

Dodgers' Clayton Kershaw Pitches for Christ

When Los Angeles Dodger pitcher Clayton Kershaw took the mound Wednesday in the major league baseball 2012 regular season finale against arch-rival San Francisco, much was on the line.

While the game meant nothing in the standings (the Giants were already going to the postseason, and the Dodgers were not), a solid performance would mean Kershaw would have a shot at a second consecutive Cy Young Award—the annual honor given to the best pitcher in each league. It also would mean more help for children on two continents.

Kershaw and his wife, Ellen, give \$100 per batter he strikes out each season to help build and support a children's home in Zambia, a **street ministry** in Dallas and an outreach to children at risk in Los Angeles. The better he pitches, the more they give.

"I want every pitch and every batter faced to be about something more than a game," Kershaw says.

Kershaw's passion to give rises out of his **passion for God**. One of a growing number of Christian players in Major League Baseball, he has taken a soft-spoken, but nonetheless bold approach to making his faith known.

"God said, 'I will give you baseball. That will be your platform,'" Kershaw said earlier this season during the Dodgers' Faith and Family Day event at Dodger Stadium. Kershaw, catcher A.J. Ellis and pitcher Josh Lindblom each gave their testimonies of faith, speaking before about 2,500 people who had stayed after the June 30 game against the New York Mets.

"Playing Major League Baseball is a dream come true," Ellis

told the crowd. "Even more of a dream come true is using baseball as a platform to talk about our faith."

Ellis had a breakout year on the field in 2012, earning the Dodgers' coveted Roy Campanella Award for most spirited teammate. Kershaw and Ellis have been friends since their minor league days, and now lead a **Bible study** for other players and serve as each other's accountability partners.

"God sent His son to die on the Cross for our sins," Ellis told the Faith and Family Day crowd. "That's our No. 1 message."

Lindblom started the season with the Dodgers, but was traded in July to the Philadelphia Phillies. The relief pitcher told about his personal transformation in 2010. On the verge of making the major league roster out of spring training, he instead had one of his worst years as a professional player—in the minor leagues.

"I was so wrapped up in baseball that I was putting Christ on a back burner," Lindstrom said. "I was in a dark place."

At one point during the season, someone quietly tucked a page torn out of the Bible into his shoes. The passage was Hebrews 11:12. As he read, he determined that he was tired of living his own way and recommitted himself to Christ. "Now it's not my will but Christ's will," Lindstrom said.

Kershaw and his wife, Ellen, told the Dodger stadium crowd about their work with HIV-positive orphans in Zambia and about *Arise: Live Out Your Faith and Dreams on Whatever Field You Find Yourself*, the book they co-wrote that tells their story of following Christ, reaching the big leagues and helping children in Africa.

Kershaw faced Ryan Vogelsong of the Giants on the last day of the 2012 season. On the field, their rivalry was fierce. Off the field, their common faith was even stronger. Last month

when the Dodgers were in San Francisco for a series of games, Vogelsong joined fellow Giants Jeremy Affeldt, Angel Pagan, Santiago Casilla, Brandon Belt and Barry Zito for San Francisco's Fellowship Day. After the game, which the Dodgers won, 3,000 fans stayed as musician Adam Shust played a set of **worship** songs, and the Giants players talked about God.

"We just shared the love of Jesus," Affeldt told Charisma News. "We have a huge opportunity to love people. We want to be known for something more than just our stats. We stand on the mound representing something more than ourselves. We want to make sure we glorify God."

A growing number of major league teams have after-game events featuring Christian coaches and players such as the ones that took place in Los Angeles and in San Francisco. About 3,500 people stayed for a Fellowship Night following a San Diego Padres game in July.

Bebo Norman performed the music and Padres players Chase Headley, Kip Wells and Logan Forsythe gave testimonies. "This gives me a platform to spread the Word," Headley told Charisma News. "At our fellowship night I reminded everyone that we all have an audience. It is important to remember that we are always influencing someone else, even when we don't realize it."

Headley added, "It is important for me to use my platform to live out my faith. ... God tells us to be bold and stand for what we believe in. And that's what I'm going to do."

After a Pittsburgh Pirates game against the Cardinals in St. Louis earlier this year, members of both clubs and their managers took off their baseball hats and appeared together as brothers in Christ.

"We are bound by the blood of Christ," Pirates manager Clint Hurdle told Charisma News. "We are directed in the Bible to go and tell, to go and represent. So we must take these

opportunities to answer questions about why we have made the decision to put Jesus first. We need to show that we are not about celebrity, money or cars. We are about serving others.”

In June, Lakewood Church Pastor **Joel Osteen** threw out the first pitch for the game on the Houston Astros’ Christian-themed day. In August, the music group Mercy Me performed at faith-based days at ballparks in Colorado and Cincinnati. In Oakland, Calif., the Athletics’ Sept. 29 event was called the Church Community Day, and chaplain Donnie Moore spoke after the game.

Teams usually offer special group rates to area churches on fellowship days.

“Because we call ourselves Christians, our actions need to reflect Christ,” Kershaw told the crowd at Dodger Stadium. “Our sphere of influence is baseball. Yours may be at your school [or someplace else].”

On the mound Wednesday at Dodger Stadium, Kershaw and Vogelsong went head-to-head. Kershaw struck out eight batters, raising his 2012 total to 221—which means he and his wife will donate a total of \$22,100 to the ministries supported through Kershaw’s Challenge.

The Dodger ace may also be on his way to another Cy Young Award and other honors—including the Roberto Clemente Award for a player who gives back to the community (he was nominated and fan voting goes through Oct. 14 at). Vogelsong tuned up for the Giants postseason run, and left the game early as the Dodgers won 5-1. The outcome notwithstanding, both pitchers know they were pitching for something more than the game.