

TBM helps Haitian amputee soccer team achieve a dream

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DALLAS—Helping a team of amputee soccer players get to their World Cup venue might not seem like disaster relief, but Dick Talley with [Texas Baptist Men](#) said that is exactly what it is.

Members of an amputee soccer team from Haiti practice in Frisco before journeying to international competition in Argentina.

“We see this as an extension of our disaster relief ministry,” Talley said. “In Haiti, if you have a dog and a handicapped person, you feed the dog because it has value.

“How do we change the way the people of Haiti look at an amputee or handicapped person? We’re trying to do that through sport. In the eyes of the people of Haiti, we are elevating the value of these people.”

Fred Sorrells of [First Baptist Church in Kingsland](#) worked with handicapped people in Haiti even before the earthquake there swelled their numbers.

“In Haiti, to be disabled is to be castoff. The general feeling is, ‘Why don’t you just go off somewhere and die?’” he said.

Recognizing the importance of sport in Haiti, he began searching the Internet for a viable sport for people with disabilities and came across the [World Amputee Soccer Association](#). As he began to inquire about it, Sorrells said, he essentially was told there was no way he could get a team together in time for the association’s World Cup.

Along about that time, Sorrells learned that Haiti's national soccer team was in Texas, and he went there to see if he could enlist some help.

"I just showed up and asked if there were any Christians on the team and learned their captain was a very devout Christian," he recalled.

Team Captain Pierre Bruny immediately was interested. Upon his return to Haiti, Bruny began visiting hospitals to invite amputees to try out for the team.



Members of an Haitian amputee soccer team proudly display a shirt bearing both the Texas Baptist Men Disaster Relief insignia and their team logo. TBM will train the team members in water purification techniques and basic disaster relief before they return to Haiti.

After several days of tryouts, the Haitian national amputee soccer team was selected Aug. 14.

The next major hurdle involved securing birth certificates, passports and visas in a country where so many records had been destroyed, but eventually all were obtained.

Texas Baptist Men paid for the air transport of the team from Haiti to

Dallas. FC Dallas, the city's professional soccer team, put them up in hotel accommodations and provided meals and transportation.

Local media reported on the team, and donations began to come in, but still the team did not have the funds necessary to fly to Crespo, Argentina, for the World Cup where they would play teams from Argentina, Japan, France and Ukraine in their opening pool. In all, 14 teams are competing for the title.

Texas Baptist Men agreed to step in again when the team did not have the money for the flight.

"People are starting to donate, but not fast enough to get them to Argentina, so we are guaranteeing the tickets, and then we will be reimbursed as the money becomes available," Talley said.

But he was quick to not take all the credit for the team's getting the opportunity to play. While TBM had handled this hurdle, others had helped at other points along the way.

"There are several groups that are helping, we're just a spoke in the wheel," Talley said.

Sorrells said he expects TBM to be fully reimbursed.

"We're doing it as a step of faith that people will hear about this team and make a donation. We really believe we'll be able to pay every penny of what they've given us back," he said.



Texas Baptist Men Executive Director Leo Smith (2nd from right) enjoys time with (left to right) Dick Talley of TBM, Fred Sorrells of First Baptist Church in Kingsland, a Haitian pastor and the soccer team captain.

In amputee soccer, players can only use a non-amputated limb to strike the ball. Field players must be missing some portion of a leg, and goalies must be missing some portion of an arm.

“Because some may only be missing a hand or foot while others may have lost much more of the limb, only the whole arm or leg can be used to touch the ball,” Sorrells explained.

Field players use crutches that wrap around their forearms for their mobility. For more information and video of the game, see iisport.org. There also are opportunities to contribute on the website.

“We know we are the David among the Goliaths, because we have not played an official game yet,” he said.

Sorrells’ organization, [International Institute of Sport](http://InternationalInstituteofSport.org), focuses on helping the handicapped be as involved in sport as they wish. He particularly is involved in the Paralympic Games and Veterans Wheelchair Games.

Sorrells believes the Great Commission is not only in Matthew 28. It also is in Luke 14:21-23: "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.'"

"That's what I'm trying to do—help the poor, crippled, blind and lame to know Jesus Christ," Sorrells said.

Seven of the Haitian amputee team now are Christians. Once their World Cup experience is completed, Talley said they will be trained in water purification so that they can help in future disaster relief efforts.

"The first casualty of a disaster is hope," Talley said. "They're going to be able to tell other earthquake survivors that there is hope, that there is life after an earthquake, and they are proof of it."