know we’d meet up once a week, read the Bible, encourage one another, teach each other, and I just think that’s really shaped my ability to handle the Bible, and my ability to teach other people as well’, said one leader. ‘Andy Bryce took me under his wing, and we would meet up fortnightly, and [he would] take me through a short Bible study. I’d see it now as discipleship. He was preparing a lot of talks and just brought me alongside him, things like that were really, really formative’, said another leader.

‘My first contact was Debbie, and she was really interested in us and interested in [my son] and she was brilliant and supportive and wanted to hear ideas’, said another leader. ‘I do remember one of the other leaders [Lucy] who worked part time for Christians in Sport. We met at one of the camps. I would ask her to pray for me. Lincs, also, was really good and he would come down and get involved and was really supportive.’ ‘Lincs was a big part of this part of my life. He would call me and say ‘if you drive to Abberton service station about 60 miles down, I’ll drive 60 miles up and we can meet on Saturday morning at 8.30 and have breakfast. So we did that, caught up on life and it was just like, this is real, people are really living it’, said another leader.

Online questionnaire data confirmed this trend: as the following graph illustrates, Christians in Sport staff, followed by Christian Sportspeople were rated by the most successful 20 per cent of respondents as the top two helpful influences in respondents’ journeys to becoming effective leaders.

Influences

We asked leaders to indicate how helpful the following areas have been in their journey to becoming an effective leader in sports ministry. The graph shows questionnaire data from the most successful **UK LEADERS ONLY**



In parallel with these relationships, successful UK leaders rated the training events and youth camps as the third and fourth most helpful areas in their journeys. However, when referenced in their interviews, it was the leadership opportunities and experiences that these events provided that were key.

'I went and coached and volunteered at one of the camps. They then wanted an athletics coach, and so I went back as a leader, and I ended up going back each year as a camp leader', said one leader. 'At the end of my undergrad, I went to help at the Sports Plus camp.... I went along as a running coach, and the whole thing was amazing. It was so well organised.... That's where I met a load of other adults who had a very similar testimony to what I had had', said another.

Here again, mirroring earlier sentiments, leaders commented on how well run these leadership training opportunities were. 'Having been involved in similar things from other organisations. I was like, "Wow this is really top notch." And that really captured my imagination a bit. That is what hooked me into Christians in Sport. So although it was all very good training, it was the excellence that hooked me in'.

Another leader mentioned that since their first meeting with Christians in Sport 'I have led a lot on Sports Plus camps first of all, and then I ran a "Pray, Play, Say" series at my church....The series would normally be a six-week programme, but they tailored things to suit our needs, reducing it to a three-week series. I was very impressed with that'.

How did this interaction change or develop?

A follow-up question asked all UK leaders how their engagement with Christians in Sport developed further over the years. In response, two main themes emerged. The first, perhaps unsurprisingly, involved an increase in leadership role and responsibility with Christians in Sport. However, intriguingly, for almost half of interviewed leaders, before this there was an initial period of reduced contact with Christians in Sport. As the following quotes illustrate, this was mainly due to competing life events or priorities.

'In my mid twenties I got married, got involved in [the] local church and didn't make it to Sports Plus for a couple years. My wife is not particularly sporty, so she did come a few times, but didn't really enjoy it so I ended up missing it for two or three years', said one leader. 'I wanted to get involved [more in Christians in Sport] but very quickly got glandular fever, and it wiped out eight weeks of first term and a few weeks of second term, and I lost a lot of stamina. Basically, it took away my ability to play sports, so I couldn't play sports and do university at the same time. From that point, it was genuinely 20 years until I looked up Christians in Sport again or was aware of anything they were doing', said a second leader.

'Other things and interests just took over, I had a year in France where we were skiing and I really enjoyed that; there were just other things that I got involved in. That's really where my relationship with Christians in Sport was put on pause too, they kept on doing their thing and I kept on doing my thing', said a third leader. 'I had three years of no interaction [with Christians in Sport], it just wasn't on my radar', said a fourth leader. 'I had about three years of no interaction', said a fifth.

My wife is not particularly sporty so she did come a few times, but didn't really enjoy it so I ended up missing it for two or three years



For some of these leaders, it was the personal relationships that were key in re-integrating them with Christians in Sport. 'Ian Lancaster himself got in touch and prompted us to do stuff and crack on with things', said one leader. 'I remember being at Aviemore and meeting Lancs and Kristin Ross, and they had a pretty frank conversation with me about there always being work to do and that God may be calling me to do specific work and I think I went back to Sports Plus the next year', said another leader.

In any case, the majority of UK leaders mentioned that there was subsequently an increase in leadership and responsibility with Christians in Sport. 'The next year when I went back they actually gave me quite a high level of responsibility in the camp. I had to oversee all of the sports, and that was a bit of a gamble I think, but I really took to it... It was a very positive experience, and I could feel myself growing, and it just felt like more of what God has made us to do, and that was directly from a bit of encouragement from the people at Christians in Sport', said one leader. 'I went back as a leader, and I ended up going back each year as a camp leader', said another. 'I became more integrated and more involved than before. Initially, I was just sending my kids to their camps for a couple years, and then I was meeting their leaders. Then off the back of that I was going to some of their events, and then I got involved with their work, particularly in the local area', said a third leader.

Other areas of influence for UK leaders

While Christians in Sport staff, other Christian sportspeople, and events and conferences were rated as the most helpful aspects of UK leaders' journeys to becoming effective, there were several other key areas of influence. However, while these areas were on average more helpful than not, they did in some instances hinder as well as help leader development.

Faith and engagement with church

As has already been shown, church played a valuable introduction to Christianity for UK leaders, as well as a stable base from which to engage more with ministry. This trend appeared to continue for UK leaders once they had met Christians in Sport, and to some extent become a more positive attribute. 'I just think that I've been really blessed in my Christian journey in that I've been taught the Bible really well and lovingly from the start and so actually I would say that is probably the most important thing for a leader', said one leader. 'Just a very overarching loving church family I think is just really vital, one where you're regularly invited round to lunch on Sunday that kind of thing and then, yeah, it's been a wonderful Christian upbringing for me', said another leader. 'I believe that the local church is really integral to the health of a believer', said another leader.

However, not all interaction with church continued to be positive. 'I find an invite to Christians in Sport events a lot easier than church events for some reason; I don't know whether it's just because it's a sports thing and often Christian in Sports events are held in a pub, so that's an easy invite', said one leader.

Ongoing mindset and identity

Similar to church events, ongoing mindset and identity were seen in a more positive light after initial engagement with Christians in Sport. As has been described, there was a general lack of confidence and missional identity in Christ that UK leaders experienced growing up. This had in turn impacted their confidence and ability to share the Gospel. However, increasingly leaders experienced a shift in identity and confidence. 'My identity became no longer in my ability to run or play sport. My identity increasingly was found in Christ', said one leader.

One of the reasons suggested for this shift was through direct experience in sports ministry. 'When you take these opportunities up, you tend to grow in confidence. You take those opportunities and you develop and get better and then I think the more you are in those types of positions, the more people are going to see you up front and see you as a leader. I feel like it's quite an environmental thing, becoming a leader', said one respondent. 'I now get a real buzz off of seeing people enjoy themselves, and I love people having a good time, and if I could have a little part to play in then that was really great for me', said another.

One leader compared their experience of taking opportunities and growing in confidence with their sister who had experienced the opposite. 'On the flip side, my younger sister had been involved with Christians in Sport and European Sports Leadership Modules, but they had stopped a lot of the pre-season training and stuff like that that she had been involved with. She's had fewer opportunities to lead since then, and I think she's a little less confident as a result of that. I think you have to be able to step outside of your comfort zone and take opportunities to lead but you need encouragement and support to do that'.

My identity became no longer in my ability to run or play sport. My identity increasingly was found in Christ



Family

It is interesting to note that family influence both family and friends and particularly sport activities scored relatively low in the level of help that questionnaire respondents felt they had received.

With regards to leader relationship with spouses, as well as leader relationship with parents, interview data likewise produced a varied picture. On the one hand, leaders felt they 'get a sense of confidence that is very much instilled in me from my family. They would always be supporting me to go ahead and do these types of things'. Whilst this was in reference to their parents and siblings, others said they 'felt encouraged and supported by [their] wife'.

However, other leaders mentioned marriage and a shift in focus away from sports ministry towards their relationship. 'My wife is not particularly sporty so she did come a few times but didn't really enjoy Sports Plus so I ended up missing it for two or three years', said one leader. 'Significantly, the biggest change has been that I married someone who is not sporty, she's not against sport, my wife loves Christians in Sport and thinks that it's good, she encourages me to go to rugby club and share my faith there which is great. But this is where there's a difference between being single and being married, I have to think about us, it's not just about what I want to do, I have to think about what I and [my wife] want to do, what does she want to do', said another leader.

However, with regards to leader relationships with their children, a significantly more positive picture emerged. Here, both parents interviewed (who had younger members in their family who were involved in Christians in Sport), mentioned that not only did their younger relations bring them into close contact with Christians in Sport, but that in fact these relationships acted as motivation for their sports ministry.

Referring to helping out at a Sports Plus camp, one parent said, 'there was a real sense that, "Yes, we're here to teach the young people, to teach our kids; Yes, we're here to give them support and opportunities". There was a real sense of feeling refreshed and built up in our faith. We felt so useful. It'll always be one of the highlights for me of anything that I've ever been to, and I feel like I'm gushing, but it was really special; it was really very special'.

We're here to teach the young people, to teach our kids. We're here to give them support and opportunities... We felt so useful



The flip side of feeling old is that you've lived a bit and had more time with God. You have life experience and some wisdom to bring to the younger ones



Associated to this feeling of 'being useful' was a strong sense of purpose and identity coming from age and life stage differences. 'I think that the flip side of feeling old is that you've lived a bit and you've also had more time with God. You know him a bit better, you've had the experience of things not going well, and you know God's plan works out much better than we would have planned. I do have some life experience and some wisdom to bring to the younger ones who are trying to run something or learning to lead', said one parent.

Finally, another leader told the story of how he and other parents had helped with the 'lack of confidence' that many younger UK leaders exhibited before engaging with Christians in Sport.

'Last year, my son was playing for the school rugby team. There were 4 or 5 Christians in the team, so it was a great opportunity to influence the team, but I knew [he] wouldn't have the confidence to do it off of his own back. So the parents of the Christian kids got together and they felt that their kids had a great opportunity but that they probably lacked the confidence to do something themselves. So we, the parents, ran a number of big screen events in our church hosting a rugby match as well as an interview with an ex-international player, and we told the kids to just invite their friends. This was just a way of encouraging Harry to be salt and light in the team, but not putting the burden on him to organise the event. People brought their friends and so we had 150 to 200 people at it, it was really good'.

