

# Gospel goalie: Central Texas pastor excels on the ice

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LEXINGTON—Some preachers are renowned for fiery sermons. One small-town Central Texas pastor is known—at least in some circles—for his skill on the ice.



Chris Bruce, pastor of First Baptist Church in Lexington, is a sought-after goaltender in pick-up hockey games at a rink in Cedar Park, north of Austin. (Photo / Nan Dickson)

Chris Bruce, pastor of [First Baptist Church in Lexington](#), is a 36-year-old father of three daughters, and an avid reader who enjoys the outdoors. But a couple of times a month, he also is a sought-after goaltender in pick-up hockey games at a rink in Cedar Park, north of Austin.

“I love spending time intentionally sharing the gospel in different environments, but 98 percent of the time here in Lexington, I’m with professing Christians,” Bruce said.

The exception is when he is with other hockey players.

“Somebody will ask, ‘Hey, goalie, what do you do when you’re not here?’ When I say, ‘I’m the pastor of a Baptist church,’ sometimes it’s crickets—the locker room goes silent,” Bruce said.

“But other times, it’s different. One guy asked the question, and when I told him I was a pastor, he said, ‘That’s [expletive] awesome!’ And I said, ‘Yeah, I think it is.’

“Most of the time, hockey players don’t have a lot of pretense. What you see is what you get, and they have a ‘take it or leave it’ attitude, accepting people for what they are.”

## **Developed early love for playing hockey**

Bruce grew up in Allen—a North Texas suburban community better known for its top-ranked high school football team than for hockey.

“Nobody in my family was a big hockey fan,” he said. “But when the Dallas Stars moved to the Metroplex, my dad on a whim took me to a hockey game. I immediately was drawn to it.”

Bruce—who acknowledges Disney’s *The Mighty Ducks* movies and animated TV series also sparked his interest—began playing driveway hockey on rollerblades before he graduated to House League Hockey.

“I played tennis and golf in high school, but I kind of enjoyed the toughness factor in hockey. It was a little more rough and tumble,” he said.



When First Baptist Church in Lexington called him as pastor in 2013, Chris Bruce thought his hockey-playing days were behind him. He was wrong. (Photo / Ken Camp)

He took an extended break from playing hockey when he moved to Abilene, earning his undergraduate degree from [Hardin-Simmons University](#) and his Master of Divinity degree from Logsdon Theological Seminary. He also served University Baptist Church in Abilene, first as pastor to youth and then pastor to college students.

“There’s no ice in Abilene, so for about seven years, I hung up my skates,” he said.

When First Baptist Church in Lexington called him as pastor in 2013, he thought his hockey playing days were behind him.

“It looked like we were coming to a pretty rural environment,” he said. “So when we moved, I sold all my hockey equipment.”

However, during his last semester working on a Doctor of Ministry degree at Baylor University's [Truett Theological Seminary](#), he went to Cedar Park to watch the Texas Stars—the minor league affiliate of the Dallas Stars.

That game rekindled his interest in hockey, and he celebrated the completion of his doctorate by buying new hockey gear and making plans to begin playing amateur hockey in Cedar Park.

“Then the pandemic hit, and everything shut down,” he said.

## **‘I like doing something a little different’**

Once the rink reopened, he began joining pick-up games two or three times a month.



Pastor Chris Bruce of First Baptist Church in Lexington appreciates the opportunity to build relationships and share his faith with other hockey enthusiasts. (Photo / Nan Dickson)

“I can’t get out of the office enough for league play, but pick-up games are a good fit. It’s pretty relaxed, and goalies play for free because they’re

always needed,” he said. “Goaltending is a draw for me because it’s sort of like an individual sport within a team sport.

“It’s kind of a cliché that pastors play golf or fish. That’s fine, but I like doing something a little different.”

While Lexington is more a football town than a hotbed of hockey enthusiasts, Bruce has generated some interest in the sport among members of his church and their friends.

“We took 40 people from the community to a Texas Stars game,” he said.

Bruce appreciates the variety of skill levels among those who participate in the pick-up games in Cedar Park.

“Some played in college. There are even some former minor league players. And then there are some who are doing well just getting their skates under them,” he said.

Austin-area hockey players tend to be “a tight-knit group,” and Bruce typically sees many of the same men from one week to the next. Slowly but surely, he believes he is building relationships that can provide opportunities to share his faith.

“I get a lot of texts from those guys. Most of the time, it’s just, ‘We need a goalie on Friday.’ But sometimes, it’s more than that,” he said.

“It’s not like they are sharing prayer requests or anything that deep. But some of the texts are about more than just asking if I can play. They are relational.”

Along the way, he looks for opportunities to plant a few gospel seeds, subtly encouraging teammates to think about spiritual issues.

One time, he wore a shirt from a mission trip to Haiti that displayed a

Creole phrase. When a teammate asked him what it meant, Bruce told him: "It means, 'Jesus is my friend.' What do you think about that?"

"There's no indication he's a believer," Bruce said. "But it's the beginning of a conversation."

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