

Baylor student-athletes build home, share faith in Kenya

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Peter Mutisya's smile said it all.



Terrance Ganaway, Lisa Sliwinski, Troy Baker and Taylor Douthit from Baylor build a fence at St. Kizito Child Care.

(PHOTOS/Baylor University)

Through the efforts of a 47-member [Baylor University Sports Ministry Team](#) that was making its third annual pilgrimage to Kenya, Mutisya and his family had their house rebuilt in a single day after it was destroyed in a fire that swept through the slums outside of Nairobi.

"When the house burned down, we had lost all hope. We lost all we had in the fire," Mutisya said. "But now we have a smile back on our faces. ... We thank all who have worked in making this day the most memorable in our lives and that of the entire community. We will live to pray for their success in whatever they do."

No matter how much success they've had on their trips into Kenya, few things can compare to rebuilding a person's home, participants in the

mission trip agreed.



Qian Zhang from Baylor shares her faith with a member of the Kenyan Junior National Volleyball Team after a match. (PHOTOS/Baylor University)



Bryce Petty from Baylor teaches quarterback skills at Mountain Park Academy in Nakuru. (PHOTOS/Baylor University)

"One of the most touching things I experienced there was to help a man put together his house," said Terrance Ganaway, a senior running back for the football team. "He lost a lot of possessions, probably photos and family things that he had for his kids, because everything is precious to them. So, just to sort of piece back together some of the things he had lost was the

most memorable thing I experienced when I was there."



Jordan Rice from Baylor shares shoes with a boy from the Mukuru slums, along and a note from a child in Waco.
(PHOTOS/Baylor University)

"You knew there was a house that used to be there," said Brooke Biddle, a senior on the equestrian team. "And it was just ashes and nothingness. We went into Mukuru and saw where the houses had been burned down. ... So, seeing the site where we rebuilt the house, that was a pretty big 'Wow!' moment."

Baylor's return trip to Kenya, which included 36 current or former student-athletes, rekindled some relationships built through the first two visits, sparked some new connections and impacted their own lives as much as the ones they touched along the way.

"To get to give something that is staying while we're gone is really neat," said Baylor Athletics Chaplain Wes Yeary. "It was a rebuilding that brought such hope to those that were so discouraged. And then for me, it's always neat to watch our student-athletes and how they give and serve and work and love on others ... to see the tenderness of their hearts and see them respond to the needs that are around them is just special for me."



Meghan Murphy and Selby Polley of Baylor feed street kids breakfast.

Even before they arrived in Nairobi, one of the key words was flexibility. What was scheduled as a "light" first day of visiting the Kizito Orphanage turns into a six-hour work day of repairing the fence around the facility.

"We were able to buy the supplies to rebuild an entire fence for less money than it cost to buy the supplies to make our lunches today," soccer player Lisa Sliwinski wrote in the team blog at <http://kenyasports11.wordpress.com>.

"This was the first fence I have ever helped to build from the ground up, and these are by far the most welcome blisters I have ever earned."

Whether involving seasoned veterans like Lindsay Palmer, Melissa Jones and Bryan Swindoll or first-time newcomers, visits with the street children in Nairobi were a sobering experience. Joining with local pastor Boniface Mwalimu, the Baylor group made two early-morning trips to feed the street children —many of them addicted to sniffing glue to the mask the hunger pains. Arriving before the crack of dawn, they intentionally tried to reach them before the kids started getting high.



Baylor University soccer team members mix concrete.

"I had put this wall up that I'm about to go into this thing and it's going to be bad, because they talked about everyone sniffing glue and the huge language barrier and they don't really care about the message. They just want the food," said freshman quarterback Bryce Petty from the football team.

"I went in with that whole mindset, but I got totally rocked. At least from what I saw, there were only about five of them that were on glue. And when I talked to them the first time, this kid named Robert was pretty much preaching to me. He was talking about how our world needs more peace. And without peace, we can't love. And I'm like, 'Man, preach on!'

"I had all these walls set up where I really needed to be praying for this or that, and there were points where I was like, 'Whoa, that's not it at all.' And then there were some points where it was a lot worse than I was expecting."



Lisa Sliwinski Soc and Taylor Douthit from Baylor serve in the Mukuru Slum.

One of the more memorable moments on the trip came on their second visit with the street kids, when they followed it up with a sports clinic in the downtown park. For the first time, they got to see the children acting like children.

"Most of the time when we see them, they're high off the glue and just strung out on the streets and look so sad," said Palmer, a senior on the women's basketball team who was making her third trip along with Jones and Swindoll, a senior tight end on the football team.

"But when we got to play soccer with them, it was like they got to be little kids for a minute. They were laughing and running around and having a great time. Even if it was only for an hour, it was nice to see them have that outlet. That was probably my favorite day, just because it breaks my heart that kids don't get to be kids."

Some of the tightest and hopefully most lasting connections came on the group's trip to the Mukuru slums, where they rebuilt a house that will include a community center for a team of junior league soccer players.



Caitlin Fennegan and Carlie Davis from Baylor run soccer relays with inmates at Nairobi West Mens Prison.

"It was something that I just never imagined before," said Casey Lougheed, a graduate assistant trainer who works with the soccer team. "It was crazy to see how they lived and what they didn't have and to see how faithful they were and how they considered themselves blessed. Compared to what we have, it's on a completely different scale. What we might think they would be lacking, they didn't seem to even be bothered by it."

In Mukuru, several members of the Baylor group developed friendships that will carry on through sponsorships. While local contact Walter Machio is establishing a trust fund in Kenya, the Baylor group is setting up a non-profit foundation that will send donations to the sponsored children—where a "one-time visit is becoming something that can carry on for years after that," Yeary said.