

2021 YEAR END NEWSLETTER



MINISTRY STATS

- **Fall Flag Football** - 228 kids, 31 volunteers which included current SDSU athletes in 9 different supports and 3 alumni
- **Summer Camps** - 10 Camps with approximately 765 campers in 4 different communities
- **Local Huddles** - 27 area middle school, high school, college and coaches huddles

FCA VISION

To see the world transformed by Jesus Christ through the influence of coaches and athletes.

FCA MISSION

To lead every coach and athlete into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and His church.

FEATURED ARTICLES

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FLAGFOOTBALL

For 8 years the local Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) has organized youth flag football in the Brookings area. In 2021 over 400 young people participated in Flag Football in the Spring and Fall seasons. Over the course of time FCA has partnered with the national brand of NFL Flag Football to help provide quality uniforms and experience.

“We couldn’t possibly offer this experience without some great partnerships- between NFL Flag, our friendships with SDSU athletics and a great sponsor support team. When we came up with the idea of hosting Flag Football in Brookings, Bruce Burkhardt, at StoneyBrook Suites, was the first to jump on board and has been our anchor donor from the beginning. We have several other businesses and groups that have been sponsors throughout the years,” said FCA Area Director, T.J. Carlson.

“Any event takes great volunteers to pull off, and our league has been blessed with the unique distinction of having Jackrabbit Student athletes volunteer to coach and lead. Their buy-in and the relationships that they create with kids is the real “win” of the program,” Carlson said. “This past Fall we had 22 teams of 1st-6th graders, and 31 college-student athletes from 9 different sports across campus volunteer their time each Sunday evening- that’s special!”

One of those student athletes is SDSU Defensive Lineman Thomas Stacker. “Stacker,” has been a favorite of many kids with his participation in Flag Football and FCA camps through his time as a student athlete.

“I started in 2016 when I was a freshman. Jake Wienke was coaching and he made it sound cool. I didn’t come in knowing what to expect, but after a few weeks I found out it was something really special,” said Stacker. “When I was a kid, I met Juice Williams, the quarterback for Illinois, and that’s something that has stuck with me to this day. I was thinking if I could have that impact, or even a fraction of that impact on kids, that would be something that was pretty cool.”

Stacker said, “All of my favorite memories are kind of the same- when a kid figures out the love for football that we all have is something that’s pretty cool.”

We are thankful to Thomas Stacker for his years of service and impact and are thankful to all our volunteers, sponsors, and participating families- Registration for FCA Spring Flag Football will begin after the New Year!



BHSHUDDLE

The Brookings High School Huddle started meeting Sunday nights this fall at the brand new Fishback Indoor Training (F.I.T.) Center thanks to a generous FCA donor. It has been a wonderful setting that allows the group to participate in a variety of games and activities on the turf field before going up top to the meeting area to dig into God's Word, discuss how we see God moving in our lives and teams, and hear testimonies from some amazing area coaches and athletes! Our activities each week are planned and facilitated by our student leaders: seniors Rylie Weisbeck, Jaxon Bowes, Claire Einspahr, Cole McKeown, Davis Engen, and juniors Sidney Carlson, Jaxton Eck and Israel Caldron.

One of our student FCA leaders, Bobcat football captain Davis Engen, has participated in Brookings area FCA events since our very first Power Camp in 2013. We asked Davis to reflect on his time with FCA, talk about how FCA has impacted his life, and to share his vision for FCA at BHS going forward.

"One of the earliest memories I have of FCA is from an FCA Power Camp in 2013. At this camp, Austin Sumner, SDSU quarterback at the time, was my group leader. I remember being shocked that a player I watched play on Saturdays was taking time to be with a bunch of little kids. It was an impactful moment that has definitely influenced me to this day.

FCA has always been a large part of my life. It has guided me on how to be a Christian athlete rather than being an athlete that's a Christian. It's helped to create a community of believers within my sports, and all the sports in the high school. In that community, I feel comfortable talking and sharing about my faith in Jesus. It's also put into perspective that I am not playing for accolades and awards but playing for the Lord and to be an advocate for him.

I am looking forward to growing a larger group of confident believers through the BHS Huddle so that they can spread the Gospel within their sports. I am looking forward to leaving my impact on FCA and the people that come behind me so that they can continue to grow FCA even when I and the other seniors are gone".

Davis and the rest of our student leaders have already made an impact through FCA and we are excited to see where God leads this group the rest of the school year!