Sport

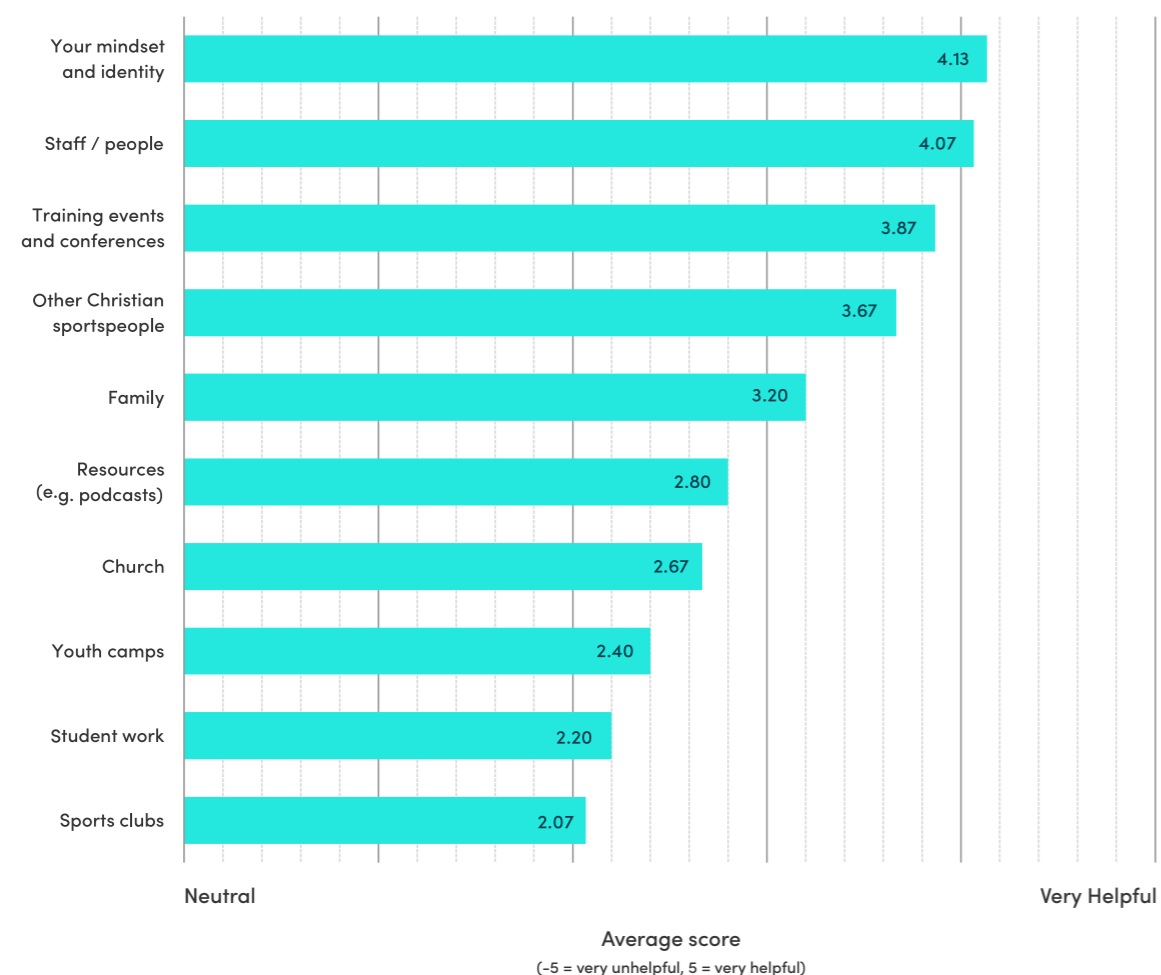
As well as being scored very low, sports teams were mentioned very sporadically in leaders' interviews. When they were mentioned, however, it was usually with the theme of increasing "cultural barriers". 'Football wise, I wasn't one of the boys any longer, if you weren't fit, you didn't train hard, you weren't putting the work in or doing the training, you just weren't playing and that made me take that far more seriously', said one leader. 'Going back to the pub as a 25-year-old married Christian – it just wasn't the same going back to the pub; I just became more focused and disciplined', said another leader.

INTERNATIONAL LEADERS' ONGOING INTERACTION WITH CHRISTIANS IN SPORT



Influences

We asked leaders to indicate how helpful the following areas have been in their journey to becoming an effective leader in sports ministry. The graph shows questionnaire data from most successful **INTERNATIONAL LEADERS ONLY**



For international leaders the process from first point of contact with Christians in Sport followed a similar, albeit more fast-tracked and less linear, process. Attending conferences and training events quickly developed into serving and leading on conference and training events. Simultaneously, informal relationships between these leaders and Christians in Sport staff developed. This in turn resulted in these staff visiting and helping international leaders to develop their ministries in their specific context.

[The serving opportunity] really opened doors to continue the work when I got home, I wasn't afraid so much to present the Word of God to other people, it was a big moment, I was thinking this is possible, if I could do it out there then I could do it here back home



'I attended mostly conferences, and heard so many stories that really inspired me and encouraged me that the sports world was not over for me. I thought "Okay, I need to go back to the conference not just as a player now but to see how I could serve". The next year I went [to serve and lead] and was even more inspired and motivated', said one leader. It was 'a relationship that was win, win... serve and be served... coming together', said another leader. 'The European gatherings were always influential for us to continue to serve. It was once or twice a year that I was going to those conferences and getting excited about that. Each time we went I was encouraged and admired them, and slowly I got involved more and more.'

In many instances these serving opportunities at conferences catalysed an informal mentoring relationship between Christian in Sport leaders and international leaders. 'I was asked to share in an ongoing series, I was asked to do a devotional for the team in the morning. To do this, I was coached a lot by Graham and Greg [on] how to present the word of God; that was a big thing. I was really grateful for this; it really simplified the Word. I learned a lot in that time: I've used those skills that I learned since then', said one leader. '[The serving opportunity] really opened doors to continue the work when I got home, I wasn't afraid so much to present the Word of God to other people, it was a big moment, I was thinking this is possible, if I could do it out there then I could do it here back home', said another leader. 'I was the main speaker for one or two sessions in a conference, where I shared my testimony, sport and student ministry. [Christian in Sports leadership] have helped me in different ways, calling, chatting, prayer requests. It was so encouraging and very helpful'.

The result was that, similar to UK leaders, the relationships that developed became key aspects of interacting with Christians in Sport. 'I would say we had an informal mentorship. It was never agreed on paper, but they were so encouraging and coaching my husband and Graham and others would send an email every now and then to see how we were doing and how they could help us', said one leader.

In some instances leaders mentioned that Christians in Sports leaders would subsequently come and help in their contexts. 'I remember him [Andrew Wingfield Digby] and then Graham started to come, and other people from England. They were really a powerful influence in my life and the main encouragement that I received in terms of sports ministries', said one leader. 'That became a time until now when we really began to develop a relationship, especially with Greg and Ian, and we connected weekly. They met my family, and I met their family, and we would travel the world together and continued to do that until the point that Greg challenged me to serve alongside him on the European board with him. That was one of the things that influenced me', said another leader. In these instances, leaders were very warm about these relationships. 'They are really concerned about me. They are really supportive of me', said one leader. 'They serve me without an agenda. They influence me to work with others like that', added another.

It is intriguing that, similar to UK leaders, some international leaders also mentioned a period of reduced contact with Christians in Sport followed by a re-engagement later in their lives. 'When we got back to [our country], I think that they thought we had left sports ministry and so we didn't have much contact with them for around seven years, but I worked in a local church as a fitness pastor, [and] my husband took a secular job and started coaching our kids. But then we reconnected, and they were surprised and amazed with our work with the fitness ministry', said one leader. 'When I moved back to Brazil, I lost touch with Christians in Sport for a bit. It was only when I decided to do the leadership program that I became connected again', said another.

In these instances however, in contrast with UK leaders, international leaders tended to mention and praise the online resources they accessed through the Christians in Sport website. 'All the access that I had with Christians in Sport was through the website. The connection I had in England – I didn't keep talking to them afterwards. It was just through the website', said one leader. 'The materials are vetted and they have been shown to be very, very sound biblically and really effective. I've been blown away by the attention to detail', said another leader.

Regardless of these periods of reduced contact, the trend in relationship with Christians in Sport continued to move from simply sharing knowledge towards deeper relationships as well as greater service and support from Christians in Sport. 'Our engagement developed from knowledge to relationship. It was a 'serving one

Our engagement developed from knowledge to relationship. It was a 'serving one another' partnership



another' partnership', said one leader. '[Christians in Sport] helped to support us when we were doing missions in the Middle East and showed great generosity. They even paid their way when they went to Wales for a Christians in Sport camp', said another leader.

The help specifically in their context was another step for international leaders. As has already been alluded to, and will be expanded upon later, international leaders had very limited support from their local church in their local contexts. This limited support meant that on the ground any interventions (including physical resources or personnel) from Christian in Sport were extremely appreciated.

'We had some help from Christians in Sport staff to help us run the first camp: they came, and they ran the programme, and we were able to learn from them, with a training weekend, and helping us with all the sports equipment which they brought with them, and they left it with us for the next camp which was really overwhelming for us not just that they were helping with words, but also with action. They also came to help us the next year but left us to take on more responsibility, in a really good way they stepped back and let us lead', said another leader.

As a result of this help and simultaneous empowerment, those leaders who Christians in Sport had supported directly in their contexts were able to continue and build upon the foundations of their sports ministry. "Each year we have more and more local leaders and we are running it almost on our own now", said one leader.

Other areas of influence for international leaders

Given that international leaders were often already engaged in sports ministry, and had already developed a missional fervour prior to meeting Christians in Sport, it is understandable that other areas of their lives would be perceived as more influential in their journey. This was particularly true with regard to their ongoing mindset and identity.

Ongoing mindset and identity

Rated as the most helpful area for "successful" leaders, ongoing mindset and identity revolved around concepts of resilience and Christ-centred identity that had been developed during their upbringing. 'Most of the things that have made me the leader that I am were moulded by the difficulties in my life. God really used those to shape me: hard moments in our lives can be very important to shape us and develop our character', said one leader. 'Mindset and identity is another big part. Things not based on performance but rather on grace. Freedom came when I understood this. The game can change, my performance can change, but my identity in Christ does not change. It gave me freedom, even in sports. After this my goal was not just to perform well but to reflect God's glory and to serve my neighbor, the other team or

my teammates and those around me. That is one thing that has been really great to understand', said another leader. A key driver behind this influential part of their lives was their diversity of experience (as has already been alluded to above). 'Looking back, when I look back and analyze my life, I think that the sheer fact that I travelled all over the world and mixed with different cultures: that was a really big learning process for me', said another leader.

