

# Should the Pope be worried that Wales won the rugby Grand Slam this year?

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Doctors in the Christmas issue published on [bmj.com](http://bmj.com) today are urging the Vatican's medical team to keep a special watch over the Pope this Christmas, after their research investigating the link between papal deaths and Welsh rugby performance suggests that he has about a 45% chance of dying by the end of 2008.

Dr Gareth Payne and his team from Cardiff found no evidence to support the urban legend that "every time Wales win the rugby Grand Slam, a Pope dies", but they did find limited data linking Welsh rugby performance and papal deaths. Worryingly for Pope Benedict XVI, Wales won the Grand Slam in 2008.

The researchers charted all northern hemisphere rugby championships since 1883, but discarded the years 1885, 1888-9, 1897-8 and 1972 because not all the scheduled matches were played. For the purposes of their research, a Grand Slam was defined as one nation beating all other competing teams.

Since 1883, eight Pontiffs have died, five in Grand Slam years—three deaths happened when Wales completed the sweep, and two others occurred when Wales won the tournament but not the Grand Slam.

Interestingly, say the authors, although the deaths did not always coincide with a Welsh Grand Slam win, they did correspond with a victory of a predominantly Protestant nation (England, Scotland or Wales), rather than a Roman Catholic nation (France, Ireland, or Italy).

The authors comment that the link between Popes and Grand Slams "is nothing more than an urban myth... This comes as something of a relief as we are at a loss to see how the events could be linked, especially given the continuing rapprochement between Catholic and Protestant churches."

However, given that the research suggests a link between the success of the Welsh rugby union team and papal deaths, the authors believe that the Vatican medical staff "can't fully relax until the new year arrives".

Journal link: [www.bmj.com/](http://www.bmj.com/)

Source: British Medical Journal

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