



## LADY PATRIOTS SOCCER MINISTERS IN LIBERIA

The Dallas Baptist University Lady Patriots Soccer Team had the distinct honor of being the first collegiate women's soccer team to visit the West African country of Liberia. As part of the DBU Athletic Department's Global Sports Mission Initiative, the group of 24 players and six staff members traveled to Liberia at the end of the school year and worked with the country's YMCA to conduct soccer camps and share the love of Jesus with those they encountered.

For 10 days, the team toured Liberia, getting to know and love the people of this war-torn country. In the town of Paynesville, near the capitol of Monrovia, the team held two soccer camps for over 300 children.

"To watch these young women pour out their heart, come out of their comfort zone, and teach little children a little about their faith and soccer was truly inspiring," said Ryan Erwin, director of athletics.

"With over 300 kids, all pretty much under the age of 12 in a very confined space, it was definitely organized chaos," Erwin continued, "but to experience these girls giving up part of their summer to travel around the world to serve and love on complete strangers, made me proud of each and every one of these student-athletes."



The team also traveled to Nyehn, another town about two hours outside of Monrovia, which has been adopted by the YMCA of Liberia. DBU presented the village with many donated items, including children's clothes, toys, and other necessities. The team also presented the chief of the village with a Bible from DBU.

Senior Andrea Hutchins found the village to be inspiring. "Seeing the kids' faces as we spent time with them—watching them running around, singing and dancing—reminded me not only of why I want to be an educator, but also how wonderful God is and how He has a plan for each and every child to do great things for Him," she explained.

During the week, the team visited the Rick's Institute, a K-12 Christian school just outside of Monrovia. Founded in 1886, this private school is known as the most prestigious school in Africa. As a part of their visit, the players spoke with the 500-member student body at a school rally, and freshman Lindsey Eccles had the chance to wow the crowd with her soccer ball juggling.

"I really felt like God used me in order to reach out to these girls and show them that they can achieve anything that they set their minds to," sophomore Kerry Edwards expressed. "They looked up to all of us and asked us to teach them to play because they now know that women can be athletes too."

A highly-anticipated part of the trip came as the Lady Patriots played a soccer match against the Liberian Football Association Female All-Stars. While the original game was postponed due to a large rainstorm, the make-up game proved to be a tremendous experience for all involved.

Prior to the game, the Lady Patriots were treated to a sur-

prise visit from the world-famous Liberian soccer star George Weah. In 1995, Weah was named the World's Best Player by FIFA, the only African player to ever receive such an honor. Weah spent time with the DBU soccer team, sharing stories from his career and encouraging their work in his home country.

The game proved to be a nail biter for the players and more than 1,000 fans in attendance. A defensive struggle, the Lady Patriots came through in the end defeating the LFA All-Stars with a score of 1-0, the lone goal coming from freshman Jolee Patterson, her first collegiate goal.

At halftime of the game, DBU head women's soccer coach, Michelle Lenard, was given the chance to share with the crowd. She had two of her players dribble a soccer ball—one fully aired up and the other flat—to show the value and importance of Jesus in one's life.

After 10 days in Africa, the team boarded their plane to return home. While their time was concluded, the impact the trip had on both the players and the people they met is far from over.

"DBU is committed to providing our students these unique cross-cultural mission opportunities to grow their faith and broaden their understanding of God's love for all people," explained Dr. Blair Blackburn, DBU executive vice president. "We trust that God will use this Liberian mission experience to transform our students and those whom they touched in mind and heart."

"This was an amazing trip that I was able to enjoy with my teammates," freshman Sarah Boren said. "I honestly have to say that a part of my heart will forever remain in Liberia."

According to junior Jessica Salas, "Reflecting on our trip, we might not ever know how we affected the people of Liberia, but I definitely know I came back challenged and changed."