

ETBU women's basketball team serves in Jamaica

August 21, 2018

MARSHALL—The East Texas Baptist University women's basketball team journeyed to Jamaica recently to "share the joy of the Lord with the people of the island," a leader of the mission trip said.

As part of the Tiger Athletic Mission Experience, the group of 27—led by Head Coach Rusty Rainbolt and Lisa Seeley, director of global education at ETBU—worked in partnership with Ignite International.

'Experience of a lifetime'



The ETBU women's basketball team competed with international basketball teams, conducted sports clinics for children, volunteered in schools and visited orphanages in Jamaica. (ETBU Photo)

"The mission trip to Jamaica was an experience of a lifetime in so many ways," Rainbolt said. "I can't begin to describe all that we saw and experienced through those nine days. I can say that, more than ever, our team experienced the biblical elements of love, patience, longsuffering and kindness. May we never forget, and may we never be the same."

Coaches prepared the student athletes both physically and spiritually for their time in Jamaica, Seeley said.

“From the beginning, the team was ready to share the joy of the Lord with the people of this island,” she said. “These young women are amazing and love God with all of their hearts. It has been a blessing to travel and serve with them.”

The ETBU team competed with international basketball teams, conducted sports clinics for children, volunteered in schools and visited orphanages.

‘This is why we are here’

A trip to the Melody House for Girls, a home for abused teenage young women, made a deep impression on Kayla Bise, an ETBU junior.

“A few of my teammates shared their testimonies, a powerful experience that created a connection with the girls,” she said. “Afterwards, the women had the opportunity to share their story with us and ask questions. One girl expressed how she knew who Jesus was but felt like God didn’t love her.

“We had the chance to open the Bible and show her how much God cares for her. By the end of the conversation, she accepted Jesus into her heart, and at that moment, I thought to myself: ‘This is it. This is why we are here.’”

The Tigers played at the University of West Indies against Jamaican Olympic and National Team athletes. During half-time, the groups gathered on the court to share Christian testimonies and pray together. Following the games, the teams spent time together in worship and fellowship.

“We were blessed to play with ladies from another country, who we could relate to on and off the court,” ETBU senior Valarie Matlock said. “At half-time, we brought the team in the middle of the court and told the crowd about what God does for us. We prayed together and showed them that God is more significant than our ability to play basketball. ETBU won 41-39, but

the score was not as important as the fact that we were able to spread the word of God as a team.”

Both the student athletes and coaches mentioned how the seeds they planted will continue to sprout in the lives of the Jamaican people and in their own lives in the future.

“These staff members and student-athletes have poured their hearts into advancing the kingdom of God, encouraging the people of Jamaica, and building the team’s chemistry,” ETBU Assistant Coach Caleb Henson said.

“Our players have learned not to allow their youth to hinder them as they profess the name of Jesus. They have set an example for all believers with their vulnerability, love and faith. I believe this experience is going to serve as a foundation for our program as we head into the upcoming season.”

The trip to Jamaica marked the seventh Tiger Athletic Mission Experience, which provides student athletes opportunities to use sports as a platform to connect with people and share the gospel of Jesus. Ryan Erwin, ETBU vice president for athletics, will lead the ETBU hockey team to Austria and Slovakia in early January for the next trip.