In many ways this mindset and identity had been shaped by engagement with other Christian sportspeople, and other sports ministry training, that these international leaders had received. 'During the ISLS school in South Africa we lived together with 25 people from 18 countries. It was extremely formative, living together for 3 months. We were fasting and doing a lot of physical challenges that shaped our sports ministry', said one leader. Other leaders mentioned working with Cru, as well as other smaller sports ministries in their contexts.

Faith and engagement with church

International leaders were mixed about the influence that church had had upon their journey towards success. For some their local church did offer support and encouragement, and appeared to have gone on the same journey as the leader. 'The church has learned the same process that I have learned. Right now they support my ministry and what I do, through prayers. It is good to have them on my journey', said one leader. However, others were less positive. 'They never followed me. They followed me in the beginning of my journey but then they are not good as a mentor, as a pastoral care mentorship, no. They are not able to do it. I got more from other people, other sporty people than my church. My church in this is lacking', said another leader. Other leaders simply did not mention church as a key part of their journey.

Sport clubs

Similar to UK leaders, international leaders rated sport clubs as the least helpful area of their journeys. Whilst it was still a positive influence, leaders from both the questionnaire and the interviews felt that it was 'no longer my priority'. As one leader summarised, 'becoming a leader was just understanding my role. I was not able to play, and then my focus was not just playing, just supporting the players. It is a different role and was just a season. Just a new season. When I left, I was happy, not sad: a new season of my life was starting. Helping sporty people [be] the youth generation was my key point'.

They never followed me. They followed me in the beginning of my journey but then they are not good as a mentor, as a pastoral care mentorship, no. They are not able to do it



Summary

This section has focused on leaders' interaction with Christians in Sport, and their subsequent journeys to becoming effective in their contexts. For both UK and international leaders, there are some clear similarities and interesting differences in this process.

What are the characteristics and prerequisites of these effective leaders?

For UK leaders, the route to becoming effective leaders typically involved the following steps:

- 1 Introduced early on in their lives to Christians in Sport through personal introductions.
- 2 Returned and wanted more of Christians in Sport mainly due to the quality of the event and the inspiration from leaders.
- 3 Developed directed relationships with key leaders in Christians in Sport combined with first hand experience of leadership opportunities.
- 4 A significant proportion experienced a short interim break where other responsibilities in life took precedence over sports ministry.
- 5 Re-engaged with Christians in Sport and further integration into a leadership role.



For international leaders, the route to success involved both similarities as well as key differences to UK leaders:

- 1 Introduced later on in their life through personal invitations to a conference or event. This was often due to them having already developed a desire and, in many instances, a practice of sports ministry.
- 2 Returned and wanted more of Christians in Sport for the excellent strategy and tools that were offered from these events and conferences.
- 3 Attended more conferences, while also developing a direct relationship with specific leaders in Christians in Sport. This also involved serving opportunities at these conferences and events.
- 4 For some, experienced a short interim break before re-engagement with Christians in Sport again.

What are the key roles that Christians in Sport plays in their journey?

For UK and international leaders, Christians in Sport played significant roles in the following areas: and currently.

Ignition for UK leaders: Through personal relationships with staff as well as events, the vision and heart of sports ministry was shared with UK leaders. Subsequent leadership opportunities in Christians in Sport events (such as Sports Plus camp), completed the ignition process for these leaders. Further integration into leadership opportunities furthered their sports ministry success.

Ammunition for international leaders: Through either conference attendances or personal introductions, these leaders came to Christians in Sport seeking the right tools to develop their already active sports ministry. Follow-up informal mentoring likewise helped these leaders implement these tools in their contexts.

Most significant moments and barriers in leaders' journeys

4

While the previous sections have outlined the overall journeys of both UK and international leaders, in this section we concentrate on significant moments in (and barriers to) their development. This analysis draws on the online questionnaire, which asked leaders to specifically mention the key moments and main barriers that they had faced in their journeys.

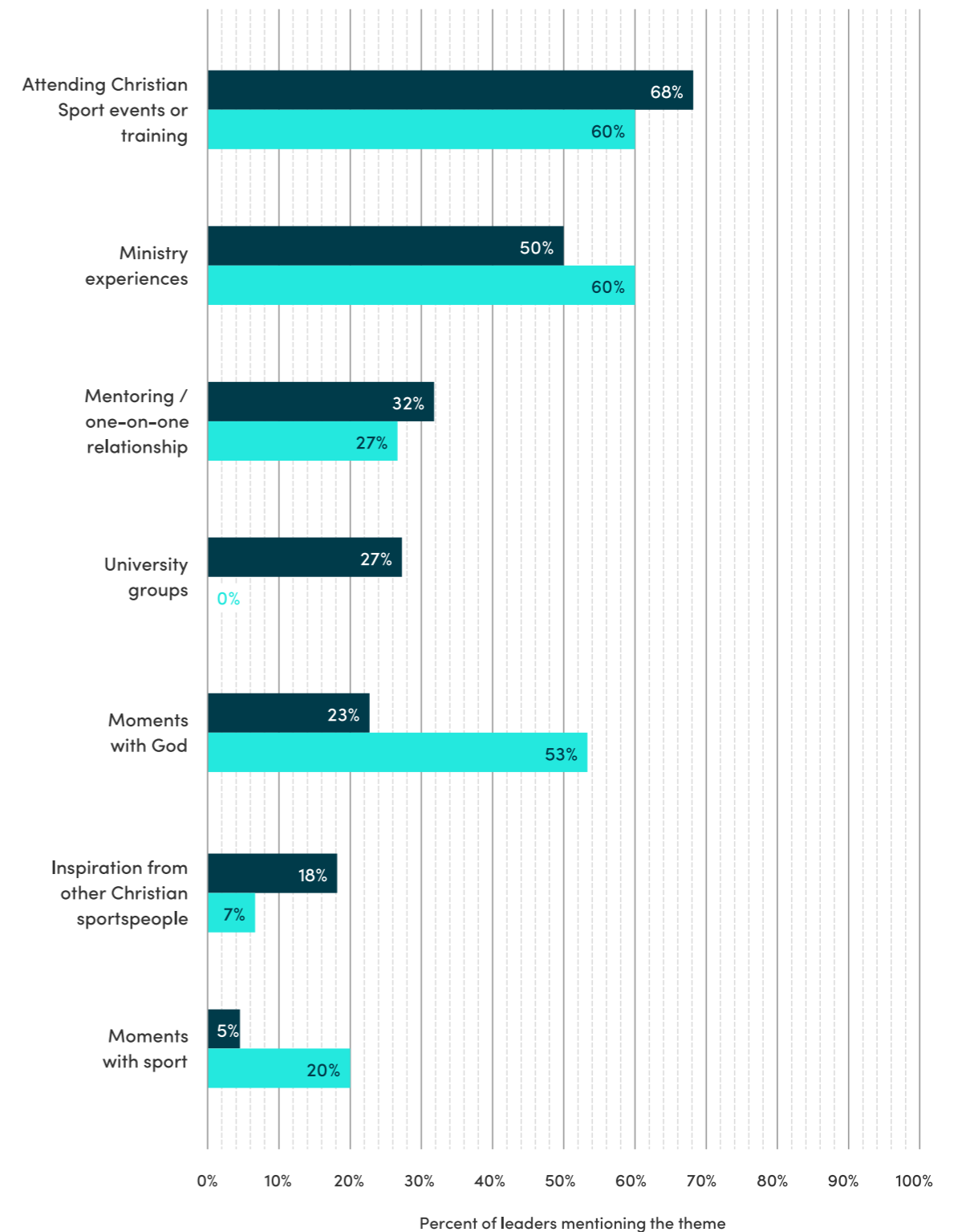


Most significant moments

The following graph shows that the most significant moments for both the top 20 per cent of UK and international leaders, were attending Christian sport events or training, as well as experiencing sports ministry first-hand. International leaders, however, also strongly favoured another category that has been coded as moments and encounters with God.

Most significant moments

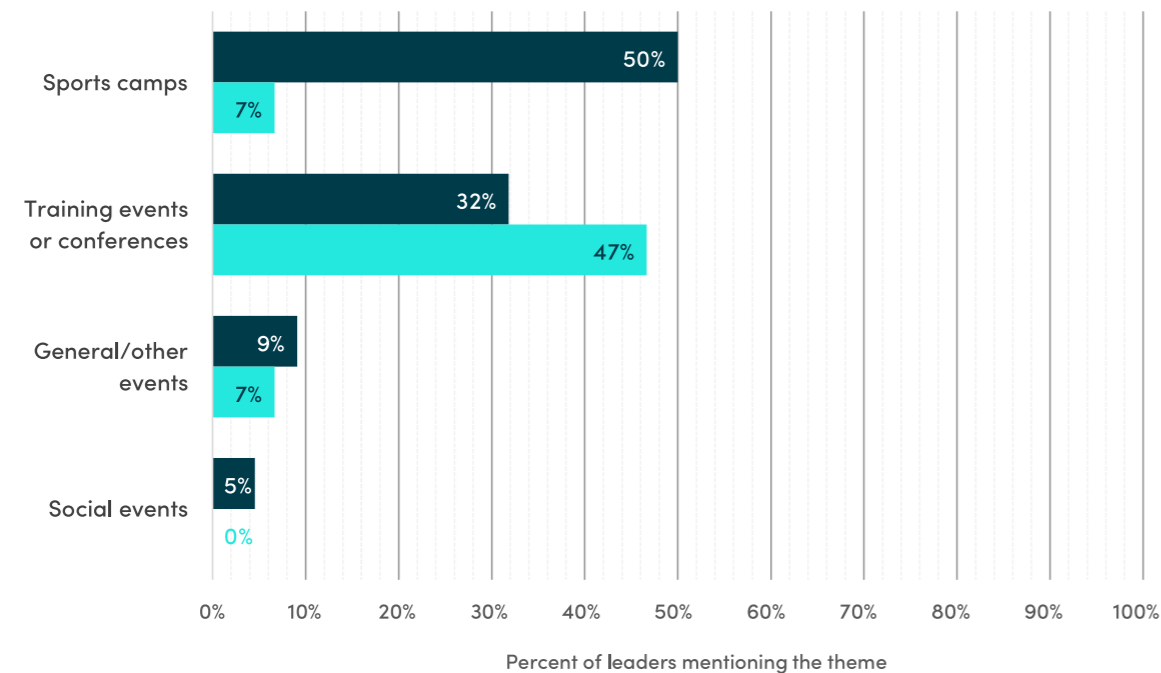
We asked leaders what have been the most significant moments in shaping their conviction and passion for integrating faith and sport. The graph compares questionnaire data from the most successful **UK LEADERS** and **INTERNATIONAL LEADERS**



Attending Christian Sport events or training

Events

Leaders indicated attending events was a key moment in shaping their conviction and passion for integrating faith and sports. The graphs shows the different type of events leaders mentioned, and compares questionnaire data from the most successful **UK LEADERS** and **INTERNATIONAL LEADERS**



Overall, 68 per cent of UK leaders, and 60 per cent of international leaders, articulated that attending Christians in Sport or Christian ministry events, camps, or training were key moments in their journeys to success. In general, this included anything from Christians in Sport student groups through to Sports Plus training camps and other Christian sports ministry programmes. Amongst other examples, leaders cited 'attending [a] "Pray Play Say" course at my local church', 'student conferences when a student', and 'Clubhouse Xtra'.

