

PLAYING FOR AN AUDIENCE OF ONE

KATIE PERKINS



Katie Perkins,
New Zealand

*After setting her mind as a youngster to compete for the New Zealand women's national cricket team, **Katie Perkins** found herself lost and far away from that goal in her early 20s. But when she handed the game over to God, her athletic career took a positive turn. She debuted for the New Zealand White Ferns in January 2012, and has appeared in more than 100 international matches since. Also a full-time police officer in New Zealand, the 30-year-old Perkins keeps her relationship with God at the forefront of all she does.*

To play cricket for New Zealand was the first dream I ever really had. Ever since I was 5 years old, this dream has given me a drive like nothing else. I had other passions, but cricket trumped them all.

I grew up going to church, with a strong Godly influence in my life because of my family. I was a good kid and followed the teachings I learned in Sunday school, but being a good kid and knowing God are two very different things. It wasn't until I was 15 years old, after being mentored by a good friend for a number of years,

when I started understanding the relational side of God. Then I remember one morning at church, I prayed to God and told Him I wanted to follow Him, to live my life for His glory. At that moment, the Holy Spirit filled me and the emotion and adrenaline that surged through my body was something quite indescribable.

But because I loved the game of cricket so much, my pursuit of a career in the game soon became my god. My self-worth was defined by my success or failure on the cricket field. My

mood was determined by how well I played that day.

After my toughest season in 2010-2011, my dream of playing for the White Ferns felt further away than ever before. I needed something to change. The offseason that followed turned my whole life around. I went to an "Ultimate Training Camp" in April 2011, which was centered around Christ. There I met other athletes who had a heart for God, all wanting to understand more about God in their sport environment. My eyes were opened to the fact that God didn't care about my results on the field, He cared about how I played the game. I learned about playing for God, an audience of One, and about my true worth, which can only be found in God.

As the winter progressed, my best friend challenged me about where God was in my cricket game. The truth was, He wasn't there at all. After a lot of prayer and struggling with the reality I may never be a White Fern, I tried to understand how to love myself for who I was, instead of what I could achieve. By the time the next season came

around, I had let go of my lifelong dream and given cricket over to God.

The freedom and joy I played with that season led to the most successful and consistent summer I'd ever had, and to the phone call that brought me to tears of joy as I found out I would be a White Fern!

I wish I could say I always play with this type of joy and freedom but I can't. I struggle constantly. As life and cricket got in the way, I let myself become distracted, and let cricket take priority in my life once again. At a Twenty20 World Cup semifinal, my love for cricket was non-existent. I was pretty low. I knew it was God that was missing in my life. I felt like my prayers were falling on deaf ears, but in reality, it was me who was choosing to be deaf toward God.

When I got back to New Zealand, I reached out for help. I connected with chaplains and a mental skills coach. I've been more disciplined about going to church and not allowing my sport to get in the way. I'm a work in progress, but I know I'm moving in

the right direction — closer and closer to God.

I don't always cope well when I lose. It's an ongoing battle. But I try to remind myself of God's truths: I am adequate, I am perfectly loved. Whenever I am lacking confidence in my ability to play, I remind myself of 2 Timothy 1:7, which says, "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline."

A strong visual I have connected with this truth is that of a 100-meter runner standing at the starting block. Whatever happens between the gun going off and the end of the race will have an impact on the immediate future of that runner in this life. But God's love and sacrifice for that athlete does not change one bit at the end of the race from when they were waiting at the starting block.

I now aim to always have my faith play a significant role in my sport and in my life. And I really appreciate when I see it in other players too. 🙌

Katie's favorite verse:

"For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self discipline."

— 2 Timothy 1:7



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