

DBU team hits home run with Guatemalan children

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DBU Head
Baseball Coach
Dan Heefner
said the trip to
Guatemala was
a highlight not
only for his
players, but
also for himself.
(Photos/Chris
Hendricks/DBU)

DBU team hits home run with Guatemalan children

By George Henson

Staff Writer

DALLAS—The Dallas Baptist University baseball team and 40 other students recently returned from a four-day mission trip to Guatemala, and the picture etched in most of their minds is a child with a beaming smile.

The two groups embarked on several mission opportunities around

Guatemala City, including visiting several orphanages, conducting baseball clinics for Guatemala's Little League teams, and wrapping up each day with a game versus the Guatemalan national team as part of the university's missions partnership with Buckner International.



Clay Kelly offers encouragement to a Guatemalan boy during a base-running drill.

But the games were not the focus of the trip, Head Coach Dan Heefner said.

"I think every player would agree that the highlight of our trip was not the three games we played, but the time we spent with the boys of the San Gabriel Orphanage and the baseball clinics we were able to have each afternoon."

Plans for the trip began formulating last spring, and players, coaches and other students making the trip began securing passports and other

necessities for the trip. But when students returned to school in the fall, preparation shifted into high gear, Heefner said.

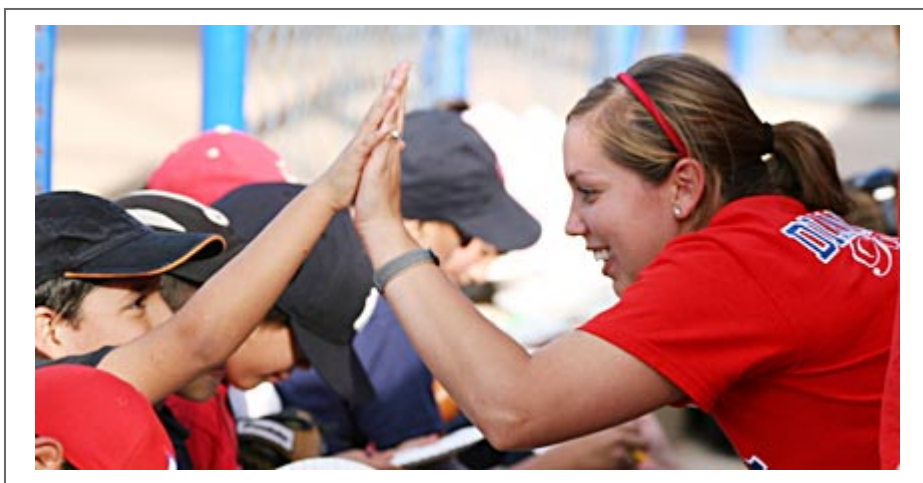
“Every day at practice, we prayed for some aspect of the trip —the financial support necessary, safety, the hearts of the people we would be ministering to and our own hearts, as well,” he said. “It was really neat to pray for that month and then to see God answer every one of those prayers.”

For Heefner and the vast majority of the players, this was their first mission trip.

“As college baseball players, you’re playing all summer, all fall, all spring—you never have the time to do things like this, and we finally got the opportunity to do it, and it was a great thing,” he said.

“I wish I had done it sooner. When you’re a ball player, you think it is so urgent that you don’t miss a game, but you can’t take a trip like this without it impacting you.”

The team and the Diamond Belles, a group of female supporters for the team, particularly enjoyed visiting the orphanages, Heefner said. The DBU students interacted with the children, as players organized activities and a Bible study, and the girls led in crafts.



Diamond Belle Lindsay Beahm interacts with some of the Guatemalan children attending the camp put on by the DBU nine.

Their coach was very proud of the way his players ministered to the children in the orphanages.

“The thing that impacted me most was going to the orphanages and seeing our players and the way they were interacting with those kids. I’ve never seen a group of college baseball players have more joy than when we were there. That was probably most impactful for me—to see our players realize that it really is greater to give than to receive.

Junior Evan Bigley from Lancaster agreed the children made the trip special. The afternoon camps also were a special time for him.

“It was probably the best experience I have ever had. We put smiles on kids faces just by showing up,” he said.

One child who attached himself to Bigley from the beginning gave him a bracelet he had made. “That really affected me, to know that I had helped him,” he recalled.

Austin Knight, a junior shortstop, had grown up at First Baptist Church in Denton, a church that regularly scheduled mission trips, but baseball always kept him from participating.

“I had never gotten to go on a mission trip before, but I had always heard how life-changing they were, and I was excited to be a part of it,” he said.

The main thing Knight said he will take away from the trip was the demeanor of the children he worked with.

“I think I expected them to be sad and not too welcoming, but they were

smiling and hugging us and giving us high fives from the minute we walked in," he said.

For Knight, a big part of the blessing grew out of the opportunity to mix his love for baseball with sharing the message of Christ.

"It was neat to get to teach the game of baseball, but at the same time getting to share the gospel," he said.

After the third game with the Guatemalan national team—all of which DBU won—students from the Texas Baptist school presented the gospel to their athletic opponents, Knight reported.

Senior Brett Lester led a Bible study at the baseball camp.

"I could not have asked for a better way to start off my senior year than teaching kids my love for baseball and, most importantly, how much God loves them. It was a huge blessing being able to share a little of my testimony with the kids, and I am so thankful the Lord allowed us as a team to be able to take part in such a special event," he said.

Andrea Adams, a DBU cheerleader and early childhood education major from Crowley, said the trip confirmed for her a desire to work with children.

"Just to see their smiles was breathtaking," she said. She recalled the joy in the faces of the little girls as the students painted their fingernails. "They were so excited by little things like that. It made you think of how much you have and how much we take for granted."

Memories of a child with a heart defect at a baby orphanage will stay with her for a long time, she noted.

"She was a year and seven months, but she was so tiny, she looked like a newborn. I would have held her forever if I didn't have to share. It just

broke my heart. She was so beautiful," Adams recalled.

Amy Patrick, a senior Diamond Belle, had a similar experience.

"I didn't want to leave. I made a little friend at the orphanage—Jose—and I didn't want to leave him."

The trip falls into DBU's overall plan for its athletic program, Athletic Director Ryan Erwin said.

"Part of the whole athletic program is to teach these young men and women to become servant leaders," he said. The NCAA allows universities to take a foreign tour such as this once every four years, but Erwin felt certain this was a different sort of trip than most teams take.

"I'm sure we're the only Division I team who took a trip like this. Some teams went out of the country, but their first priority was winning and getting better as a baseball team. We also want to do that, but our first priority is sharing Christ," he said.

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