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Rodgers**



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SPORTS SPECTRUM WINTER 2009



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CHECKING OUT ATHLETES OFF THE FIELD OF PLAY • BY JENNA SAMPSON

What did you do with your Olympic medal?

■ **All eyes were on Beijing last summer** as Americans cheered on the nearly 600 U.S. athletes who proudly represented the red, white and blue. Our athletes brought home 110 medals—more than any other country! Few of us have ever had the opportunity to see an Olympic medal up close, so here are a few interesting facts:

- A gold medal isn't completely gold! It actually consists of a 92.5% silver base with a coating of 6 grams of 24-carat gold.
- Each Olympic medal must be at least 70mm across and 6mm thick.

- Since 1928, the front of the medal has featured "Nike," Greek goddess of victory.
- The backs of the 2008 medals include a jade inlay, which represents beauty and excellence in the Chinese culture.

Ever wonder what athletes end up doing with their medals when they return home? We asked some of our Olympians for all of the details, including their favorite post-Olympic appearances. More importantly, these men and women honor Christ as they compete on the world's highest athletic stage.



GOLD, BRONZE, SILVER

MEN'S BASKETBALL



HOWARD

■ At 6'11" NBA superstar **Dwight Howard** is our tallest Olympic athlete. He helped lift the USA men's basketball team to gold against Spain and plans to keep his medal "in a safe place," he says. "I've worn it a couple of times, but the first thing I did was bite it to make sure it was actually real. Honestly, I just keep it at home so I can look at it every day."

The red neck band is starting to show some wear from his appearances, including basketball camps and events for McDonald's, but the 2008 NBA Slam Dunk champion doesn't mind. "It's just tight to say that I represented my country," adds Dwight. "It's great to know that I'm a part of history."



WOMEN'S BASKETBALL



LAWSON

■ On the women's side, WNBA hoopsters **Tamika Catchings** (Indiana Fever) and **Kara Lawson** (Sacramento Monarchs) both played a big part in earning gold. They're on opposing teams during the regular season, but gladly took a break to compete for the USA Women's Basketball Team. It turned out to be a whirlwind week!

After standing on the medal podium as the national anthem played, most of the players had to catch a flight home to continue the season.

"We didn't have a chance to relax and decompress after we won gold, but seven of us were lucky to have an off day to participate on the Oprah show," says Kara. "It was fun seeing my Olympic teammates again, as well as some of the other athletes."

Kara eventually flew back to Washington D.C. in late fall for some special appearances. "I got to show my medal to all of my friends and family, visit my old neighborhood, my old high school, and my elementary school to show the kids my medal," she adds. "Then I stored it away for safe keeping!"

Tamika celebrated her team's success with a "Gold Medal Celebration" through her Catch the Stars Foundation in Indianapolis (The foundation motivates at-risk youth to achieve their dreams and goals by providing positive academic and athletic programs). Later that night, her medal drew quite a crowd during a quick dinner stop at TGI Friday's.

"My boyfriend and I were sitting at the bar placing a to-go order and there were some people talking about the Olympics. My boyfriend told them I was an Olympian and that I had just gotten back from Beijing." The sports fans begged to see the gold medal!



CATCHINGS



LAWSON

"I don't think I've seen five guys move that fast in a long time! They were all over the medal and trying to take pictures with me," she says. "It was cool to be able to share a moment with complete strangers over something that brings the whole world together."

Now Tamika is less likely to keep the medal with her and prefers to keep it tucked away next to her 2004 gold medal in a specially designed display box courtesy of Nike. This is much to the chagrin of her boyfriend, who enjoyed having her wear it out on the town—mostly because of the free desserts they received at restaurants.

Tamika has been a guest speaker at several special events, including the Indiana Housing and Community Development Association Conference. "It was awesome to see the impact that this gold medal makes on people."

TRACK & FIELD

■ Decathlete **Bryan Clay**, arguably the greatest athlete in the world, delivered gold for the U.S. with the greatest victory margin (240 pts.) in the decathlon since 1972—despite extreme weather conditions in Beijing ranging from rain to 100-degree heat during competition. He keeps both his gold medal and the silver medal from Athens 2004 in an appropriate place—his sock drawer!

"The gold is much heavier than the silver medal I got in Athens," Bryan says. "They're gorgeous medals! Mine are getting a little tattered, but that's okay." If he medals in 2012, he'll be the first decathlete in history to medal three times—an amazing feat!



CLAY



FELIX



■ USA Track and Field sensation **Allyson Felix** grabbed gold as a member of the women's 4x400-meter relay team—a nice addition to the 200 meter silvers from both Beijing and Athens in 2004. "My mom keeps all of my medals," she says. "I actually don't have any in my house! I feel like my parents have sacrificed so much for me to get where I am that it's only fitting they keep them."