However, while both international and UK leaders resonated with these events, there were significant differences in the specific type of events to which they were referring.

Being at the conference in Germany and the opportunity to meet and learn from people doing similar work around the globe

Overall 68 per cent of UK successful leaders, and 60 per cent of international successful leaders, articulated that attending Christians in Sport or Christian ministry events, camps, or training, were key moments in their journeys to success.

As the graph opposite shows, 50 per cent of UK leaders mentioned Sports Plus camps. One leader, for instance, spoke of 'Christians in Sport camps when I was a teenager' and 'Lady's talks and influence especially'. Another mentioned being a 'Trainee on Repton Sports Plus camp [and] Clubhouse Xtra '19'. 'Multiple Sports Plus camps', said a third. In many instances, these Sports Camp experiences were also leadership experiences – reflecting themes discussed above. For example, leaders spoke of their 'first time serving at Sports Plus', or attending 'Sport Plus as a young person and now as [a] leader'.

For international leaders, however, the focus was almost exclusively on training events and conferences. Here, 47 per cent indicated that their key moments had occurred in and through training events and conferences. For example, respondents mentioned the 'Sports Ministry Conference' and the '2013 Orlando Global Conference for sports leaders'. Another leader particularly valued 'being at the conference in Germany and the opportunity to meet and learn from people doing similar work around the globe'. As has been described earlier, many leaders mentioned conferences and training events that were run by organisations other than Christian in Sport. Amongst other institutions, leaders discussed attending the 'Southeast Asia Sports Leadership School' and the 'Sport Movement Leadership School'.

Ministry experiences

Another clear theme was the high proportion (50 and 60 per cent of UK and international leaders respectively) who identified first-hand ministry experience as a key moment in their journey. While the precise nature of these experiences differed, they were always practical and often involved success in discipleship or evangelism.

For example, for one UK leader it was 'seeing conversions through my university rugby team years ago'. For another, it was 'starting work and seeing how God has moved in the ministry of The Sports Factory'. A third described 'the challenge of bedding into a team after the student world, but then having the opportunity to explain the Gospel in the deepest way with a teammate'. Yet another remembered the excitement of 'being able to read the Bible with a non-Christian hockey player and seeing him become a Christian'.



International leaders expressed similar sentiments. Amongst other subjects, they discussed 'seeing God at work in the lives of sportspeople as you share the Gospel', how they had 'trained many leaders through sports leadership training who are [in turn] disciplining many youngsters', and 'leading sports camps and seeing first-hand the impact Jesus can have on a life'.

When further analysed, it is interesting to note that the least 'successful' 20 per cent of leaders (for both UK and international contexts) referenced these ministry experiences significantly less in their responses.

Moments with God

Thirdly, as the graph opposite shows, international leaders were far more likely to reference direct experiences with God as key moments in their lives. While this finding is based upon questionnaire data, it aligns with our earlier finding (from interviews with "successful" leaders) that international leaders were more likely to have significant "conversion" moments than their UK counterparts.

For example, one leader pointed to their relationship with God' as a key moment in their development, and another referenced 'God's calling for ministry'. The majority of responses on this topic were even more specific. 'It was when the Lord called me into sports ministry when I was still playing', said one leader. 'My conversion', said another. A 'personal encounter with Christ while doing sports ministry', said a third leader. 'A personal conversation with God in 2012', added another.

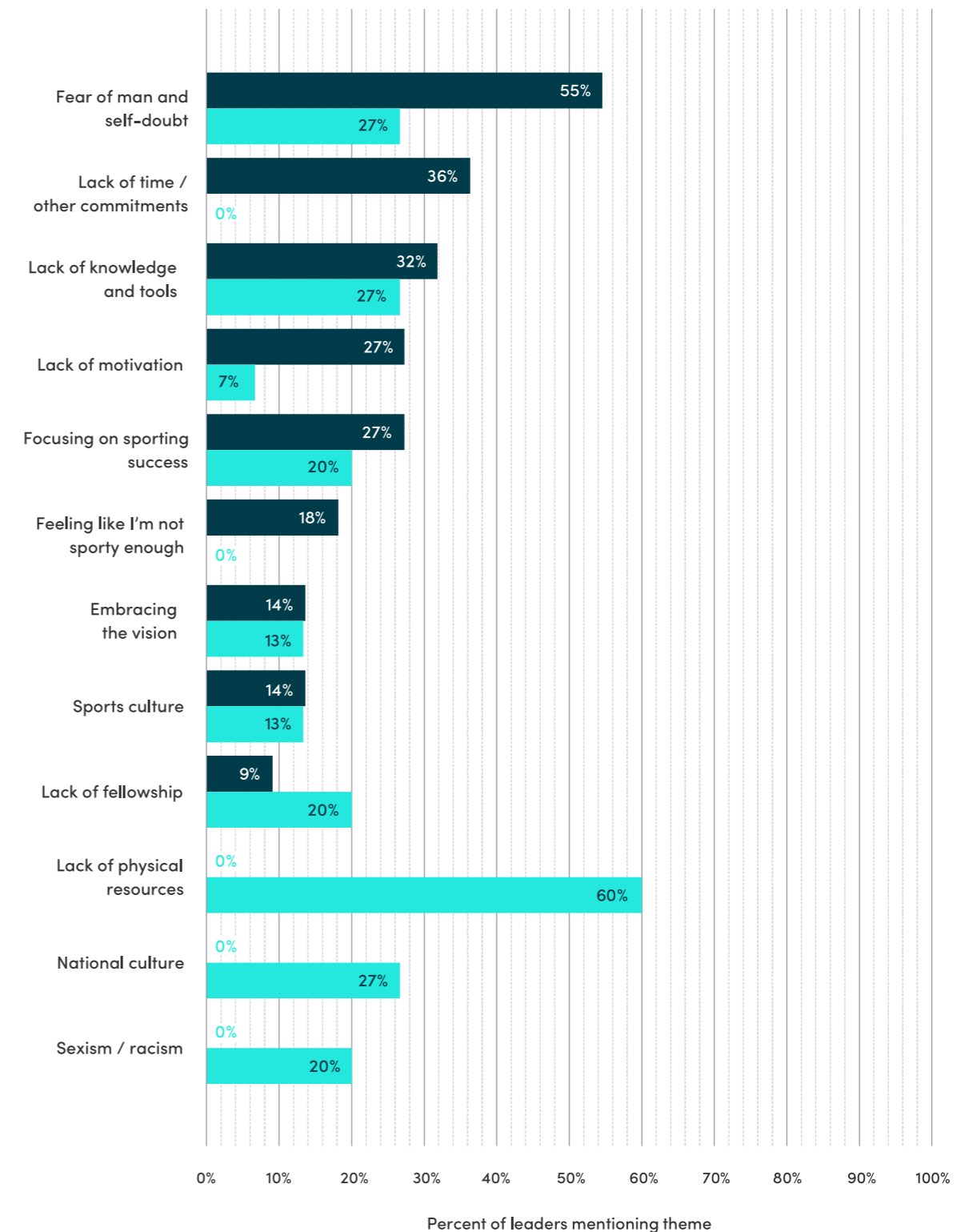
While 23 per cent of UK leaders also mentioned this concept, their references tended to be less "charismatic" and more "cognitive" in nature. 'Understanding from scripture that we are to tell people', said one leader. 'Wanting to take my faith seriously in all aspects of my life, at the end of first year, off the back of a trainee leader year on a contagious camp', said another.

Most significant barriers

Respondents were also asked to discuss the barriers they had experienced in their journeys to becoming leaders. As with their keys to success, UK and international leaders' questionnaire responses confirmed many of the trends seen in the interviews above. Overall, UK leaders' barriers were significantly more internal, and focused on fear, self-doubt, and the distraction of other commitments. International leaders, on the other hand, struggled more with external cultural barriers and a lack of physical resources. While quotations in this section draw on both interview and questionnaire data, all percentages are representative of the full sample of leaders (as opposed to the smaller sample of "successful" leaders selected for interviews).

Barriers leaders had to overcome

We asked leaders what have been the biggest barriers that they have overcome to become an effective influencer and leader. The graph compares questionnaire data from the most successful **UK LEADERS** and **INTERNATIONAL LEADERS**



UK LEADERS: FEAR OF MAN, SELF-DOUBT, AND A LACK OF TIME



As has been described in their interviews regarding their journey before meeting Christians in Sport, UK leaders were significantly less confident and motivated to share the Gospel than international leaders. (Revealingly, UK leaders' lack of confidence seemed to be specifically confined to sharing their faith; as we have shown above, they were often confident leaders in other spheres of their lives.)

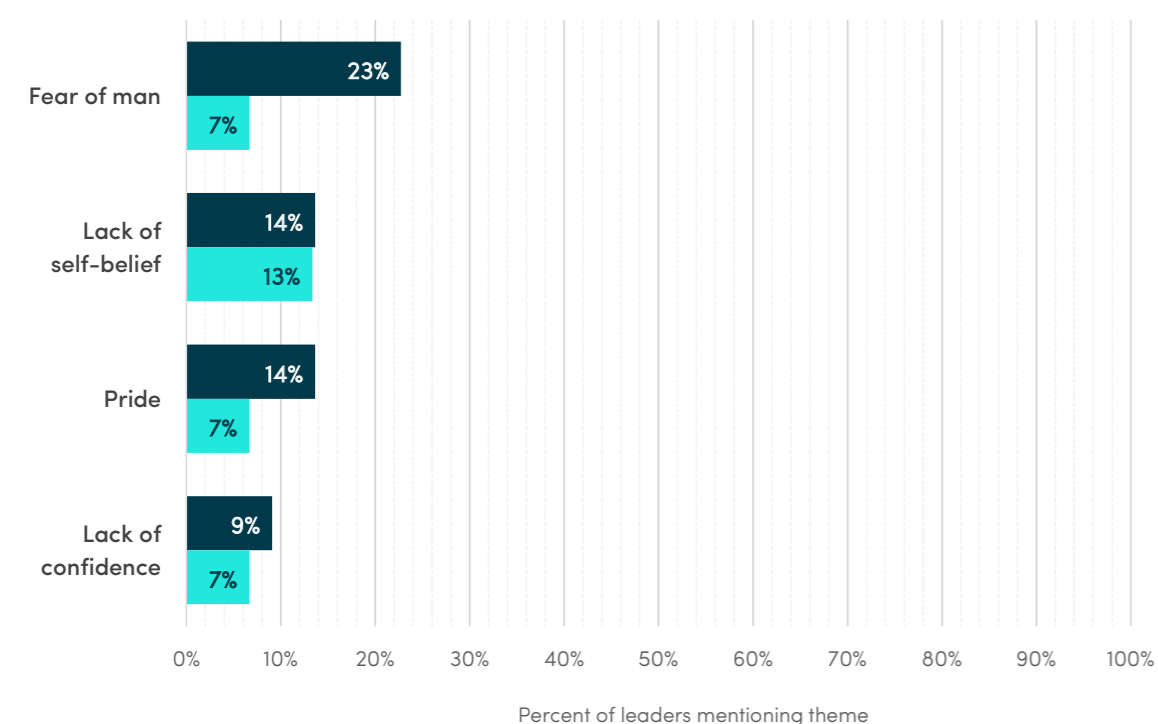
This trend is mirrored in questionnaire data with 55 per cent of UK leaders indicating that the main barriers to their success as leaders were a 'lack of courage' and 'self-doubt'. As one leader phrased it, 'I had a fear of rejection from my non-Christian mates, both personally and of sharing the Gospel message'.

