

Steele Johnson and David Boudia have faith in their diving

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RIO DE JANEIRO (RNS)—Steele Johnson almost died on the diving platform.

In 2009, at age 12, he was practicing his favorite dive, a triple reverse somersault in a tuck position, when he cracked his skull on a concrete platform, sliced open his scalp and fell 33 feet into the pool.

His coach pulled him out and held his head together all the way to the hospital. Today, he still has some memory loss.

But Johnson, a Christian, has spoken of how his faith helped him recover and placed him in medal contention in Rio.

“I wanted to be the kid that had the big injury and came back from it and made the Olympics and all that stuff,” Johnson told the *Indianapolis Star* in June. “So, it’s kind of embarrassing. But now I’ve kind of realized that God had his hand over all of it to help me come to the realization, like, that’s not why at all.

“He gave me this ability to dive. God kept me alive, and he is still giving me the ability to do what I do.”



Steele Johnson and David Boudia dive in the synchronized men 10m platform during the 2016 U.S. Olympic Team Trials Diving in June. (Photo by Brian Spurlock-USA TODAY Sports) His teammate at the Rio Olympics is David Boudia, a three-time Olympian and a fellow Christian. They won a silver medal in platform diving in Rio.

But in July, when the pair qualified for the Olympics—Johnson’s first and Boudia’s third—Johnson was so overwhelmed he doubled over with emotion before getting out of the pool.

“It’s cool because this is exciting, this is fun, but this is not what my identity will be for the rest of my life,” a dripping Johnson told NBC Sports. “Yeah, I’m Steele Johnson, the Olympian. But at the same time, I’m here to love and serve Christ. My identity is rooted in Christ, not in the flips we’re doing.”

Boudia, who is six years older than Johnson, also said his diving is driven by his faith.

“We can’t take credit for this,” Boudia told NBC Sports. “To God be the glory.”

Of the pair, Boudia has the most experience in talking publicly about the connection between his faith and his sport. He has written an entire book

about the subject, *Greater Than Gold: From Olympic Heartbreak to Ultimate Redemption*, that hit stores a few days before the Olympics began.

In it, he tells how he went from a not particularly observant Catholic upbringing to evangelical Christian through the help of his Purdue University diving coach, Adam Soldati.

“I am not a diving coach who happens to be a Christian,” Soldati said in a talk he gave at his church just after the close of the 2012 London Olympics, where Boudia won a gold medal in singles platform diving. “But rather, I am a Christian, follower of Christ, who happens to be a diving coach.”

In his book, Boudia talks about how he was engaged in “a destructive lifestyle” at Purdue and sought his coach’s guidance. He credits his gold medal to his conversion to evangelical Christianity.

“Whatever happens at the end of this Olympic Games is completely out of my control,” Boudia said in 2012. “God is totally sovereign over everything.”