Even so, her medal does leave the house every now and then. Allyson makes regular appearances as a newly appointed ambassador for the Children's Miracle Network, a nonprofit organization that raises funds for children's hospitals and medical research. She also took a trip across the pond to appear at London's famed Fashion Week. The trend for fall must have been gold! And of course, she brought it to church to show her friends who faithfully cheered her on as she competed.



BROWN-TRAFTON



■ Fellow track star **Stephanie Brown-Trafton** finally ended the long drought in women's discus for the U.S. with her surprise gold medal. Previously, she had never qualified for a world championship, or won a national championship. "It was a boost in the arm for USA Track and Field as well as their internal development programs," she says. "They have supported me through years of injury and sub-par performances, and now I'm happy to share this accomplishment with them."

"In 2008, it was an awesome year from the very beginning. I had great performances from day one, with personal bests at four different meets, leading the world performance list, and winning the highest praise the sport can offer," she adds.

Her gold medal is so treasured that Stephanie's husband keeps it in a really secure place: the safe! "He is a little paranoid that our house will burn down and we will lose it. I still have to ask him how to open up the safe when I need to get it for a speaking engagement, because I can't remember the combo."

■ **A big congratulations goes out to the men and women who represented our country proudly and honored us with their hard work and excellence.**

G

reen Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers may not have his own Christmas ornament hanging on the shelves of Green Bay stores yet, but he *has* succeeded in winning over diehard fans who mourned Brett Favre's controversial exit prior to the start of the 2008 season.

These aren't typical football fans either. Packers fans actually own their hometown team, boasting 112,088 local shareholders, and enthusiastically endure sub-zero temperatures in the stands at Lambeau Field. They also wear their game gear to church on Sundays—and leave early if the pastor has mistakenly preached past noon.

"Aaron had big shoes to fill when he stepped in, and we think he has done very well proving himself on the field and leading the team, despite the situation he was in," notes one local shop clerk.

It's true. As sports commentators said early in the season, no young player has ever faced more pressure than Rodgers, and no other young quarterback has ever been in the situation he faced—the legend retiring, then wanting to return after Rodgers had been named the starter, and the friction that ensued

**FAITH AND CHARACTER DEFINE GREEN BAY QUARTERBACK
AARON RODGERS, WHO WENT FROM BACKING UP A LEGEND
TO LEADING A LEGENDARY FRANCHISE ■ BY JENNA SAMPSON**

OUT **OF THE** SHADOW

between the team management and Favre prior to his release.

"The best part was that it was an opportunity for me to speak honestly and openly in the midst of strong adversity and a difficult situation," says Rodgers, who routinely had 50 cameras at his locker after practice. "Either myself or Brett was the leading story on SportsCenter every day, and I knew that the way I handled the situation would be remembered for a long time. The way I handled it hopefully said a lot to my teammates, the fans, my family members and my friends back home."

It spoke volumes about his character, as well as his confidence as a leader on the field. In his first NFL



JONATHAN DANIEL / GETTY IMAGES



DWS



LAMBEAU FIELD FAST FACTS

◆ **LAMBEAU FIELD** was voted as the #1 NFL fan experience by a *Sports Illustrated* online poll in 2007.

◆ **SEASON TICKET HOLDERS** pass their tickets down from generation to generation.

◆ The **WAITING LIST** for season tickets is about 80,000 people long.

▼ **TIME HONORED TRADITION:** During training camp, players ride across the street to the practice field on the bikes of local kids, who in turn carry the players' helmets alongside.



start last fall, he earned a spot in the record books with an 81.1 percent completion rate, beginning a pattern of consistency successful signal callers possess. And according to Rodgers, the key to that consistency is confidence by way of preparation.

"The way I prepare each week, the film I watch, how hard I practice, the notes I take in meetings—all of those things allow me to have a lot of confidence when I go into the game," he says. "I'm going through reps I've already done and looks I've already seen on film or in practice. My confidence level is so high when I get in the game that I expect to play well."

Rodgers relishes being a leader on the field.

