

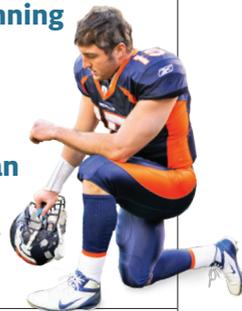
SPOTLIGHT: Muscular Christianity's Newest Heroes

➔ Even as Jeremy Lin's record-breaking NBA streak and Tim Tebow's NFL season ended, the two athletes and their Christian faith dominated sports coverage. Fans and journalists compared Lin's wristbands to eyeblack and debated players' Jesus talk. "It is kind of crazy," says *Sports Spectrum* managing editor Brett Honeycutt. "It's as if they were the first Christian athletes." Sociologist James Mathisen says it's been nearly 20 years since "jocks for Jesus" had this much attention.



"The religious lives of Tebow and Lin fit into a narrative of underdog, and they are both 'adamantly humble' in their mien. This gives their testimonies an unusual credibility. Of course, if the Knicks and Broncos hadn't had their winning streaks, we would have heard very little about their Christian faith."

Shirl James Hoffman, author, *Good Game: Christianity and the Culture of Sports*



Holy Hall of Fame

1891: Outfielder Billy Sunday quits. Later, the famed evangelist would criticize baseball but load his sermons with sports references.

1952: Athlete evangelists get organized with Sports Ambassadors and Fellowship of Christian Athletes (1954).

1971: Amid San Francisco Giants "God squad" hype, Graham claims sports has "more really committed Christians . . . than any other occupation in America."

1890 1900 1910 1920 1930 1940 1950 1960 1970 1980 1990 2000

1884: The "Cambridge Seven" cricket players respond to Dwight Moody's altar calls in England and become missionaries to China.

1945: Record miler Gil Dodds joins Billy Graham at the first Youth for Christ conference.

1969: Former Cleveland Browns defensive end Bill Glass forms what would become a leading prison ministry.

1997: Promise Keepers, brainchild of college football coach Bill McCartney, rallies nearly 1 million in D.C.

ATHLETES IN ACTION



TIM TEBOW: Given the popularity of "Tebowing," you'd think he invented praying on one knee. His faith was even making off-season headlines before this week's trade to the Jets. In *GQ*, backup QB Brady Quinn worried about Tebow's humility, while earlier Christian celeb Kurt Warner called Tebow's story "biblical." And yes, he and Lin are hanging out (via phone).



JOSH HAMILTON: While Tebow and Lin represent one underdog narrative common among Christian athletes—the moral resister of temptation—Texas Rangers outfielder Josh Hamilton represents another: the penitent. "My recovery is Christ," he said in February after his latest slip with alcohol use. "It's an every-day process."



ALBERT PUJOLS: "My life's goal is to bring glory to Jesus," the first baseman says on his website. "Baseball is simply my platform to elevate . . . my Lord and Savior." It's also the source of his \$254 million contract. Pujols gives away a lot to his St. Louis-based charity, but biographer Scott Lamb thinks the contract "will hurt . . . his Christian testimony."



MARINO RIVERA: As pitchers and catchers reported for spring training, the famed Yankees reliever suggested that this season may be his last. He's said his retirement might mean going into full-time pastoral ministry. He's already planted (or at least funded the building of) one church in La Chorrera, Panama.



KAKÁ: Forget "Tebowing." The Brazilian soccer superstar pulls off his jersey after goals to reveal T-shirts declaring his love for Jesus. In October, he shocked his homeland by leaving the neo-Pentecostal church where his wife was a pastor. "It became a business," she complained. (And its leaders had recently served time for smuggling money.)