However, when this theme is split into four main sub-themes, further insights are provided. As the graph below shows, the main areas of difference between UK leaders and international leaders appear to be in the level of 'fear of man' and 'pride' they experienced.

Fear of man and self-doubt

The graph shows details to "Fear of man and self-doubt" thematic coding for Barriers. The graph compares questionnaire data from the most successful

UK LEADERS and **INTERNATIONAL LEADERS**



55 per cent of UK leaders indicated that the main barriers to their success as leaders were a "lack of courage" and "self-doubt"



With regards to the former, UK leaders mentioned 'fear of man, in both evangelism and multiplying', 'peer approval in my sports team', and 'a lack of courage to share with non-Christian friends'. With regards to the latter, other UK leaders mentioned a strong sense of 'pride', and not wanting to 'appear weak'.

In sub-themes with more balance between international and UK leaders, others mentioned other past barriers such as a lack of 'confidence', 'apathy', and 'complacency'. As one particularly candid respondent admitted, 'there might have been an element of 'this is true for me, but is it relevant/true for everyone? Maybe a lack of conviction that the Gospel could transform someone's life, or even if they needed it to'.

To some extent, these themes align with the second barrier discussed by UK leaders: a lack of time. Here, leaders explained that they had a variety of other commitments and struggled to find the time for sports ministry. One leader, for example, discussed 'getting busy and Christians in Sport being crowded out', and another noted that 'finding the time to attend meetings and events' could be a challenge.

Very often this theme was alluded to in the context of other admirable commitments. For example, sports ministry was sometimes crowded out by 'general life busyness (work, marriage, life)', or the difficulties of 'balancing church ministry and finding enough time for Sports'. In other cases, however, it seemed to result from a lack of organisation: as one leader confessed, 'I could talk to people and corral people on the pitch, but... organisation was never really my strength. That's always where I've felt the most support and help; that's where I need it'.

I had a fear of rejection from my non-Christian mates, both personally and of sharing the Gospel message



INTERNATIONAL LEADERS: LACK OF PHYSICAL RESOURCES, LOCAL CULTURE BARRIERS, SEXISM AND RACISM



For international leaders the most prevalent barriers were significantly different. Sixty per cent of these leaders indicated that a lack of physical resources was a major barrier. Specifically, these respondents tended to point to 'finances and lack of resources', 'few workers', and 'financial instability'. Other examples included 'a lack of equipment' to run sports camps, as well as capacity 'to organise an effective ministry from the human resources point of view'.

One leader lamented the fact that most written resources had not been translated into his language: 'mostly [people in my country] don't know English', he observed, 'and so how can they have the good resources if they are in English?' Notably, these sentiments were completely absent from UK leaders' responses, suggesting that there may be a need to concentrate on resourcing for international leaders specifically.

A second unique theme for international leaders were gender and cultural barriers. Intriguingly, for instance, while only one in five (20 per cent of) international leaders mentioned gender, it was emphasised by all four of the female leaders who were selected for interview. These leaders spoke of the barrier of 'being a woman in a male-dominated world', how their 'gender' could be an obstacle, and their 'fear of being [the] only woman among men'. As these respondents were well positioned to understand these issues (as women who were successful in sports ministry), it may be worth investigating how to better support women in these contexts.

With regard to cultural barriers more widely, leaders mentioned a 'strong Muslim presence and tradition', the challenges of ministering in a 'closed country', and 'secularism in my university' – as well as the resistance from their churches discussed above. Since this was also a major theme, discussed by more than a quarter (27 per cent) of international respondents, it may also be worth considering how Christians in Sport can contextualise its ministry in contexts of heightened opposition (for which, see our recommendations below).

100 per cent of successful female leaders mentioned the barrier of 'being a woman in a male dominated world'



Sixty per cent of these leaders indicated that a lack of physical resources was a major barrier. Specifically, these respondents tended to point to 'finances and lack of resources', 'few workers', and 'financial instability'



Now and into the future

The fifth part of this research looks at the current and ongoing lives of these successful leaders (both those interviewed and through the online questionnaire). Based predominantly upon questionnaire data, it examines how they currently define successful leadership, what they consider keys to success, and their recommendations for future leader development.



Definitions of leadership

Focusing on the current mindset of these leaders, the online questionnaire asked leaders to define what influencing and leading others in the mission of Christians in Sport looked like.

As the graph opposite shows, UK and international leaders agreed on some themes (encouraging and inspiring other Christians, loving God, sharing the Gospel) and differed on others (leading by example, being real, connecting with other Christian sportspeople).

For UK leaders, a major theme to emerge was “leading other Christians by example”. One participant went into detail about what leading by example might involve:

Be an example to other Christians [by] speaking to your teammates about Jesus [and] reading the Bible with them [and] inviting them to church. Give testimony to people about how it's gone well and your failures. Encourage others to do the same. Meet with them, read the Bible, and encourage them to tell their teammates about Jesus.

‘Lead by example, be Christlike and ready to serve’, said another. A third agreed, and emphasised the importance of an ‘authentic demonstration of [leadership] in real life’.

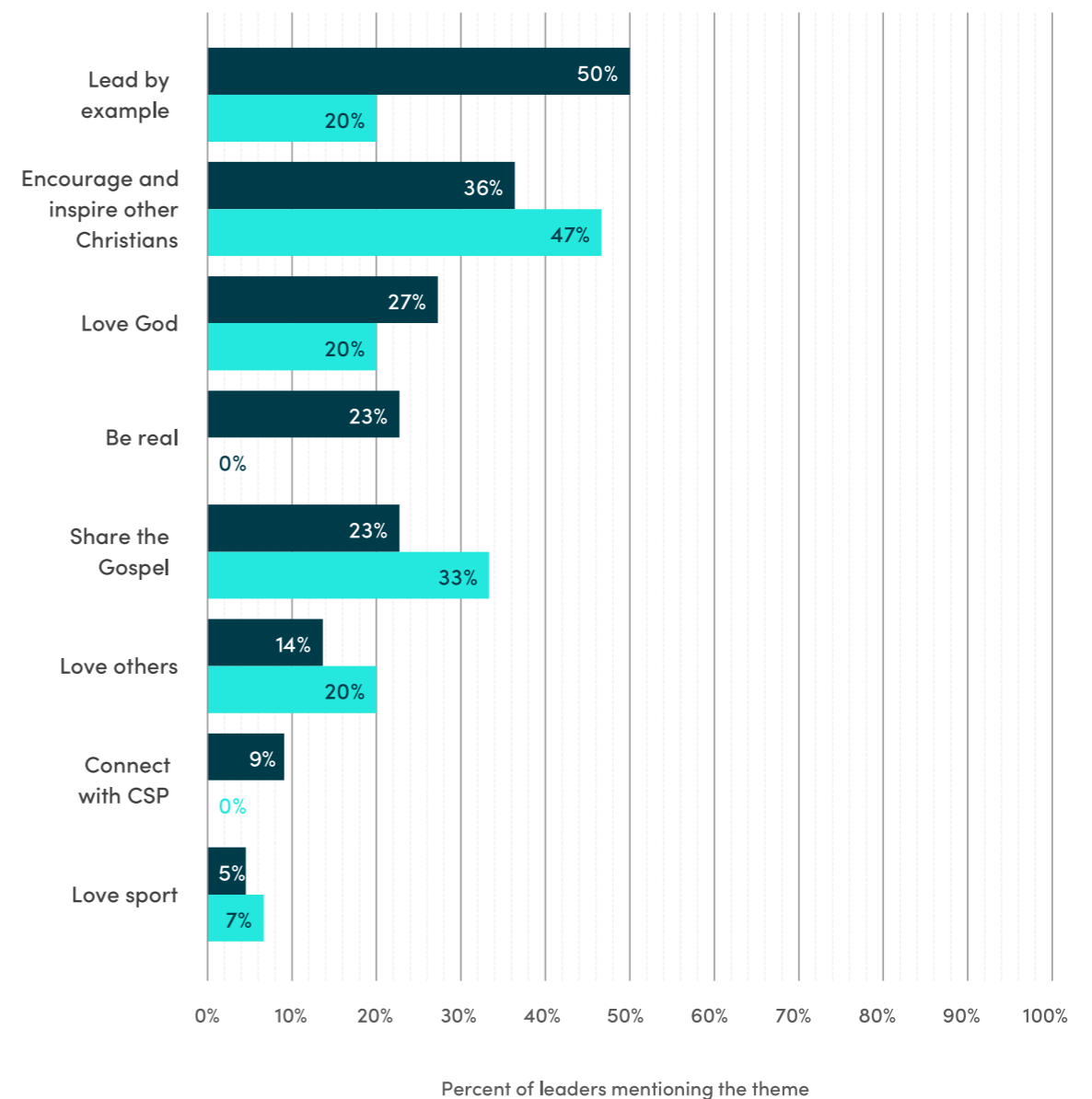
Meet with them, read the Bible, and encourage them to tell their teammates about Jesus



Secondly, UK leaders mentioned an “encouraging and inspiring other Christians” theme. This theme focused on sporty Christians rather than non-Christians, and encouraged them to become involved in the work of Christians in Sport. One respondent, for example, urged leaders to, ‘Tell other sportspeople in church and get them involved on vision. Get church leaders to understand the importance so they go out and motivate their churches or run relevant missions’.

