

LEADERSHIP ON AND OFF THE ICE



“I went to a fight tonight, and a hockey game broke out.” So goes the joke in the world of hockey. Hockey—like life, in general—is a battle. Max Erickson has been called in this battle to impact the world of hockey for Christ. That’s why he is serving as hockey chaplain for five Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) Division III hockey teams: Augsburg, Saint John’s, Saint Mary’s, Hamline, and St. Thomas. He works under IMF in partnership with Hockey Ministries International, and raises his own support through IMF.

Max meets with each team weekly during the season for an hour-long chapel. Chapels are voluntary and, on average, three to fifteen players attend. During chapel they discuss everything including relationships, family, who Jesus is, if the Bible is reliable, and where one goes when one dies.

Sometimes it takes a while for hockey players to get involved in chapel. When players do come, it’s often because they’ve noticed a change in chapel-going upperclassmen. “I don’t know anything about God, and I’m afraid to go to chapel,” one player recently said, yet he was drawn by the changes he saw in his peers.

The majority of Max’s time is spent discipling players one-on-one. His life is devoted to serving these players, their families, and the coaching staff, and he orients his life around their (very complicated) schedules.

Many players think they’re Christian when they start going to chapel, but as they go deeper they realize, “I don’t know who Jesus is. Is he real? Is he real in my life?”

Some have difficulty making the leap of faith. One recent graduate has still not made a confession of faith. Recently, his father was diagnosed with cancer. The family’s

church didn’t offer help, so Max met with this student and his family, and they talked for four hours about the peace that Christ offers and how to know one’s prayers are being heard. God is working through Max to minister to the family in their battle.

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While some are hesitant to surrender to Christ, others are ready. For a while, Max regularly drove three hours to Onalaska, Wisconsin (from his home in Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota) for chapel with one student. After three months, the student surrendered his life to Christ. He’s now walking boldly in his new faith, playing Division III hockey and sharing Bible verses on Facebook.

Max is intentional about sharing his failures. “For a short time, I did the partying and the drinking. And thank the Lord there’s grace and forgiveness,” Max says. Players have told him, “When you share your own struggles, it tells us we’re not alone.”

Jesus is our example when life gets tough. “We’re all a bunch of loose cannons,” Max says, but Christ changes the reason for playing. Because of Christ, Christians can distinguish fighting for the game from fighting out of aggression. In fact, Max believes that some of the toughest hockey players are Christians. They know that

battling on the ice is just part of their job, and they can have peace in the midst of an otherwise brutal game.

Jesus is the ultimate example of how to fight the temptations of this world. College hockey players face pressures of fame, money, fortune, drugs, and sex. Weekend after weekend, the party scene leaves them empty. “I’m a hockey player,” Max says. “I know what these guys are going through, and I feel called to make an impact.”

Max is focused on ministering with impact, not just influence. “Jesus Christ did more than influence,” Max explains. “He made an impact, and it changed the course of the world.” In following Christ’s example, Max aims to impact the lives of hockey players with the gospel so that they, in turn, can impact others. It’s only from the impact of Christ that anyone can find satisfaction and purpose.

Max himself was impacted by Christian leaders. The most significant model of leadership in Max’s life is his father. His dad was his hockey coach in school and has remained his coach personally and spiritually. Max admires the way his father’s life reflects the Word of God. Max was also impacted by Luis Palau as well as Don Liesemer, President and Founder of Hockey Ministries International. While at HMI Hockey Camp, Max, then 12, received the call of the Holy Spirit to dedicate his life to serving hockey players with the message of the cross.



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