Dear FCA Friends,

1 Timothy 6:11 tells us to “*pursue righteousness and a godly life.*” In 2021, we saw over 2,000 coaches and athletes pursue new or strengthened relationships with Jesus Christ- just in our small geographical part of the South Dakota! Through Student Athlete and Coaches Huddles on Campus, Camps and Sports Leagues Coaches and Athletes pursued God’s mission – His greater purpose – for their lives. As you read through our year-end newsletter we hope you’ll celebrate with us some of the amazing things God did through FCA this past year. ***Thank you for your generous support to help make this ministry happen.***

Even though Jesus Christ transformed many lives this year, we know there’s more work to do, more changed lives in broader and deeper ways, in 2022. **Will you prayerfully consider providing a year-end gift so that even more coaches and athletes in our area will become followers of Jesus Christ? Or maybe you would like to become an Automatic Monthly Partner (AMP) who helps provide for FCA’s financial stability throughout the year?**

Your special gift today helps position us to start 2022 with the resources to strengthen our ministry. Through your generosity, more coaches and athletes can pursue God’s greater mission through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Please visit **www.BrookingsAreaFCA.org/Donate** to submit your gift online or learn about non-cash ways of giving to FCA.

I am thankful that God brought us together to see more people pursuing God’s purpose in their lives. My prayer for you as the year ends is that you and your family continue to feel the light of Jesus Christ shine on and through you in 2022.

Your Teammate in Christ,



T.J. Carlson
Area Director
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JOHN AND LAURIE STIEGELMEIER

John and Laurie Stiegelmeier have long been intertwined with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, living out the values of the organization with their family, friends, relationships and life as leaders of the South Dakota State University Jackrabbits football team. The pair were recently recognized as part of The Tom Landry Associates program for their generous giving over the years.

The Tom Landry Associates, launched in 1981, is FCA's major donor program named in honor of Coach Tom Landry to commemorate his legacy of impact not just in football, but also for the Kingdom, and as a very special friend, leader and benefactor to FCA. The Tom Landry Associates program recognizes major donors who are leaving a legacy of impact for generations to come through generously investing in FCA.

How did your relationship with FCA start?

John: Early in my career I was addicted to football. I found out that I could go to an FCA football camp and could bring the family, so it seemed like it would kind of cover both areas of my life well – we could have a family vacation and I could be working doing what I love. I couldn't believe they were going to let me go to a football camp, let the family come and have all expenses paid while I got to work on the field.

Laurie: What I remember about that week was that it really was this great family vacation for us. We stayed in the dorms and had breakout sessions, Bible studies with all the wives, and they had childcare and a bunch of activities for the kids. It was a great chance to bond with other coaches' wives and really learn that you're not alone in this journey.

What else do you remember about those early years of camp?

Laurie: Going to an FCA camp is just such a high. If you want to see FCA at work, go to a summer camp. Listen to the speakers, enjoy the music, and just see the Holy Spirit at work. We had not been familiar with FCA growing up. That wasn't a thing in our high school or college years, and so it was a real eye opener when we started. We were able to hear good Christian music, we saw young men and women transformed. It was a little bit of a mourning period when we couldn't go to camp anymore (due to NCAA Division I recruiting rules) because there was such a support system there, and so many great memories.

Where have you seen the greatest impact with FCA on your lives?

John: Well, for me, the first camp changed my life. I was convicted. I committed myself to being a better dad and a more committed Christian. Prior to that, I would say I was treading water as both father and a husband and was probably a pseudo-Christian. So really, a bunch of 14- to 18-year-old kids changed my life and my faith journey. We have a lot of fond memories of jumping in the van and taking off for camp.

Laurie: It was a great chance for us to go a little deeper in the friendships we made and grow the relationships we had with other coaches and their families. We got beyond the wins and losses, and really got to share the joys and hurts, the concerns or experiences, and just really got to know you're not alone in this crazy life of coaching.

Tell us about how FCA has intersected with your time at South Dakota State?

Laurie: I think the fact that TJ (Carlson) was a student coach, left to get into ministry and then came back has really allowed the two to merge well. That really is maybe symbolic of our lives, where we started with the game of football, were exposed to ministry within the game and now they're connected. A lot of times people live those two areas – your Christian walk and your professional walk – separately, but we feel very honored to have the chance to make an impact here in both areas.

John: When a young person goes to college, they should be allowed to grow in all phases of their life. Physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. We've always had chapel before football, but when FCA got its foothold on campus the concept of growing spiritually became exponentially more available for our student-athletes. Through TJ and Kristy's commitment and their love for SDSU and our athletes we've seen such a tremendous impact. Our athletic program is better because FCA is intertwined with it.

