

The Games in Paris: Golden Opportunity for Outreach?

WASHINGTON – Experts predict an estimated 15 million people will travel to attend the summer games in Paris – nicknamed the “City of Light.”

With more than 3 billion people tuning in to watch 10,500 of the world’s premier athletes compete for gold, Christian ministries and some athletic competitors see a golden opportunity to fulfill Jesus’s call to be the “light of the world.”

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Daniel Roberts, 26, of Georgia, qualified for a spot running the 110-meter hurdles for Team USA in late June. He told CBN News his identity as a Christian outshines any acclaim or attention he receives as an elite athlete.

“We’re all here to worship God in our own special way,” Roberts said. “This is just a different way that I use my abilities and my gifts to bring glory to Him.”

Beyond the support of his family, friends, coaches and teammates, he’s also getting spiritual reinforcement from sports ministries like Athletes in Action, which is devoted to developing the mind, body and soul.

The ministry believes the transcending power of sport can be used to reach the ends of the earth with the message of the gospel.

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When Frank Shelton lands in Paris, he and his team of volunteers will be praying for “divine appointments” to guide their time in the French capital, where they will serve as chaplains to the athletes.

Shelton told CBN News Christians do a good job helping the poor but fail to minister effectively to what he describes as “the powerful, prominent and popular.”

“They’re bold in what they do,” he explained referring to athletes who share their faith publicly. “And we need to be bold in sharing the gospel. I just don’t believe that we should be saints sitting on the sideline. We got to get in the game.”

“Christianity isn’t a spectator sport,” he added.

Paris marks Shelton’s fourth summer games. He recounted his team’s success at the 2016 competition in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

“In Rio, we saw 1,054 people give their life to Christ: gold medalists, three Uber drivers, fans, spectators,” he recalled. “I’ve just learned that when we show up God shows off, and things happen. And people get saved.”

He’s praying for even bigger numbers in Paris, which saw its streets flooded with some 25,000 people in May for a “March for Jesus.”

Youth With A Mission built a schedule of events, including street worship and prayer, that spans three weeks and coincides with the international competition. The effort kicked off with 100 days of prayer starting in mid-April in conjunction with French churches and both local and international ministries.

“[It’s] so cool to see people coming from literally the ends of the world to Paris to proclaim Jesus,” said Sky Grimes

with YWAM Paris Connect. “We’re working with local churches – churches with other countries. We’re trying to activate Paris with us.”

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