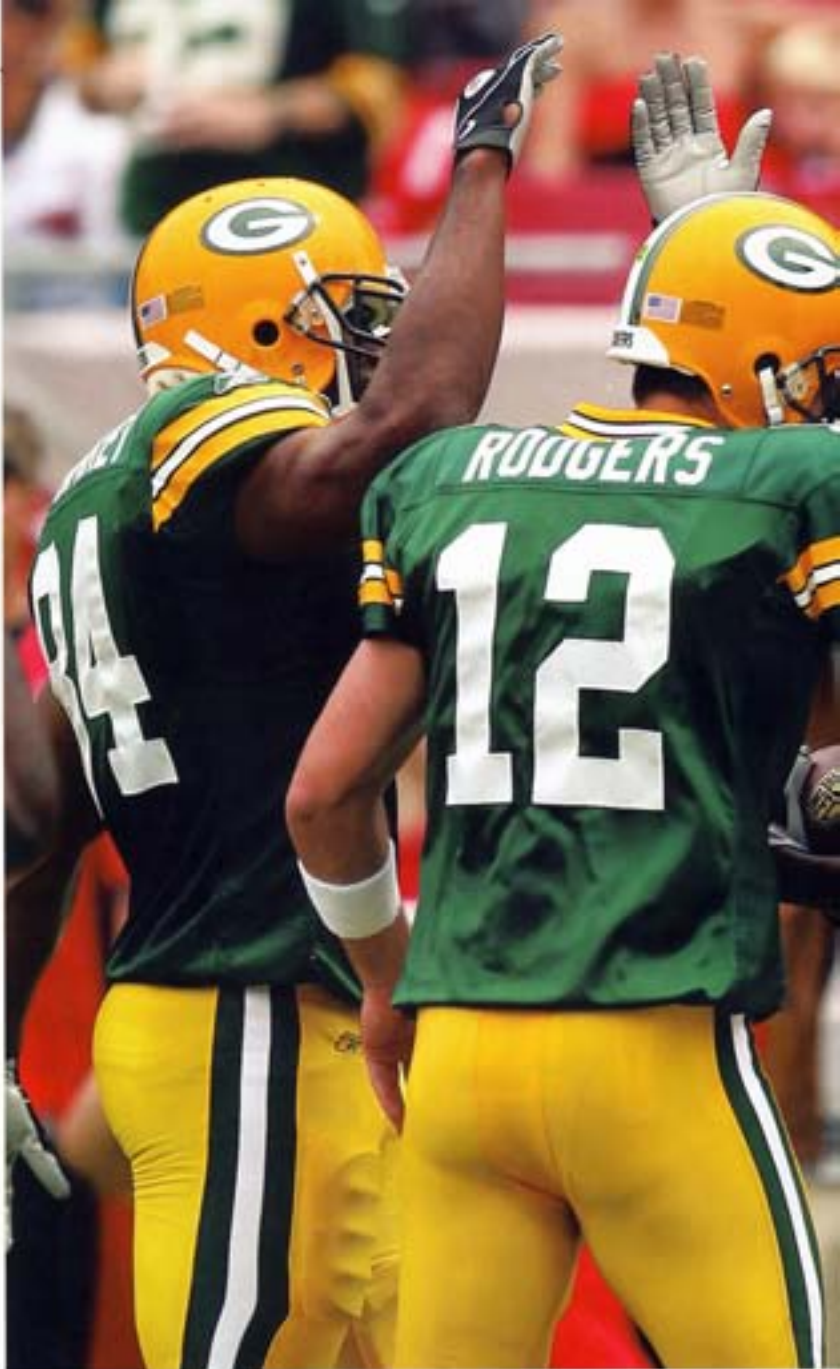
"Any sport I've played, I've always wanted to be in the position where you can have a great impact on the game," he said. "I'm not saying the quarterback is the only position in football, but it's a very important one."

Growing up as a middle child in a household of boys, Rodgers credits his even-keeled temperament and his ability to be a peacemaker as an invaluable leadership asset for his day job. "You have to help the older brother and younger brother get along. Likewise, on the field you have to be able to get everyone on the same page, and have your confidence filter out to those guys."

To understand that confidence, you have to take a closer look down the road that brought the California native to the place he is today. Rodgers grew up in a Christian home, but it wasn't until the spring of his junior year of high school that he faced a crossroads about the path he would follow in life.

"Before that point, I went to church because my parents went to church," he admits. "But when I was 17, I realized I had to make a choice because I was starting to do some things that my buddies were doing, and I knew deep down that it wasn't right. I rededicated my life to the Lord. Ever since then I fall on my face and get back up, get on my knees and confess, and keep on trying to live for Jesus. It's not easy. It's daily dying to yourself and prioritizing your time."

It was after that decision that Rodgers' journey to the NFL began. His senior year of high school came to an end without a college scholarship in sight, and it was while quarterbacking at a junior college that he caught the eye of California Berkeley head coach Jeff Tedford, who noticed Rodgers on a



▲ **Pack to the future:** Rodgers and favorite target Greg Jennings—both 24—figure to be pass buddies for years to come. ◀ **Aaron it out (left):** Rodgers' success with the California Golden Bears led to national attention and his selection by the Packers to succeed the legendary Brett Favre. Aaron's 2008 play assured Packer Nation that they made the right choice.

scouting tape featuring one of his Butte College teammates.