You have been longtime supporters of FCA in prayer, time commitments and financial gifts. Where does that heart of giving come from?

John: It's a no-brainer to give to FCA because it's not a temporary impact. Long after we're out of here, this investment will still be paying dividends. The ministry done here doesn't just stay on campus. It branches out as these young people leave. Their lives are changed, their family and other relationships are changed, and it just goes on and on.

Laurie: We've been really, really blessed through of lives, and we both grew up in homes with generous givers. It's fun, too, to be able to give and have a little bit of an impact outside your own little circle of family.

What do you tell people when you talk about giving to FCA?

John: When I have those kinds of conversations, I always try to sum it up like this. When you get to Heaven, you're going to see a long line of people waiting to thank someone for the impact they've had on lives of others. At the front of those lines, you're going to see people that worked for FCA because they have changed lives and made a Kingdom impact. That's all that matters in the end.

When someone asks you about a favorite moment or memory of FCA, what comes to mind?

Laurie: For me, it was just sitting in the back of an auditorium on a college campus in those early days and seeing 300 young men take their hats off and get to their feet to sing praise and worship music. That just really can't be compared to anything else.

John: Mine was a speech by a guy named Fred Wilson, a longtime coach and teacher in South Dakota. It was a very simple speech and he said, "young men, you have a decision to make. You're either going to live in heaven forever, or not." That was the end, and I really think it kind of sums up the whole deal and why the work of FCA is so important.



SPONSORS



STORY OF IMPACT

Caden McKeown is gearing up for the adventure, and test, of a lifetime.

At the end of the 2021 fall semester, McKeown will take a break from his academic studies at South Dakota State University, hop on a plane for southeast Asia, and immerse himself in a six-month mission trip focused on exploring his own faith, growing closer in his relationship to God, and sharing the good news of the Gospel to the nations.

McKeown, who others have said is on fire for Jesus, wasn't always destined to spend time as a missionary. The sophomore, pre-med major grew up exposed to Christianity and faith-based activities but admits he "fell off a bit" through his middle school and early high school years. So, how did he get here? As McKeown tells it, the journey started long before he found himself heading for the mission field.

From the early days of life, McKeown and Rhett Zelinsky found themselves linked. As competitors in baseball, wrestling and football, the two began to interact through youth sports. Unknown to both, however, was how that connection through sports would soon change both of their lives and set the stage for an eternal pay-it-forward.

Rhett was first introduced to the world of Fellowship of Christian Athletes with, perhaps, some apprehension. Signed up for an FCA football camp, the aspiring athlete found himself in the middle of baseball season and uninterested in attending the event. "My mom signed me up and was determined that I would go," Rhett recalls. "I showed up and had a great time. From that point on, I just continued to stay involved and go to as many camps as I could and loved getting the chance to grow in my faith and in sports as much as possible." The camp life was Caden's introduction to FCA as well, but it would be a few more years before he immersed himself in the organization's activities. That moment came during time at Brookings High School, when Rhett insisted on connecting the Bobcats' football team with FCA huddles to bring the group closer together. "Rhett definitely brought up the idea of FCA and some of the positive things that it can bring," McKeown said. "We hadn't really been exposed to it yet as a team but bringing it into the high school turned out to be a great thing for us." Though FCA huddles had previously existed within the high school culture, a change in leadership provided the opportunity for Rhett to push. "Things kind of fell off during the spring of my freshman year, and then in the fall I started to talk with TJ Carlson about setting up a new huddle and we worked out some details," Zelinsky said. The two set out on relaunching the gatherings, and in the beginning would host them at the school, different churches, or any home that would open their doors to a group of high school students. What started as a gathering of six to 12 people soon took off, and several dozen students began showing up on a regular basis. "It was awesome when we started growing, because you would get to know people that you really never interacted with before," Zelinsky said. "You may have seen them in the hallways, but it was just a great place to meet others and find real connections through the huddle."

While meeting others and finding commonalities to bring them all together in the halls of Brookings High School, the relationship between Rhett and Caden began to strengthen as well. "Rhett has always been a guy that pushes you to get better, but he's also someone you can get behind because he's a good person doing good things," Caden said. "We always interacted through sports, but you really got to see that on display when we got closer through FCA." The time spent at the huddles led to deeper conversations and a closer bond while practicing or working out in the weight room, and soon the pair found themselves as leaders and captains of the football team. That year, Caden's faith journey took the fast track.