Definitions of leadership

We asked leaders what they think it looks like to influence and lead others in the mission of Christians in sport. The graph compares questionnaire data from the most successful **UK LEADERS** and **INTERNATIONAL LEADERS**



Another participant concentrated on 'encouraging others by showing them that the Bible tells us playing/competing is not at odds with following Jesus'. For this leader, there was a need to show others 'that we can worship God through sport'.

For international leaders, this was also the most frequently discussed theme. As one participant reflected:

Leading others in sports ministry looks very much the same as multiplication, only through the field of sports. The main focus has and should always be making individual disciples with independent walks with God who are also introducing and influencing others to know God and make Him know generationally.

In slight contrast, however, international leaders were more focused on impacting non-Christians as an ends in itself (as opposed to doing it as a way of leading by example to impact other Christians). This was, either through sharing the Gospel or (more generically) loving others. With regard to the former, leaders emphasised that 'if [non-Christians] do not know Jesus yet' leaders should 'use sport as a way to introduce people to a relationship with him'. Other underlined the importance of pointing 'them to Christ, to the mission of making disciples, and the vision that someday Jesus will come again'. As these quotes illustrate, international leaders were significantly more focused on the long-term outcome of salvation compared to their UK peers.

What are the ongoing keys to success?

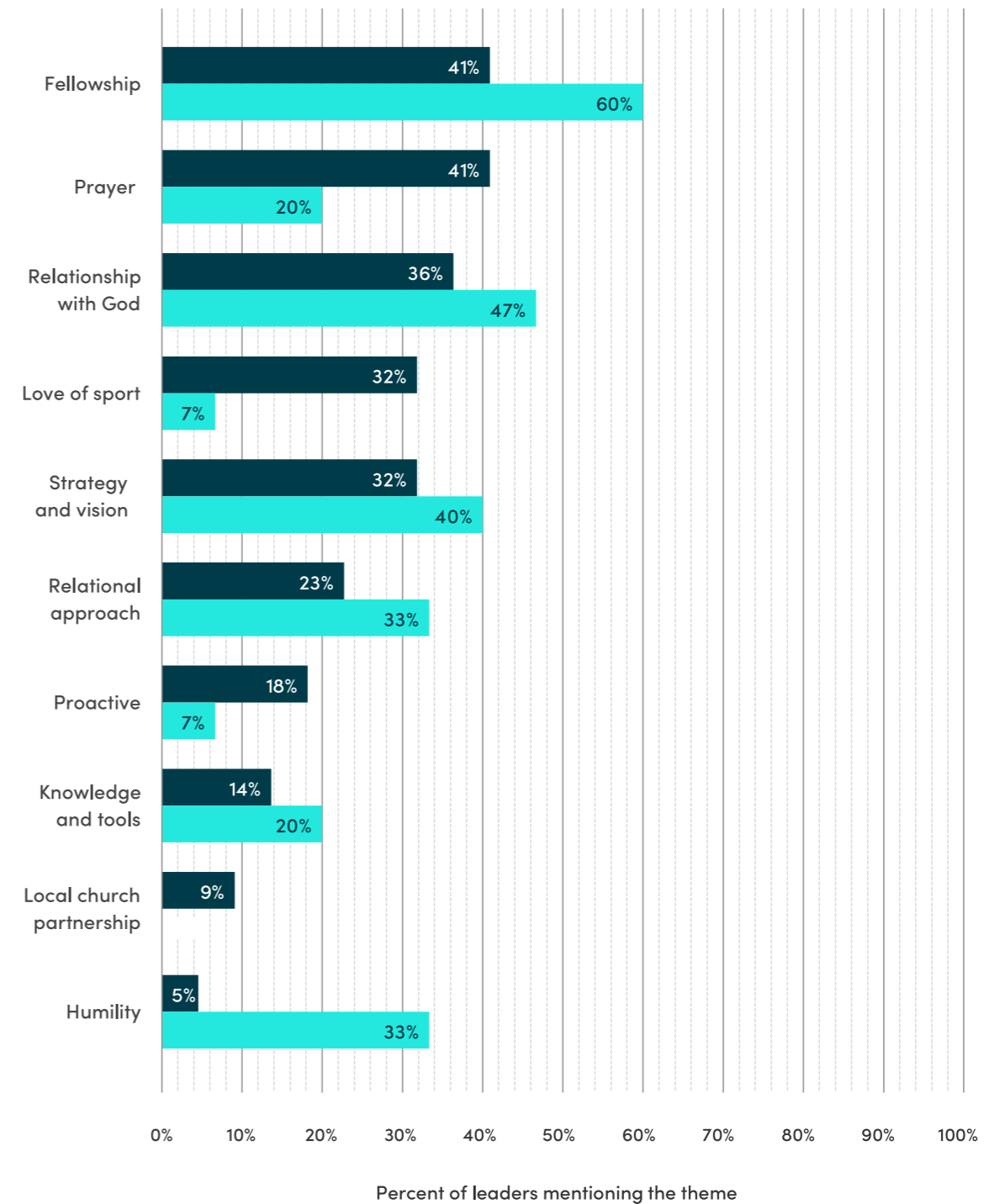
In the questionnaire, when asked what they believed were the keys to successful leadership, both UK and international leaders tended to agree on the same priority issue. As the following graph shows, this was ensuring that leaders had fellowship with other Christians sportspeople.

For example, UK leaders mentioned the need to keep 'in touch regularly with Christians in my sport', and to remain 'plugged into a Christian sport community'. Other responses were more specific, and included attending 'Christians in Sports events' and 'having other people that can keep you accountable'. Indeed, many respondents particularly stressed the benefits of remaining in touch with Christians in Sport staff: one, for example, advised 'checking in with Christians in Sport staff' because 'clear yearly plans help a lot'.

For international leaders this need to have fellowship was emphasised even more, with 60 per cent of leaders recommending it. Participants valued 'having a small team of leaders or individuals holding me accountable', as well as 'accountability partners' and 'working in in a team of like-minded people'.

Keys to ongoing effectiveness

We asked leaders what they believe are the main keys to ongoing effectiveness in influencing and leading others in Christians in Sport. The graph compares questionnaire data from the most successful **UK LEADERS** and **INTERNATIONAL LEADERS**



Key behaviours

It is interesting to note that while leaders did mention the importance of having fellowship, there was almost no mention of the importance of specifically church fellowship. Indeed, in almost all references, this fellowship was connected to other Christian sportspeople rather than local church.

Further analysis of behaviours and statistical tests revealed a similar story in the qualitative data.

As the following graphs show, several key 'behaviours' were measured in relation to the overall 'success' of UK and international leaders (to see how we measured success see the methodology section of this report). For both international and UK based leaders, there was no statistically significant correlation between the amount of times they attended church, and their overall success in sports ministry. Similarly, there was also no correlation between the amount that leaders were participating in sports teams or clubs and their overall success. Whilst both of these findings may come as a surprise, within the context of this research they align closely with the patterns already identified.

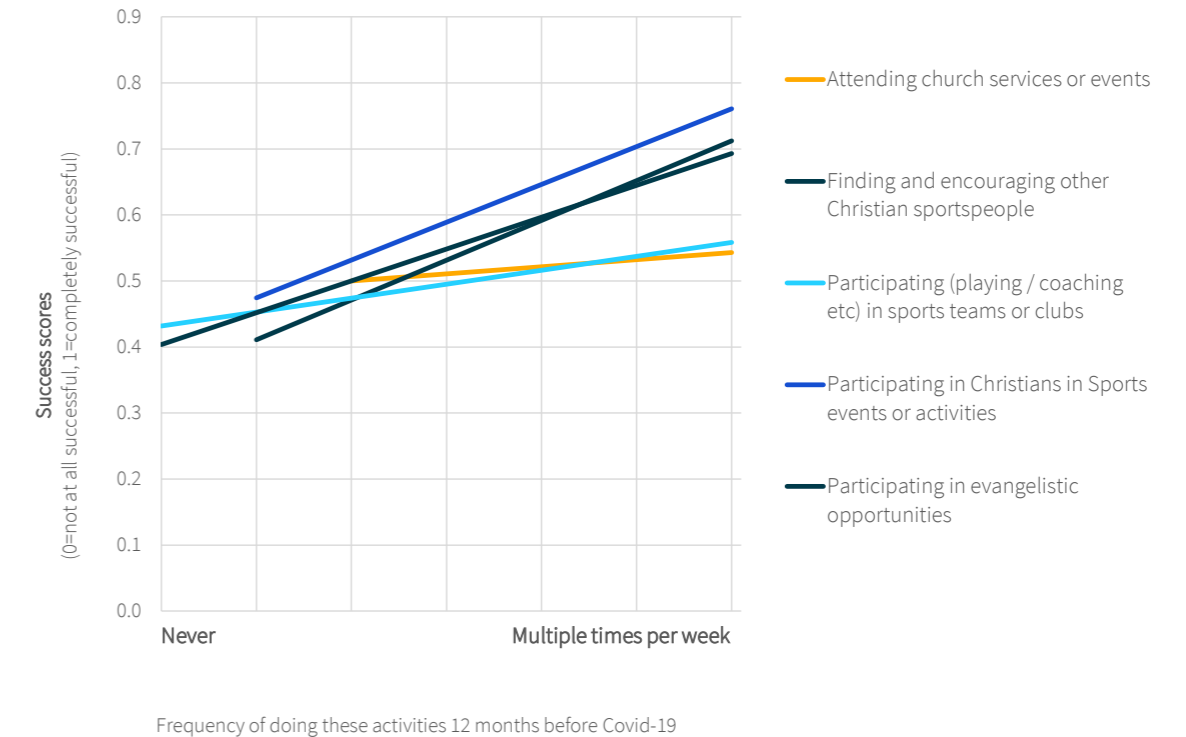
In contrast, however, participating in Christians in Sport events or activities, finding and encouraging other Christian sportspeople, and participating in evangelistic opportunities were significantly correlated with the overall success of participants. This again aligns closely with earlier findings in the research. For example, in the previous section, leaders frequently mentioned the need for fellowship with other Christian sportspeople. Likewise, attending events and activities was seen as a key moment for leader development.