Division I scholarship in hand, Rodgers took the reins of the Cal offense during the 2003 season, and the following year led the Bears to their highest national ranking since 1952. He finished his college career with the school's career record for passing efficiency

whom I trust.' Psalm 91:1-2

Even now, on football's biggest stage, Rodgers is eager to use his platform to share the hope of Jesus Christ, but he does so carefully. He lives out his faith following the words of St. Francis of Assisi: *Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words.*

"Faith plays an interesting role in our game. There are a lot of guys that profess to know God, but myself included—we don't always set the best example for Christ. It's a work in progress as every relationship is, but we have an important opportunity as Christians in the NFL to use that platform to glorify God, and I don't think you have to be the most vocal guy in the media."

"He has handled himself with great character, and character is the key to being the voice box he wants to be without saying a word," says assistant team chaplain Troy Murphy. "You can tell that he genuinely cares for people, and that's very evident in his life."

Rodgers acknowledges that NFL players have so many things within their grasp—including money, fame, and opportunity. But there is something decidedly different about guys who are content with what they've been given and are living their lives for Christ.

"There are so many of us that are trying to fill that God-shaped hole in our heart with different things," Rodgers says. "We realize that there has to be something more."

And what does he say to athletes who believe that playing sports is their sole purpose in life?

"You're gonna get let down because sports aren't forever," he replies. "Every practice or game could be your last. You have to put your hope in something that's more stable. And God's proven that He's stable and is going to last a lot longer than your sport. You can't take your records, stats and money with you into the next life, so you need to plan for that as well as life after football."

"I've played for four years and I'm 24, and if I'm lucky to play 10—and I live to be 70—I better have something to do the next 40 years of my life that fulfills me outside of sports and can give me a purpose."

The near future, though, is certain for the young quarterback, who signed a contract extension at the end of October with the Packers. The extension runs through the 2014 season.

"Just to be able to play the way I did starting the season definitely helped,

but [the extension] was still a little unexpected," Rodgers said at the time. "This definitely means a lot to me that they are saying I am going to be the guy for the future."

Rodgers has clearly emerged from the shadow of a legend, and is now casting his own. **O**

Freelance writer Jenna Sampson lives in Carlsbad, California, and managed to squeeze in a quick trip to Green Bay last fall. She also serves as Communications Coordinator at North Coast Church in Vista, California.

KEEPING IT REAL

■ **Despite his fame,** Aaron Rodgers stays grounded by keeping his priorities straight: family, faith and friends.

"You have to have people in your life who keep you humble," he says. "I think in the Kingdom, humility is God's favorite attribute. I have people who tell me how it is, keep me focused, and keep me walking the talk."

Those people include his brother, friends back home, teammate **Aaron Kampman** (a veteran Pro Bowl defensive end who is Rodgers' training camp roommate), and several other teammates who join him for Bible studies. Former NFL quarterback **Trent Dilfer** is also a good friend who has offered some great words of advice to Rodgers during the last year.

In addition to the team chapel that 30-40 players and coaches attend the night before games, Rodgers and Kampman came up with the idea to start Wednesday night "Packers Church" for the players and their spouses who aren't able to attend on Sunday mornings. The duo also organized small groups that meet during the week.

Every morning, assistant chaplain **Troy Murphy** sends daily verses by text message to about 40 guys, including a few on other teams.

"For some of them, with the pace they keep, getting that daily verse is important," Murphy says.

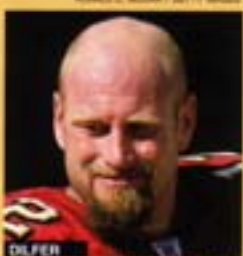
Murphy and head chaplain **Joe Urcavich** accompanied several players (including Rodgers) to Alaska last year on a trip with Unlimited Potential, Inc., a Christian organization that ministers through sports. The group visited a military base and had a chance to share their testimonies with the soldiers. —JENNA SAMPSON



RODGERS
RONALD G. BOGURA / GETTY IMAGES



KAMPMAN
RONALD G. BOGURA / GETTY IMAGES



DILFER
BRUCE WELBY / GETTY IMAGES



MURPHY
COURTESY, ALMA MATER UNIVERSITY



URCAVICH
COURTESY, THE ORGANIZATION



PHIL SPINELLI / GETTY IMAGES

(150.27). Then came the 2005 NFL draft, where he was projected to be the first pick. Instead, he sat patiently until he was named the Packers' first choice and the 24th pick overall. Rodgers once again waited patiently, biding his time behind Favre for three seasons.

Through all of the obstacles he has faced—it is Psalm 91 that he clings to.

"I felt like the Lord gave me that passage my junior year in high school," he says. "I used to write it on my shoes. And now, years later, every time I get injured, or am scared, or have a bad day, I go back to that passage."

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in