White said Truett’s program will offer a unique opportunity for students.

“How many Division I sports teams have a seminary and a program like this? There are none,” he said.

White is one-of-a-kind, too. Few people concentrate their research on both religion and sport. While at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, his PhD research centered on theological ethics. White worked for Athletes in Action – a ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ – on college campuses for 17 years, raced as an amateur cyclist at the highest level in the U.S. and Europe, has numerous publications and wrote his dissertation on sports and Christian ethics.

“He’s exactly the fit we were hoping to find,” said Dr. Dennis Tucker, Truett’s associate dean.

White, his wife, and their three teenagers moved to Waco from his most recent position as an assistant professor of theology at Cedarville University in Ohio. His class this fall is titled Studies in Leadership: Ethics and Ministry. This particular class is not sports-related, but White said he is excited to work in the context of a committed Christian university like Baylor where faith and sports matter.

“Sport is an area people think is harmless,” White said. “This is one area of modern life that has not been subject to deep theological thinking. We’ve done it in other areas such as film, music and business, but my goal is to transform sports – to think holistically. Sport is good. God made us desire to play. But we want to make sure it is all directed to God.”

The Riley family’s financial contribution made this permanent professorship possible. Harold Riley played football for Baylor in the early 1950s and went on to become an All-American who was drafted by the NFL’s Los Angeles Rams. He chose the business route instead and is the founder and CEO of Insurance Company of America. Riley was instrumental in securing funding for Baylor’s Moody Library as well as giving money for scholarships and other projects. Riley has attained numerous awards for his achievements in athletics and for his generosity. He is also committed to ministry and his Christian foundation.

The Rileys join the Truett community in their excitement for the program and for being the first seminary that trains people going into sport ministry.

“We may reach a whole group of people who never would have thought about theological education as part of their preparation for their vocation,” Tucker said. 