

**EXCLUSIVE: CHAPLAIN TELLS OF MIRACLE AFTER STAR 'DIED'**

# It looked bleak at Fabrice's bedside...

## But God had other plans that left doctors stunned



Bolton Wanderers Chaplain  
Phil Mason

**FOOTBALL club chaplain Phil Mason's role at Bolton had never been more important than on Saturday March 17.**

Midfielder Fabrice Muamba had collapsed and 'died' while on the pitch in Bolton's FA Cup quarter-final tie at Spurs.

"I was actually at home at the time because I'd been working with the academy lads in the morning," says Phil. "But obviously I was listening to it on the radio at home, immediately realised something terrible had happened.

"I got the call and went to London to offer support and be with Fabrice, Shauna (Muamba's wife) and the rest of the team."

The call that Phil received came from the Bolton chairman Phil Gartside - emphasising the importance of his role at the club - but when he arrived at the London Chest Hospital that night and began to pray at Muamba's bedside, he realised that things looked extremely bleak.

Muamba had been technically dead for 78 minutes and it had taken 16 defibrillator shocks to get his heart working again. Survival without lasting damage to Muamba's heart or brain looked virtually impossible.

### SERIOUS

Phil said: "It was like any pastoral role. You're there to support, to pray with, to listen, and to try and help in any way possible - for Fabrice and Shauna first and foremost, his dad, Marcel, and then other friends and family who came along.

"But as in any pastoral role, you see people and you think, 'Gosh, this is serious. This is very bad news.' I don't think any of us really imagined such a positive outcome

This time last year, Phil Mason had no idea he was about to be thrust into the national football spotlight. **Andy Evans** spoke to the Bolton Wanderers club chaplain



Newspapers featured Fabrice and wife-to-be Shauna's faith on their front pages

at that moment - apart from Marcel and Shauna because their faith was incredibly strong. They stuck with it all the time." The faith of

Shauna Muamba has now become part of popular folklore. Her tweets the following morning asking for prayer and stating that God was in control spread like wildfire over Twitter.

In the meantime, the phrase 'Pray for Muamba' became the most talked-about slogan on the planet. A few days later, this was replaced by 'Miracle of Muamba', which summed up the player's extraordinary recovery - one that highlighted the miraculous power of prayer.

"The very fact that he was alive in the way that he was at the end was God," explained Phil.

"I mean, yes, there was the skill of all the physicians involved and the right expertise, but even they described the whole event as an absolute miracle.

"And there's no doubt that Fabrice himself feels that it's an opportunity for him to witness in lots of ways. I described it to Fabrice like this: 'Jesus did his most powerful

at his most vulnerable on the cross, and at his most still, and you, in your Christian witness, have done your most powerful at your most vulnerable and at your most still, because you have managed to get God, faith and prayer on every headline in every British newspaper in the country, and I don't think that's ever happened before - certainly not in my lifetime."

Phil has been working closely with Muamba since his release from hospital last April.

And even though the player has had to retire from football, his future appears to be extremely bright.

Phil added: "He wants to give back in lots of different, positive ways and is very keen on opportunities to share his faith.

"I get hundreds of letters still from people who are telling their story - often from people whose family members have had cardiac arrests - so we tend to catch up on letters like that and look at how we can carefully write back.

"I tend to write back on his behalf because he'd be overwhelmed by it and he's still a recovering man from all that he's gone through. So that in itself has become quite a ministry."



SAVED BY A MIRACLE... Fabrice Muamba in hospital, left, after surviving the cardiac arrest on the pitch, right

## Manny: I was floored after hearing God!

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accept Jesus Christ in your life as your Lord and Saviour, you have eternal life."

Pacquiao has never forgotten where he came from - the poverty-stricken area of Sarangani Province on the Phillipine island of Mindanao.

Despite his star status, the welterweight has dedicated his life to helping people from his home region by giving away large sums of cash and food, believing he is fulfilling the call of Jesus to help the poorest.

Bob Arum, chairman of Top Rank, who has visited the Philippines several times, says the boxer's outreach is genuine - and something he has witnessed.

"It starts with the fact that he's a very spiritual man," explained Arum. "When I've talked to him, he's expressed his belief that God has put him where he is for a reason - to benefit mankind, to do good.

"He believes that whatever he does in life, whatever happens, is the will of God. Therefore when he goes into a ring, there's a big smile on his face because in his mind, he will do his best.

"But if he loses, it's God's will. That's his whole philosophy of life. God has given him all this for being a poor kid living in a cardboard shack in order that he benefits mankind. He believes it, and it runs his life."

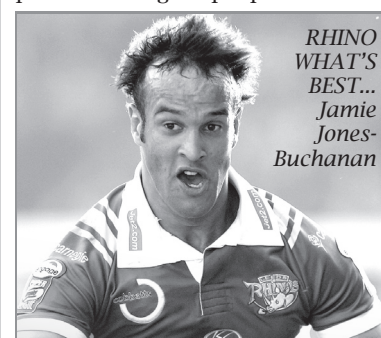
Pacquiao has said he wants to help those in greatest need because he's been there.

"I feel what they're feeling because I've been there," he said. "I've slept in the street. That was my life before. So hard. That's why I feel what they're feeling right now."

Some of those around Pacquiao fear he will give away his fortune, but Arum says it's part of the plan.

"He sits in front of his house giving money away to people; they go for blocks," revealed Arum.

"I've seen it. Food and money. Food and money. He believes that's part of the higher purpose."



RHINO  
WHAT'S  
BEST...  
Jamie  
Jones-  
Buchanan

## How my faith Leeds me on

RUGBY star Jamie Jones-Buchanan says God has helped him be a winner on and off the park.

The Leeds Rhino player is a hero to fans and respected by players. But when it comes to getting his priorities right, Jamie insists he'd drop-kick everything for his love of Jesus.

He said: "I believe everyone is attracted to God, it just comes out in different ways. I attend the City Evangelical Church in Beeston on Sundays and I am trying to set up a group with some lads at Headingley.

"I've a great group of friends at the Rhinos. There's a bit of banter in there too but Christianity is a big part of my life."