For both international and UK based leaders, there was no statistically significant correlation between the amount of times they attended church, and their overall success in sports ministry



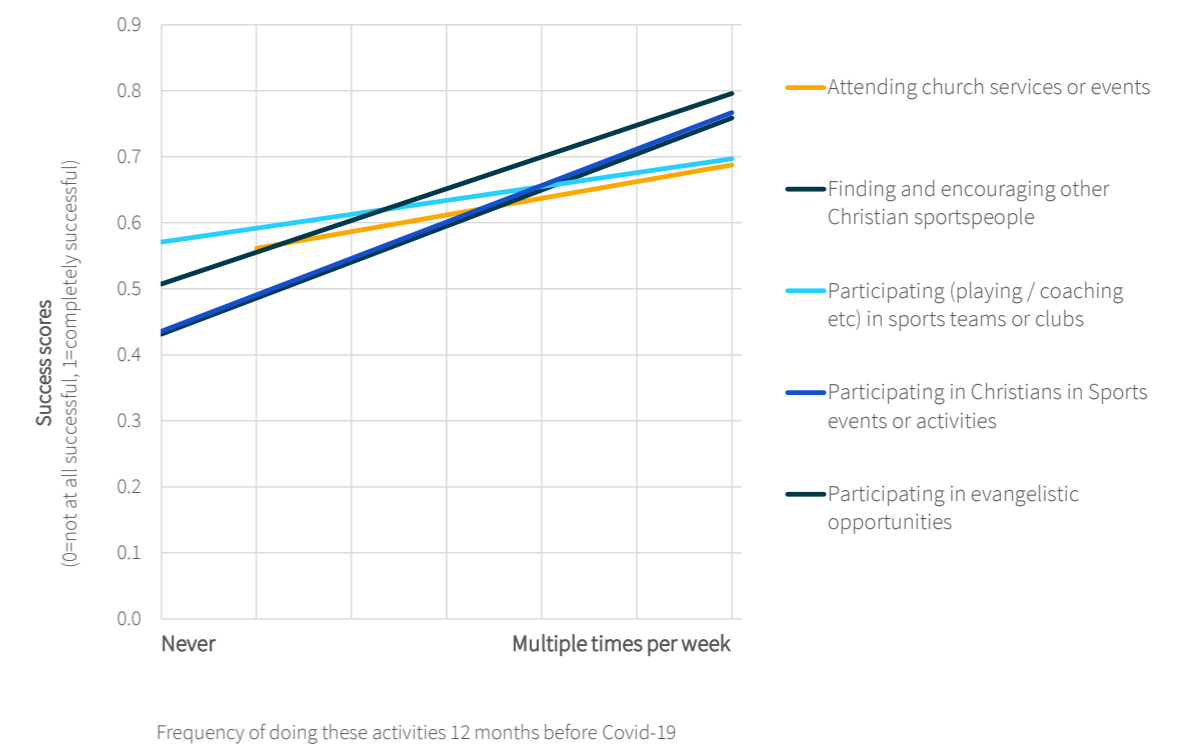
Correlation analysis

The graph shows correlations between frequency of doing the following activities 12 months before Covid-19 and success scores. The graph shows results for UK leaders.



Correlation analysis

The graph shows correlations between frequency of doing the following activities 12 months before Covid-19 and success scores. The graph shows results for Int'l leaders.



Leader recommendations

We also asked leaders to provide recommendations on how Christians in Sport might improve its programmes. While UK and international leaders had different emphases, both groups agreed on the importance of mentoring and training programmes, and stressed the benefits of a hands-on approach from Christians in Sport. Findings in this section draw upon our interviews with “successful” leaders.

UK LEADERS RECOMMENDATIONS



UK leaders had four general recommendations for how Christians in Sport might improve its programmes: (1) a continued focus on relationships and mentoring, (2) continued provision of high-quality training, (3) involving young people early, and (4) engaging parents as leaders.

Relationships and mentoring

Interviewees stressed that personal relationships and mentoring were crucial at all stages of developing new leaders: from recruitment to mentoring once a leader had become independent. As one leader emphasised, ‘having that person who will check in, who will encourage and say, ‘What about this, let’s get a quiz booked in, come on, lad, let’s do it’ – that’s class, and... [works] really well’. Others agreed: ‘personal invitation always goes a long way’, one leader said, and another noted that ‘if you invest well in a person then you’re going to see fruitful results’.

High-quality training

UK respondents also underlined how much they valued the training they received from Christians in Sport, and expressed a desire for more. As they made clear, this emphasis on training applied both to Christians in Sport’s practical guidance on evangelism and its theological teaching on the integration of faith and sport. ‘There is such an enormously helpful role that CiS are able to fulfill providing training and resources for people and small churches’, one leader said.

Another respondent agreed, but felt that Christians in Sport training had once provided greater ‘theological depth’ than it did currently: ‘I don’t really see anything like that depth in recent years with CiS’, he noted, ‘and I think that sort of thing is really helpful at helping people go a bit deeper’. Christians in Sport, he implied, might benefit from doubling down on this aspect of their programme.

Sports Plus camp as a leader... that is just a massive moment, probably one of the most significant moments



Involving youth early

Several respondents felt that involving youth early was crucial to helping to affirm their faith and their understanding of the connection between Christianity and sport. These respondents particularly emphasised the importance of involving young people in leadership. As one leader commented:

I ended up going to Sports Plus camp as a leader, and I remember feeling like my eyes and heart had been opened. So that is just a massive moment, probably one of the most significant moments. All these Christians and they were like me and liked the things that I liked. They were just really serious about their faith.

Another respondent echoed his thoughts, noting that ‘throwing people into the deep end a bit as well and just getting people stuck in’ could be helpful: ‘if you think there’s a good leader or you think someone’s got potential’, this respondent said, ‘just go for it’.

Engaging parents as leaders

Finally, both parents in this research thought that Christians in Sport might benefit from making an even greater effort to engage other parents as leaders. For them both, there were three main themes in their responses.

Firstly, these leaders saw other Christian parents who were involved in sport as an invaluable resource to draw upon. By giving these parents a ‘tap on the shoulder’, as one leader said, Christians in Sport might be able to capitalise on the enthusiasm these parents already felt for sport and their children. ‘Parents [of Christian in Sports involved youth], are a potential group of leaders who can offer some things unique to the movement’, said one leader.

Parents are a potential group of leaders who can offer some things unique to the movement



Another mentioned that they had started a parents' group themselves, 'and we are really appreciated as leaders in the lives of young Christian sportspeople, but we are really just scratching the surface of what we can do'.

Secondly, these parents also mentioned that having more Christian parents involved would be beneficial to themselves. 'I remember going to a national champs event in the midlands and there must have been thousands of people there and I remember walking around thinking, there must be other Christian parents here, and other Christian young people here, and I thought, "How can I find them?" I would love to connect with them!' said one leader. 'It would be so helpful to equip Christian parents to deal with the stresses and strain of being the parents of sport kids, but also how to react in those big competing events and getting on with parents when your kids are at an event competing against each other', said the other leader. 'How do you react when there's a big punch-up; there are so many things that really throw you, and how do you react when your young person who is breaking records is no longer able to compete in sports anymore: that sort of thing is really tough, and there are so many things that CIS have been incredibly helpful with and many things that they can be helpful with again'.

Thirdly, parents also mentioned what one described as the "untapped mission field" of other non-Christian sport involved parents. 'I see thousands [of parents] who are there driving other people's children places to events, hanging out on the weekends for matches and competitions: that really strikes me as an untapped mission field', said one leader. Likewise another mentioned that in their own circles with other athletes, there was a lot of need to hear the Gospel. Here they mentioned that when they themselves played in a senior team they noticed that their own peers needed the Gospel. 'In worldly terms they are sorted, they look like they have everything but actually they don't, they are lost and scared and they don't know what's going to happen to them when they die, and they worry about it. To be there and to be able to chat to them and talk about sport and faith and life is so important, and I pray to be able to bring some light into that'.

I see thousands of parents... hanging out on the weekends for matches and competitions. That strikes me as an untapped mission field



With regard to how to engage this group, one leader mentioned that a 'tap on the shoulder' approach would work. 'Maybe target parents of CiS kids at camps: CiS should be able to spot the parents with the kids who regularly attend their camps, a personal invitation always works well in our culture...The "tap" can be manifested in many ways, it could be an invitation to one of their quizzes, which are so fun, to just show them what CiS is about, or it could be to have a coffee with them, anything to help find common ground'.

Hands-on or hands-off?

Five of eight "successful" UK interviewees preferred hands-on leadership development and a tried-and-tested, systematic approach. (The remaining three felt that Christians in Sport should provide both "hands-on" and "hands-off" options; no leaders felt that "hands-off" options should be offered on their own.) In the words of one respondent:

Partnering people one-to-one and older people to take people under their wing – it's just vital, and the only reason I say that is because... of the benefit that I've had in my life of being taken under one person's wing.

Others expressed similar sentiments: 'definitely the more hands-on approach', one leader said, 'I know that's more costly, but I think that's using people better'. A third agreed: 'all of the key transformational steps happened when someone made intentional steps to be hands on'.

INTERNATIONAL LEADER RECOMMENDATIONS



While international leaders reiterated UK respondents' suggestion that Christians in Sport should continue to offer high-quality practical and leader training, they also expressed a strong desire for greater contextualisation of Christians in Sport's programmes and more diversity within the organisation.

High-quality training

International respondents' focus on training included a desire for personal mentoring, leadership development, activity models (such as sports camps), and other practical skills. Perhaps more than any other theme, participants expressed a desire for Christians in Sport to train leaders in other parts of the world.

As one leader remarked, 'I know they are doing a great job in England and Europe, but I think we need all of those people also to train other people in other parts of the world [so] that we can carry on this DNA'. Another respondent echoed this interest, while stressing their hope that Christians in Sport would 'train [more] practical things in terms of leadership development. The sports camp, but also other practical things'. A third indicated her interest in a tried-and-tested route to leadership development: 'having these steps would be helpful', she said. 'Having mentorship groups would be really helpful. Training people is really, really helpful'.

Contextualisation of models

However, many of these leaders also underlined that Christians in Sports' programmes would need to be contextualised before they were applied. One respondent noted that she 'didn't know before that CiS had a ministry outside the UK. When I heard about it in England, I thought, 'We need to have this in [my country]'. I think it would work in the rest of the world with a little change of the context'. Another respondent hoped that Christians in Sport might help them adapt this material for their context, observing that it would be helpful if CiS had 'more staff that is for different places [i.e., different parts of the world]' because 'he has had to do a lot of translating' and contextualising the materials.

Diversity

Lastly, international leaders underlined that Christians in Sport should pursue greater diversity, both in its leadership and in the type of people it serves. In the words of one respondent:

[The CiS leaders] are all very similar: male, white, evangelical backgrounds. They speak with big words like teachers, and they speak the same type of language. I think it's important that there are other role models [so] that other people can identify themselves [with them].

Another leader concentrated primarily on the people that Christians in Sport serves, and suggested that it 'reach out to people of different language groups and backgrounds'.

*Having mentorship groups would be really helpful.
Training people is really, really helpful* ””

Hands-on or hands-off?

