

Fly, Kick and Skate



sports ministry the YFC way

Athletic performances

At various points in the history of Christian evangelism sport has been used in wonderfully powerful ways to reach the public. Billy Graham, when founding British Youth for Christ in the 1940s, often filled sporting arenas with athletic performances (not his own!) which accompanied the preaching of the Gospel of Christ.

Today, Youth for Christ continues to communicate the Gospel in a relevant way to young people in Britain by using sport to promote an active Christian lifestyle. Over the last six years YFC sports evangelists have shared their personal testimonies and proclaimed the Gospel of Christ to an estimated 10,000 young people.

Fly

In 1999 the YFC National Ministries Department, under Jon Burns' passionate leadership, launched an evangelistic basketball mission team. 'Fly', pioneered by Simon Lee, aimed to use their basketball skills to build relationships with young people in their own environment – the court. God has blessed the Fly team's ministry from its early days in Coventry (working alongside Coventry Crusaders) to its current work in Leeds, Swansea, Teesside and Waltham Forest (north-east London).



Barry Mason is 28 years old and Teesside born and bred. He spent much of his youth working for his father's grocery business before attending Loughborough University to study PE/Sports Science and Mathematics. Barry has worked as the National Sports Co-ordinator for British Youth for Christ (YFC) for the last four years. He lives in Luton with his wife Becky, a primary school teacher.

As well as the long-term placement of team members in specific inner-city locations, they also come together nationally to deliver missions in various locations across the UK. During a week-long mission the Fly team work with local churches and schools to establish and develop relationships with young people in the area. Team members aim to challenge the stereotypical view that Christians are boring and Christianity is irrelevant, by sharing their enthusiasm for basketball and their dynamic faith in Christ. Fly have delivered over 50 of these missions, including a number in Bosnia.

Kick

In 2000, Alan Gray launched a YFC football mission team in Scotland called 'Kick'. Kick soon spread south of the border helping YFC to build up its sports ministry across the UK in locations as diverse as Aberdeen, Manchester, Perth, Richmond (west London), Wearside and The Wirral.

The Kick team aims to share the Christian message with young people through football, whether it is part of a school PE lesson, an after school team training session, or simply a knock-around at the local park. The Kick team report that some of the best opportunities for sharing a personal faith come after an hour of kicking a ball around – wherever that might be!

Football is sometimes thought of as a religion in its own right, with its own temples, forms of worship, calendar of sacred dates, heroes, and forms of fellowship. Kick attempts to bring a Christian

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presence into the midst of this environment. As skilful players and competent coaches, Kick team members attempt to show young people that football can be a gift which we can use to worship God.

Skate

Of course, sports ministry isn't just about using well-established sports in a well-organised manner. The launch of YFC's 'Skate' missions team is a case in point. Skate aims to equip genuine skaters to stay submerged in the skateboarding world whilst being a living Christian witness to their peer group.

It is argued that because 'skate culture' is a world largely closed to outsiders, it can only be affected from within. Hence, Skate is a team for those who live and breathe skating but want to see their fellow skaters come to know Jesus as they do. As such, Skate represents a different approach to youth ministry.

YFC's Skate outreach in Bath, led by Jo Dolby (definitely a name to watch out for), is proving to be an inspirational example of skate ministry. Through skate parks and events, Christian skaters in Bath are attempting to place Jesus at the centre of the skating world so that other young skaters – who may have rebelled against wider society and rejected the church – will be open to knowing a God who is able to meet them in their own world and understand their approach to life.

Identity and faith

As National Sports Co-ordinator for YFC, I have the privilege of seeing these teams introduce Jesus Christ to many young people who may never have previously stepped into a church building.

Between them, the Fly, Kick and Skate teams have trained, equipped and mentored around 50 young

leaders, helping them to use their God-given gifts and their passion for sport to live out and share their Christian faith with others. Since 1999, YFC sports evangelists have made contact with thousands of school-aged youngsters in more than 300 churches and schools. Through these initiatives, many hundreds of youngsters have been mentored to a better understanding of their own identity, and many of them have become Christians.

Volunteers needed

When I see the ways in which these three fruitful sports ministries help to build the Kingdom of God in the UK, I cannot help but feel extremely excited about where God will lead YFC in the future.

Over the coming years YFC plans to develop more resources to help churches to use sport evangelistically with young people. I look forward to seeing the expansion of sports ministries with young offenders' institutes across the UK. I also look forward to exploring the ways in which sport can be used to bridge cultural gaps in this country and overseas.

I am committed to fulfilling the potential of sport to develop young people both in society and within the Kingdom of God. I am passionate about sport, I love Jesus Christ, and God has given me a heart for young people. I honestly can't think of any other job I would rather do!

■ Barry Mason

Contact

Barry says, 'In my role within YFC I am always looking to recruit volunteers for these teams, so please share these ideas with anybody who you think might be interested in using their sporting passions to serve God evangelistically.'

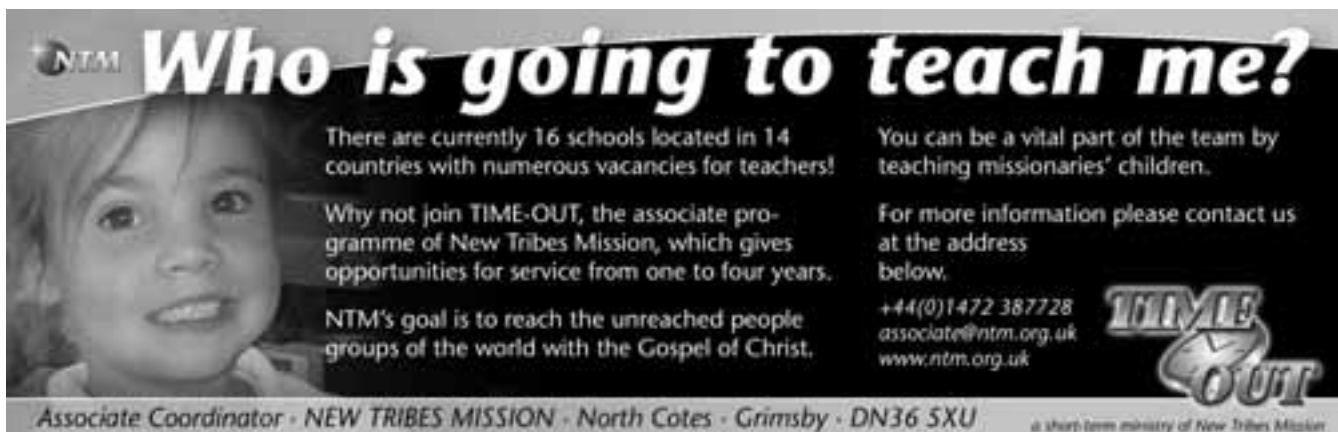
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