As the two captains were talking about the upcoming football season, Rhett mentioned his interest in connecting the team to FCA and pushing to bring teammates along to huddles, and FCA into the team's inner circle. McKeown was originally on the fence about the idea, but Zelinsky insisted. "Faith wasn't really an open thing to talk about, but Rhett just kind of said, 'you have to trust me with this,'" McKeown said.

"Faith isn't a very popular topic of conversation in younger groups, but FCA had such a big impact on my life that I knew it'd be huge for our team to get connected," Zelinsky recalled. "FCA exposed me to Jesus, was so important in my faith and really was a huge reason I was baptized." "That, and having the Lord to lean on is a pretty good way to push away the small worries and feel confident as a group," he said.

The Brookings Bobcats would eventually reach the DakotaDome and South Dakota State Football Championship Game that season. Although the group fell short of raising the trophy, perhaps the greater reward lies in what's ahead for a group who got a taste of Christian brotherhood and sharpening others. Now a sophomore at William Penn University, Zelinsky finds himself spending time with FCA, playing baseball, pursuing a degree and leaning on his background of faith when times get tough. "I try to keep my faith as the main driver of my life," Zelinsky said. "It's a whole new set of adversity as you get into your college years, but having that backbone is what keeps me going and loving life. I'm not in control – God is – and that's such a calming thing to fall back on."

For McKeown, a journey into the unknown looms. He'll spend the first three months of the trip learning from other missionaries and focusing on his faith, and then will heed the call to "go forth and make disciples." That call perfectly reflects the vision of FCA – to see the world transformed by Jesus Christ through the influence of coaches and athletes – and displays how, when Jesus is let into single heart, He can change the world.



RORICONNERS

SDSU Swimmer

To me being a Christian athlete is all about love. I am called to show love to those around me. To love my teammates through the good and the bad. To love my coaches and be grateful for their guidance through sport. To love all our wonderful support staff for helping us to achieve success. To love my competitors. I believe that loving those around me is both my greatest gift and my greatest challenge from God. But in return, I am reminded that I “Play Loved.” My performance in the pool has no reflection on my worth because God loves me no matter how I swim. When I dive in reminding myself I am already loved, I am free to enjoy my competition and not to worry about the outcome.



LEAHKROEGER

SDSU Wrestling Athletic Trainer

I have written at my desk one of my favorite quotes from one of my favorite teachers, “In Christ’s name, be a shelter to someone today.” I see this as an important part of my call as a Christian, but also as an athletic trainer. I find myself in a tangible place to be the hands and feet of Christ to a hurting—physically, mentally, and spiritually—world. To be a Christian in this space is to have a chance to build relationships and pour into a team that needs healing. My goal as an athletic trainer is to bring hope and healing, as Christ has enabled me to do both naturally and supernaturally!



BUSTERVINCENT

Sioux Valley High School Boys Basketball Coach & 17U Pentagon Schoolers National Team Coach

For many years I considered myself a coach that was Christian. Now I take great pride being a Christian coach. To me being a Christian coach means everything you do should reflect the greatness of Christ. Coaching with a purpose, right? To me three key things:

1. Reflect Christ: 1 Corinthians 10:31 “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do (coach basketball, play basketball, study, being a son, brother, anything), do it all for the glory of God.” Every single thing we do in life is an opportunity to honor and reflect Jesus.
2. Building & investing in relationships: Romans 12:10 “Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.” Wow, that’s a powerful way to coach, compete and live! Imagine showing each other honor and celebrating each other’s successes above oneself. That is a reflection of Christ in a team and a coach. Being there for each other in the good times and bad times.
3. Pursue excellence: Colossians 3:23 “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.” The world standard says WIN. Don’t get me wrong, I want to win more than most. By pursuing excellence with all your heart, as to working for the Lord- winning takes care of itself.

As a Christian coach you will know love, feel love and spread love!



JAXONBOWES

Brookings High School Senior Football, Wrestling, Rodeo

Christian athlete is about your source of strength. When things are going bad in your sport and you don’t know if you have the strength to get through the situation on your own, you can remember that you are not on your own. God is and always will be with you. Through Him anything is possible. Walking in His ways inevitably leads to you becoming a leader in your sport because in His strength you have the ability to take on adversity and you also know what it means to serve.



BOARD MEMBERS

Randy Hanson, John Stiegelmeier, Dave Graves, Brock Thompson, Clint Johnson, Marcus Heemstra, MaryJo Minor, Kate Bergstrom, Jessica Hardt



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