

ETBU hockey team serves in Slovakia

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Members of the East Texas Baptist University hockey team competed with international teams, toured significant sites, worshipped with local churches, conducted sports clinics for children and volunteered at homeless shelters during a mission trip to Slovakia.

The team partnered with International Sports Federation to minister to the people of Slovakia as part of the Tiger Athletic Mission Experience program.



Skyler Spiller and other members of the East Texas Baptist University hockey team conducted sports clinics for children in Slovakia. (ETBU Photo)

“We were thrilled to have the opportunity to serve in Slovakia and excited for what the Lord had in store not only for the people we encountered, but also for our Tiger hockey players,” said Ryan Erwin, vice president for athletics at ETBU, who led the group along with Head Coach Alain Savage and Lisa Seeley, director of the Great Commission Center and Global Education at ETBU.

“We are appreciative of the support we received to make the trip possible, both financially and prayerfully. It was rewarding to watch our team use their God-given talents to share their faith.”

International Sports Federation is a faith-based nonprofit organization that has developed an international network for sports missions with more than 750 missionaries around the world.

“During our time in Slovakia, we served in a number of different ministries providing shelter, clothing and food to the homeless of Bratislava,” Seeley said. “You can imagine the great need to help the homeless when the alternative for them is to sleep outside in temperatures that drop into the teens at night.

“It was eye opening for everyone as we met men and women staying in night shelters or improvised shelters of their own making. This trip truly gave us the opportunity to share the love of Jesus with the poor and outcasts of this country.”

From serving at one of the largest homeless shelters in the country in Depaul to a private safe house for the elderly in the home of a community member, the ETBU hockey players gained a new perspective.

“We had the privilege of connecting with a few residents, hearing their stories and the instrumental role God has played in their lives,” said Michael Garvie, a senior at ETBU. “One takeaway I had was a response from one of the older residents to our question, ‘Who is Jesus to you?’ He

responded: 'My faith is everything to me. Without it, I would not have any of this and would not be here.' This came from a man without money, a job, and with challenging health issues.

"The contrast provided from witnessing how genuinely rich these people were in their faith was uplifting and humbling. Overall, the trip has been a unique platform to serve those in need and play the game we love. It was amazing to share the word of God and act as a vessel for his endless love and care."



The East Texas Baptist University hockey team competed with international teams during a trip to Slovakia as a part of the Tiger Athletic Mission Experience program. (ETBU Photo)

During the nine-day trip, the Tigers competed against a local junior team, a semi-pro adult team and the 2018 European University Hockey League champion. Following each game, the ETBU hockey team distributed Bibles to the opposing team members. The teams also spent time in fellowship and serving alongside one another.

"Watching our team play and practice in another country was a rewarding experience," Savage said. "We had the opportunity to interact with and learn from skilled players and coaches. As we move forward, we will use this trip to remind ourselves that even in difficulties, we should remain

grateful to the Lord and that whatever we are doing, God is working through us. The most significant part of the trip was watching God take over as we served others in his name.”

The trip to Slovakia was the eighth Tiger Athletic Mission Experience, which provides student-athletes the opportunity to use their God-given talents as a platform to connect with people and share the gospel of Jesus. ETBU Women’s Soccer Head Coach Kristin Cox will take her team to Costa Rica in early March.