

Sports camps seek to change livesâ€”one game at a time

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DENTON—In an age where fascination with local and national sports teams influences—and even controls—the schedules and lives of many children and adults, Bill Chamblee sees sports as a bridge to hope and a bridge to Christ.

Sports campers take a break to enjoy snow cones and water. New Hope Baptist Church hosted a soccer camp instead of the traditional Vacation Bible School during summer 2009 in an attempt to reach out to a different segment of the community who normally would not participate in VBS.

Before Chamblee retired in 2007 from 35 years of recreation ministry at [First Baptist Church in Denton](#), the church's missions committee sent him and three others to Springfield, Ill., to conduct a basketball camp for Eastview Baptist Church. After this experience, he became convinced God wasn't finished using his passion for sports and his desire to see people begin relationships with Christ.

Through the help of the missions committee at First Baptist Church and a small group of men willing to serve as ministry advisers on the board of directors, Chamblee began [Sports Ministry of North Texas](#), focused on using sports and church partnerships to reach communities with the gospel.

“God led me to start a group that would teach sports such as basketball,

soccer, softball, baseball and football as an avenue to share the claims of Christ,” Chamblee said. “I want to teach the kids a skill, help them have fun and share the love of Christ.”



Children stand in line waiting to perform a soccer drill they were just taught by Bill Chamblee, director of the Sports Ministry of North Texas.

Since beginning the ministry in 2008, Chamblee partnered with churches to hold sports camps in North Texas and Illinois. In 2009, the ministry saw more than 50 elementary and middle school students begin relationships with Christ through the four camps held that summer. The ministry receives support through gifts to the Mary Hill Davis Offering for Texas Missions and other donations from individuals. Consequently, Chamblee can offer the sports ministry to churches free of charge.

“I believe sports is an international language, and by using that as the

hook, people will come and respond,” Chamblee said. “In responding to that sport and learning a new skill, we can share with them the claims of Christ.”

No matter what the sport, the camps teach basic skills and provide time for Bible studies and gospel presentations. Each camp is slightly different according to the facilities the church can provide, Chamblee said.

Elmer Cummings, pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in Aubrey, found this extremely helpful because the church didn’t have a gym, only a grassy lot next to the church. When Chamblee heard of the accommodations, he suggested the church host a soccer camp on the field.

In an effort to reach a segment of the population that typically didn’t attend the church’s yearly Vacation Bible School, the congregation chose to forgo hosting a traditional VBS and allowed Chamblee to lead a weeklong soccer day camp for the community.

“We really weren’t reaching unchurched kids in our community” through the Vacation Bible School, Cummings said. “We were looking for something where unchurched kids would come, and about 40 percent of the kids who came to the soccer camp were unchurched.”

More than 70 children participated in the weeklong event, but they weren’t the only people influenced by the week. Since Chamblee relies on the local church to provide volunteers and the registration process, church members who love sports had an opportunity to learn how to use their hobbies as a ministry. Several members who typically don’t help with VBS showed up to volunteer at the camp, because it was active and based on sports, Cummings said.

“Sports ministry is important because there are a lot of people who need to be reached, and it is a different way of going about reaching,” Cummings said. “We can’t expect people to come and sit in a classroom or listen to a

service. But we can give their kids an opportunity to be involved in a sport, and they are grateful for that. Through this, they see that there is something different about the church.”



Keith Hanks (left) teaches children about goal kicks. Hanks and many other volunteers from New Hope Baptist Church in Aubrey partnered with the Sports Ministry of North Texas to host a soccer camp in place of a VBS outreach in summer 2009.

Cummings saw the camp as a way to show the community that the church wants to be involved in their lives, meeting them where they are and with the interests they have.

“I hope they had a good time and saw Christian adults having a good time and reflecting the joy and life of Christ,” Cummings said. “I hope it gave them a different perspective of what it means to be a Christian. A Christian can encourage getting out and playing soccer too.”

Mike Scheer, the missions pastor at Denton Bible Church, sees the ministry as a platform for churches to engage parts of their community previously not open to involvement in the church or with the gospel. Using sport

camps and programs can allow the church to build trusting relationships through common interest.

“A lot of parachurch ministries seem to ignore or don’t seem concerned with local churches, whereas Bill works with local churches, giving them an opportunity for outreach,” Scheer said. “He is a guy who is dedicated to the gospel and is using sports and all those areas that God has gifted him in to influence others.”

Scheer also stressed how using sports can break down barriers, helping the church connect with families in the community.

“It’s a great opportunity to be around other families, many who aren’t involved in a church,” Scheer said. “It’s a nonthreatening way to get to know those people. It’s easy to become friends with them or the kids. By being on the field, you are where the families are at and can minister to them there.”

For more information about the Sports Ministry of North Texas, visit www.smntxs.com.