

# Irving church connects student athletes to the love of Christ

January 3, 2022

IRVING—To demonstrate the love of Christ and meet needs in their community, members of Oak View Baptist Church in Irving developed an outreach program to encourage student athletes to press on towards the goal.

The church began the sports outreach by [adopting the varsity football team](#) from Nimitz High School.



When members of Oak View Baptist Church in Irving adopted the varsity football team from Nimitz High School, it opened up a wide opportunity for ministry in their community. (Photo courtesy of Oak View Baptist Church)

As word spread about the positive impact the program was making on the team, it wasn't long before the church was given another opportunity—to sponsor the boys' and girls' basketball teams.

With both outreach programs, church members of varied ages show support for the players and their families with encouraging notes, care

packages and attendance at home games. The weekly care package usually consists of items such as a sports drink and snacks such as baked goods, chips or protein bars. In addition, church members often include a Bible verse and note of encouragement with each care package.

“It is encouraging to watch members of Oak View come out to the games, especially those who have no relatives or friends directly involved,” said Jack Teel, minister to students.

“They are coming to support their player, and you can see the joy it brings to their lives. At each game, I watch the players look up into the stands and point to the section where our church members are sitting and wave at them. Then, I watch our sponsors light up with pride for the students.”

## **Making a connection with students**

Before each season begins, the church holds a “meet-and-greet” event, where church members and student athletes get acquainted. At the end of each season, the church hosts a lunch for the players and their families.

“Our desire is to make a connection with the students and let them know that people care about them and want to support them,” said Lynda Randle, who serves weekly in the student ministry and coordinates the football outreach.

“We want to help get them connected to a local church if they don’t already have one. It’s always a special time when the players come to church, and we can get to know them better.”

Teel agreed, adding: “The response has been amazing since we started the program a few years ago. It truly is a unique way for us to reach our community. It has allowed us to hear stories of how our bags and personal notes have reached these players in their time of need—both on and off the

field and the court. It has been a great vessel to spread the love of Christ in our community.”

## **Student athletes comes to faith in Christ**

Through the years, many of the players have connected with the church and made professions of faith, including Delontae Scott, who played football at Nimitz and now plays in the NFL for the Pittsburgh Steelers. Scott began attending Oak View’s student ministry when he was a high school student and gave his life to Christ as a result of the football outreach.

Many of the students and their families have stayed in contact with their sponsors even after graduation, which has allowed church members to continue the connection.

“This outreach is about planting seeds,” said Wes Pyfer, who coordinates the basketball outreach. “You never know what the Lord has in store. It’s exciting to get to know these players and let them know that someone cares about them.

“Many of their families have to work and aren’t able to attend games. So, this is especially meaningful for them to have supporters cheering them on during the games. The players are so appreciative of the care packages and look forward to receiving them each week. It means a lot to the coaches, as well, to know that people are coming alongside them and supporting the team.”

By continuing the connection with these players, Teel recognizes the opportunity the sports outreach opens up to influence the city for Christ.

“The ultimate goal of the outreach is to live out our mission statement as a

church and connect people to the life-changing love of Christ,” Teel said.

“I would love to see this outreach expand beyond what it is today and crossover into other sports, as well as the arts program. Any place that we might be able to reach a student and their family in a way that otherwise might not be possible is exciting to me. We have a mission field here, and I am excited to see what God has in store.”