

Soccer Standout Follows Spirit to Miraculous Outcome

The world is watching as soccer teams from around the globe take to the pitch for the Women's World Cup. Among these elite athletes is U.S. Women's National Team standout Lauren Holiday, who helped the U.S. beat Australia and Nigeria and tie Sweden thus far in Cup action. The U.S. takes on Colombia today.

Now, as they watch the intense competition, young athletes across the world are diligently practicing their dribbling, in the hopes to play at the World Cup level someday—just like Lauren Holiday. But she hopes her young fans will recognize something else in her besides her love for soccer—her love for Christ. Holiday recently told the Fellowship of Christian Athletes magazine: “(God) gave me the world's stage to share His gospel.”

“All of us at FCA have been thrilled to watch Lauren Holiday's joy both on and off the field,” said FCA President and CEO Les Steckel. “For this Christ-following soccer standout to be on the world's stage and impact her fans and young athletes is an amazing gift. We wish Lauren and the entire U.S. Women's Team all the best in their World Cup run.

“Young fans who are enamored by intense World Cup play can see firsthand that athletes like Lauren Holiday are dedicated in all areas of their lives,” Steckel added. “Their devotion to sports may drive them, but only a balanced strategy that puts Jesus Christ at the center will help young athletes grow into the person God designed them to be. That's why FCA is committed to reaching student-athletes in all areas of their lives. We love sports, and competition is thrilling and rewarding, but there's much more that happens away from the field that helps athletes fully reach their God-given

potential.”

Through its popular Camps program, FCA focuses on ministering to the whole student-athlete—physically, mentally and spiritually. With the 2015 theme of “Undefeated,” FCA Camps offer student-athletes the opportunity to develop in their sport through outstanding instruction, skill development and intense competition, along with spiritual guidance from dedicated coaches and staff who concentrate on training the total athlete.

For the sports camp experience, athletes can select from either a sport-specific camp or a multi-sport camp. Coaches, team and leadership camps are also available. During the 2014 camps season, FCA impacted 86,557 attendees at 516 camps in 40 states and 33 countries.

This year, FCA Camps will focus on 1 Corinthians 15:57: “But thanks be to God, who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” As the FCA Camps website reminds, “We serve a God who has never lost. His string of victories is unmatched. He has dominated the competition throughout history. ... God is holy. God is mighty. He is UNDEFEATED!”

Holiday certainly knows the importance of building a relationship with an “Undefeated” God while representing Him on the field. As a star for the United States Women’s National Team (WNT) and the National Women’s Soccer League (NWSL) champion FC Kansas City, Holiday has no shortage of accomplishments on her resume, including the 2014 U.S. Soccer Female Athlete of the Year, four NCAA All-America awards and two Olympic gold medals. But Holiday told FCA that nothing comes close to the opportunity she’s been given to follow Christ and influence the world’s largest sports stage for Him.

Holiday was an athlete growing up and remembers watching Brandi Chastain and the U.S. WNT claim a 5-4 shootout victory over China to win the 1999 FIFA World Cup.

“That’s when I realized how badly I wanted to play for my country,” Holiday said in an interview with FCA. “The World Cup made it real to me. That’s when I knew I wanted to play on that stage one day.”

She got her chance early, as part of the FIFA U-20 Women’s World Cup team while still a high school senior. After the U-20 World Cup, Holiday enrolled at UCLA, where she scored a conference-leading 19 goals. More importantly, her faith continued to flourish, as other believers on the UCLA team helped her grow. Also at UCLA, Holiday met her now-husband, Jrue, a point guard for the NBA’s New Orleans Pelicans.

Still in college, Holiday earned her first start with the U.S. WNT in 2007; in 2008, she was named as an alternate to the U.S. WNT’s Olympic roster. An injury to another player bumped Holiday to the official lineup, and she played in three matches. In 2009, Holiday also joined the Pali Blues, a California-based United Soccer Leagues developmental team. But despite her busy schedule, she was careful to put even more focus on her relationship with Christ, making sure to connect with Him every day. In fact, Holiday has written a devotional on the FCA website to encourage others to daily build their faith.

In 2010, the Boston Breakers selected Holiday in the Women’s Professional Soccer (WPS) league draft. Meanwhile, she finished as the U.S. WNT’s second-leading scorer, moving into the team’s starting lineup prior to the 2011 FIFA World Cup. By 2012, Holiday had played in 31 games for the U.S. WNT, including all six Olympic matches.

But many note what Holiday does before her games rather than during them.

Prior to each FCKC home game, Holiday invites everyone from the opposing team to pray. And when the Blues are on the road, she leads the team and others in prayer, too.

“Success is winning a gold medal,” Holiday said in an FCA video. “Success is being the best soccer player I can be. But the wonderful, wonderful thing about loving Jesus is, it’s not about me. And the spotlight isn’t on me. So when I do step out on the field for that gold-medal game or the World Cup, I get to play with freedom because I don’t have to worry about how I score or if I score or what happens if we lose or if I make a bad pass, because success isn’t determined on that with Christ. Yes, I love to win, and I know that God loves when I win, but when I walk away, my identity is still the same. I’m still a follower of Jesus Christ and, in a loss or in success, I can still be humble and give Him the glory.”