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Lola Ogunbote, lecture, "More Than the Scoreline: Sport as a Platform for Impact," Kennedy Center Winter 2026 Lecture Series, "Sport and Society," Brigham Young University, April 8, 2026

Born in Nigeria and raised in London, Lola Ogunbote left law for football and built her life around calling instead of prestige. Her lecture argues that real fulfillment does not come from titles or status, but from understanding one's identity before God and using one's gifts to bless other people.

Lola Ogunbote's lecture treated sport as more than entertainment or personal ambition. She presented it as a tool that can shape lives, build leadership, and create opportunity. That claim gave the lecture its force. Public conversations about sports often stay fixed on results, rankings, celebrity, and money. Ogunbote moved past that almost immediately. Her point was that football matters not simply because people love it, but because it can create belonging, teach discipline, develop leadership, and open doors for people who might otherwise be ignored. In her account, sport was never just about the game. It was about what the game can do in people's lives.

That argument carried weight because it came out of real tension rather than an abstract principle. Ogunbote described growing up in an immigrant Nigerian family in London, loving football from an early age, and quickly realizing that her family's idea of success was academic and professional, not athletic. Law represented stability, respectability, and proof that her parents' sacrifices had meant something. Football represented uncertainty. That contrast gave the lecture one of its clearest ideas: many people spend years building a life that looks successful before confronting whether it is the life they were meant to live.

She made that conflict even sharper by showing what it cost to leave prestige behind. After leaving law, she moved back home, worked part-time jobs, cleaned houses, worked in a

pub, worked retail, and funded her coaching licenses however she could. That section of the lecture stripped ambition of its polished surface. Reinvention is easy to admire after it succeeds. It is much harder to respect when it still looks unstable and embarrassing. Ogunbote's story made that plain. The real test was not whether she could picture a different future. It was whether she was willing to keep going while that future still looked uncertain.

The lecture found its clearest center when Ogunbote explained how football became useful beyond the field. She described coaching girls in villages, working with young people carrying adult responsibilities, and realizing that sport could teach time management, respect, teamwork, resilience, and self-belief. That is where her title, "More Than the Scoreline," stopped sounding like a slogan and started sounding earned. She was not claiming that sports magically solve social problems. She was showing that sport can become a language through which people learn who they are, what they can do, and how they belong to a larger community. The game was not the endpoint. It was the vehicle.

Her focus on girls and women gave the lecture added urgency. She showed that sport is not only about participation. It is also about access, visibility, and permission. Girls drop out of sports at higher rates, and women are still treated as secondary in athletic spaces shaped by male assumptions. Ogunbote's work with Goals for Girls and Burnley Women made that pattern concrete. She was not simply praising representation in theory. She was building teams, creating structure, pushing institutions, and making women visible in places that had excluded them for decades. That gave the lecture substance. It was built on strategy, leadership, advocacy, and the slow work of changing systems.

Another strong thread in the lecture was her insistence that initiative matters. In China, she started a women's football team in a district that had never had one. At Burnley, she helped

build a women's program inside a club that had existed since 1889 without one. She did not wait for ideal conditions, universal support, or a tidy plan. She started. That point matters in a university setting, where it is easy to postpone action until credentials are finished, certainty arrives, or permission is granted. Ogunbote pushed in the opposite direction. Education matters. Preparation matters. But eventually someone still has to begin. At that point, her lecture moved beyond sport and into a broader argument about responsibility.

Her treatment of faith gave the lecture its moral center. When asked how faith shaped her work, she answered in practical terms: treat people how you want to be treated, be direct, expect excellence, show empathy, and do not build your identity on titles alone. That answer avoided vague language and gave the lecture real clarity. The point was not that faith makes a career easy. The point was that faith steadies a person when status changes, prestige disappears, or success becomes uncertain. Her story of moving from lawyer to service worker to coach to executive made that lesson clear. Titles rise and fall. The harder question is who remains when they do.

By the end of the lecture, the real subject was no longer football alone. It was stewardship. What does a person do with talent, education, hardship, faith, and opportunity? Ogunbote's answer was direct. Use it to lift other people. Use it to build something that did not exist before. Use it where it is needed, not merely where it is rewarded. That is what made her lecture more than a success story. It was not about climbing. It was about contribution. The scoreline, in the end, was never the whole story.