Like UK leaders, international respondents strongly preferred a hands-on, systematic model of leadership development, with 6 of 10 interviewees favouring this model, and a further interviewee feeling that hands-on and hands-off approaches should be combined. Interestingly, however, international leaders seemed to emphasise the importance of CiS providing a model much more than their UK counterparts. 'A kind of leadership manual would be great to share... across the world, especially for developing leaders, connecting the sports and biblical aspects; that would be really helpful for [my country] and all over the world', one leader said.

Others offered similar responses: 'Maybe for me, I'm a little bit systematic', one said. 'I like 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 – [that] would be helpful. Give the base then leave them to make [it fit?] in their own context'. A third agreed, noting they would appreciate 'more interaction with a model that can give more trust' and adding that 'having materials and a system that works' would help prepare them as 'disciple-makers'.

*A leadership manual would be great to share...
across the world, especially for developing leaders* ””

Recommendations

As stated earlier, the purpose of this research is to enable Christians in Sport to maximise their impact on leaders in the future, as well as to increase and improve developing leaders in international contexts. In service of these goals, this report presents ten main recommendations. Recommendations one to eight focus on the direct relationship that Christians in Sport have with leaders, whilst recommendations nine and ten look at variables outside of Christians in Sport control.



Recommendations involving Christians in Sport

1 Continue to be relational and provide formal/informal mentoring

A first key recommendation is to maintain the level of one-to-one relationship that has already developed between Christians in Sport staff and UK and international leaders. As has been shown, this relationship for both groups is referenced multiple times in their journeys. Likewise, it is a concept that is itself heavily recommended by both groups with regard to developing more leaders in the future.

Conversely, for some leaders it appeared that a lack of relationship was a potential barrier for success. As one leader summarised, 'they have books, they have videos, they have internships, they have camps they have everything but the issue is not the lack of resources: the issue is the lack of coaching'.

they have books, they have videos, they have internships, they have camps they have everything but the issue is not the lack of resources the issue is the lack of coaching



2 Continue to deliver excellence

Another key concept that appeared at multiple times throughout the research was the level of quality, excellence, and professionalism of Christians in Sport models and events. Undoubtedly, excellence is a costly goal to achieve, and, in times of financial pressure for the charity sector, there may be a temptation to compromise. However, this research has shown that excellence is not simply a "nice to have" but is in fact pivotal for both UK and international leaders.

For UK leaders, this was most evident in their appreciation of the organisation and how seriously Christians in Sport took their events (in comparison to other Christian ministries). For international leaders, it was most evident in the quality of tools that they received from Christians in Sport for their own sports ministry.

3 Continue to integrate leaders into experiential roles

For both UK and international leaders, experiencing sports ministry first-hand was another key moment in their journey. For UK leaders, having the opportunity to work on Sports Plus camps was particularly influential. Likewise, participating in evangelistic opportunities was one of two behaviours that was most correlated with leader ministry success for all leaders.

Continuing to provide these experiences gives participating leaders a space to realise that they can integrate faith and sport. It likewise turns theory into practice, a process that has been shown to have a significantly more positive impact upon participants' ability to lead and influence others in the future. This is a trend that Eido Research have likewise identified in numerous other ministry training contexts. Whether at the Bethel school of ministry in California, or the Community of St Anselm at Lambeth Palace, participants who engage in experiential learning are far more likely to succeed than those who do not.

4 Continue to focus on UK leaders during adolescence

A specific trend that was apparent for UK leaders was the key role that Christians in Sport played during their adolescence. Sociology of religion research has frequently shown that it is in their late teens and early twenties that individuals are most likely to either gain or lose their faith.

Since many of the UK leaders showed signs of having an unstable faith at this phase of life, the “ignition” provided by Christians in Sport was key. This was most apparent through Sports Plus camps and university groups.

Connected to this recommendation is the potential to engage not only the student but the parent also. In both interviews involving parents, sports ministry success in their own lives was attributed to Christian in Sport’s work with younger members of their family.



5 Consider partnering with parents as new leaders

Connected to this previous recommendation is the potential to engage parents as well as students. As the research has described, both parent success stories became involved in Christians in Sport through younger members of their family. With a historic passion for sport and faith, but with few opportunities to serve and integrate these worlds, both parents quickly understood the need for Christians in Sport. They were further motivated by a desire to see their children and younger relatives embrace and grow in their faith.

This high level of motivation, combined with a higher level of maturity due to their stage of life, has made them effective leaders that uniquely contribute to sports ministry. Similarly, as described in their recommendations, engaging with parents creates the opportunity to reach a whole new “mission field” of other sporting non-Christian parents.

6 Temporary lack of contact is not necessarily negative

One particularly intriguing finding was the significant number of leaders who temporarily lost contact with Christians in Sport before re-engaging. The reasons for this varied – and included other commitments and mission fatigue – but, in each case, when connection was re-established, the leader only expressed an increase in sports ministry success.

At first glance, it may be tempting to view these periods as unfortunate, or as an outcome to be avoided. Indeed, many of the leaders themselves said they would have rather not have lost contact. However, it is worth considering that maybe this time apart from Christians in Sport constituted an important part of the process. This is a pattern that we have noticed in other projects with similar populations.

7 Understand and address the difference of needs between UK leaders and international leaders

There are, broadly speaking, two main contributing factors to the different needs of UK and international leaders. The first main factor is the timing of contact, with Christians in Sport encountering UK leaders significantly earlier in their journey than international leaders. However, secondly, there are contextual factors related to their upbringing. International leaders typically experience more cultural barriers from their church and their local society, as well as physical resource constraints on their opportunities. In line with a significant body of research surrounding Christianity identity formation and mission, it is possible that these negative forces have the positive effect of suturing sport and mission into the identities of these leaders at an earlier age. Without these pressures, there may be less impetus for UK leaders to form a solid Christian identity.

As a result, UK leaders' needs revolve around a lack of identity and confidence to integrate faith and sport. For these leaders, sport is a passion, while faith is often less significant. While they are certainly passionate about their sport, as well as committed believers in their faith, they subsequently lack the confidence and vision to share this faith in their sporting contexts.

International leaders, however, tend to have already developed this confidence and vision. Their needs revolve around a lack of tools and strategies to combine the worlds of sport and faith. To compound this issue, these leaders need context-specific tools to fit their circumstances (as expanded upon in the next recommendation).

8 Be contextually focused for international leaders

International leaders' unique contexts present a challenge for any systematic model. As these leaders have recommended themselves, therefore, it is important to develop specific tools and strategies for their individual contexts (including translation of materials into local languages). To do this, and building upon current models of engagement with these leaders, Eido recommends a "co-production" of materials with these leaders in the future.

Likewise, there are overlapping themes for these international leaders such as a lack of physical resources, general lack of support from their local church, and a lack of fellowship, that also need to be contextually addressed. Here, Christians in Sports' on-the-ground support (both through physical as well as strategic resources) should continue where possible. Given the current Covid-19-related restrictions, support may have to be remote in these areas, but should again focus on providing the same resources.

Recommendations involving other variables

9 Continue to encourage fellowship between Christian sportspeople

In line with earlier recommendations, there is also a clear need to encourage leaders to have relationships with other Christian sportspeople. Indeed, given the limited human resources available to provide direct formal or informal mentoring, this second recommendation is likely vital for ongoing success.

The evidence for this was found in both the correlation as well as recommendation data from the questionnaire. With regards to the former, there was a strong positive correlation between leaders 'finding and encouraging other Christian sportspeople' and their overall success in sports ministry. Likewise, for both UK and international leaders, it was finding fellowship with Christian sportspeople that was the most referenced key to ongoing success.

It is interesting to note that in both cases, it is fellowship with Christian sportspeople that appears to be key. This is emphasised given the lack of correlation, and lack of mention, of church fellowship with overall success.

10 Consider the role that church and sport attendance play in a leader's ongoing success

One finding was the lack of quantitative correlation between ongoing church attendance and other markers of success for leaders. Similarly, there was no correlation between ongoing sport team attendance and markers of success. Whilst it is important to note that both of these concepts were influential in the upbringing of individuals, they may not be closely linked to ongoing success.

Qualitative data from interviews somewhat disagree with this finding, although not dramatically. Leaders gave mixed opinions on the role that either of these concepts have towards ongoing success.

Given the potential implications of this finding, it is important to discuss and consider it further.

Conclusions

In some senses, the work of Christians in Sport is niche. Starting in the UK with the vision to impact sport for Jesus, Christians in Sport clearly requires a focused impact strategy. Not only does leadership development in this sphere necessitate specific tools for the Christian faith and ministry, but it also requires these same tools to be shaped for a sporting context – a context with value systems that are often at odds with the Gospel. (See, for example, the struggles of UK sportspeople to remain distinctive discussed in the Immediately before discovering Christians in Sport section above.) It is to Christians in Sport's credit that they have managed to develop these highly specific tools.

However, the desire to expand their focus to international contexts presents a set of both unique problems and opportunities. There is a danger that tools and methods that have worked before for UK leaders will be applied generically to international contexts. Conversely, there is a danger that future leader development will try to suit the needs of all contexts around the world and lose its strategic focus.

It is with this challenge in mind that this research has sought to understand the journeys of past and currently successful leaders. What are the typical routes to becoming effective established leaders? What are the characteristics and prerequisites of these effective leaders? And what are the key roles that Christians in Sport plays in their journey?

For UK leaders Christians in Sport meets them early, and meets them "where they are at". These leaders, while mostly coming from Christian backgrounds and stable homes, do not typically have the confidence or passion to integrate faith and their sporting world. They are often slightly disenchanted with the Church and have noticed a lack of excellence in typical ministry circles that they have experienced in their own sporting lives. It is in this context that Christians in Sport provides inspiration and ignition, impressing these leaders with both a passion as well as excellence in Sports ministry. This initial ignition is fuelled through informal mentoring relationships as well as first-hand opportunity to lead in ministry contexts. The result is that Christian leaders not only discover that the world of faith and sport can be combined, but realise that they can be the ones to do it.

It is into this picture that Christians in Sport act as inspiration and ignition, impressing these leaders with both a passion as well as excellence in Sports ministry.

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In large part, what distinguishes international leaders from their UK counterparts is merely the point at which they first encountered Christians in Sport: these leaders tended to discover Christians in Sport later in life, after they had already found "ignition" through other sports ministries and Christian sportspeople. Consequently, these leaders already have developed a strong passion for sharing the Gospel in their sporting contexts – a passion which is often heightened by strong conversion or recommitment experiences. Despite cultural barriers, both secular and religious, these leaders have also developed a resilience that only further increases their confidence and reduces their fear of man. However, while they have passion, they often lack the strategic tools and ammunition required to impact their contexts. It is here that Christians in Sport plays the vital role of providing this ammunition. Through conferences and informal mentoring, leaders in Christians in Sport partner with these international leaders, serving each other. The result is that as relationships develop these leaders are provided with the tools and personal support required to be effective sports ministry leaders.

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