

ELITE ATHLETES AND THE GOSPEL

FIVE ELITE ATHLETES WHO ARE MEMBERS
OF THE CHURCH TALK ABOUT HOW THE GOSPEL
HAS HELPED THEM NOT ONLY IN THEIR SPORT
BUT ALSO IN THEIR LIVES.

ONE of the things that has helped these athletes excel is a willingness to work hard and prepare for the future even when they are not in control of the outcome. Things they can't control: whether or not they made the team; whether or not they win; or even if the events where they will compete may be postponed a year due to a once-in-a lifetime pandemic.

What can they control? How much effort they put into preparing so they could do their best. As you read their stories, think about what kind of effort it would take to reach peak performance in their sport. How about you? What can you do now to be at your best?

CASEY PATTERSON: BEACH VOLLEYBALL

I've never forgotten this line from a conference talk: "Hard work . . . involves going after it 'with all your heart, might, mind and strength' (Doctrine and Covenants 4:2). That alone is the difference between the average and the excellent" (F. David Stanley, "The Principle of Work," Apr. 1993 general conference).

In my sport I focus on being resilient and having a positive attitude. It's easy to look at the kid who can jump higher than you or perform better, but getting a good grasp of your attitude is what really matters. Working hard is the main thing that controls your destiny. It's important to compare yourself to yourself—nobody else.



About Casey:

- Has been playing volleyball for nearly 25 years.
- Has three younger sisters.
- Represents USA.
- Interesting fact: His mom wouldn't let him grow a mohawk until he'd served a mission and gotten married.



JASON SMYTH: TRACK AND FIELD

I was diagnosed with an eye disease when I was eight years old, and over the years my vision has been reduced to less than 10 percent. But I have had many blessings through the sport of running and competing in the Paralympics. A few years ago, an injury resulted in surgery, and I wasn't sure I would be able to compete again. But I was blessed by Heavenly Father to heal well and be able to continue competing.

I know that Heavenly Father loves me and wants what is best for me, and that gives me comfort and reassurance that what happens is what's best for me.



About Jason:

- Has been running for 15 years.
- Has one brother and three sisters.
- Represents Ireland.
- Interesting fact: Participating in elite sports gives him a unique opportunity to share the gospel.

MARY LAKE: VOLLEYBALL

Growing up, a lot of girls struggle with the adversary targeting their self-worth. The world places an emphasis on what we look like, and if you're an athlete, you're being watched a lot. I felt a lot of anxiety playing volleyball at Brigham Young University. Lots of eyes were on me, and it brought up insecurities. I had been praying to get through the doubts that came with those insecurities. It wasn't an immediate answer, but I know that it was those prayers and that time with Heavenly Father that helped me overcome those.

The Spirit reminded me that I am now a different person than I was four years ago. Looking back, I can see times when Heavenly Father's hand gave me experiences and impressions that I have so much more worth than I thought.

I'm so much more than athletics. My mom says I could quit everything that other people label me as, but I could still be a wonderful person and a wonderful daughter. My family treats me like I'm human and loves me for things that aren't athletics. That has allowed me to enjoy my



About Mary:

- Has been playing volleyball since age 7.
- Youngest of six siblings—three sisters and two brothers.
- Represents USA.
- Interesting fact: Loves to crunch numbers and studied accounting at Brigham Young University.

sport more since my self-worth isn't really tied up in how I perform. Volleyball is only a certain number of years of my life, but who I am is infinite.

Younger girls often come to me and talk to me about volleyball. I get a glimpse of who they are and how Heavenly Father feels about them. I just want them to understand that they don't have to be a college athlete or do anything extraordinary to have great value and be loved. My main message to them is to ask Heavenly Father about their worth and realize that it's not connected to any one thing they do.





JACKSON PAYNE: GYMNASTICS

I had a great chance to qualify for the London Olympics in 2012, but in the most important competition, I fell off the apparatus. My chance at the Olympics was gone. I was halfway around the world, and my dreams were shattered.

Shortly after that failure, I decided I wanted to go on a mission. I might not have gone if I had made it into the Olympics, but my mission was one miracle after another. I was so grateful for that opportunity.

The gospel has helped me make right decisions, especially at times when it's difficult to keep my standards. It shapes who I am and all the values that I have.



About Jackson:

- Has been doing gymnastics for about 22 years.
- Fifth of six siblings—three older brothers, an older sister, and a younger sister.
- Represents Canada.
- Interesting fact: Got to shake the hand of President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008) at the dedication of the Edmonton Alberta Temple.

BRICKELLE BRO: SWIMMING

I was applying to colleges in 2015, the year before the 2016 Olympics. I was trying to find a college team that would allow me, a disabled swimmer, to train with them in preparation for Rio. Immediately after submitting each application, I would email the head coach of the swim team and give them a short bio and explain that I wanted to train with them. Then I would receive an email back wishing me luck but saying they just did not have the ability to work with me.

My family and I started praying and fasting that I would find a team that would train me. Eventually, a friend told me to apply to Stanford University because the head coach of the women's team was eager to work with Paralympians. I did apply, just as an excuse to talk to the coach and pick his brain. I was so surprised when I actually got in to Stanford. Just a few minutes after receiving an email telling me that I got in, the head coach emailed me and said he would like to work with me to train for the Rio Paralympics. It was a little miracle!



About Brickelle:

- Has been swimming for 15 years.
- Has one brother and one sister.
- Represents USA.
- Interesting fact: When she was little, she preferred playing in the bathtub over going to the park.



Read "Use the Forts" in this issue for some great ideas on how to prepare yourself for the spiritual attacks you might face.