

Humanity Through Baseball

by James A. Cederberg

As a boy, I was fascinated by the elephant tusks in a neighbor's garage, and always wanted to visit Africa. In 2000, I journeyed to Kenya with a group of students. The wildlife and the scenery were spectacular.

Even more fascinating than Kenya's geography and topography were the people. Everywhere we went, we saw women and children carrying five-gallon plastic bottles tremendous distances to dirty, crocodile-infested streams to collect drinking water. Men of great intelligence and ambition, who in the United States would be doctors, lawyers, scientists, and CEOs, drove us around in Land Cruisers. Students labored in primitive classrooms over lessons more rigorous than in U.S. schools, using nubs of pencils to write on scraps of paper. (Lunch was a small bowl of corn. They licked the bowls.) When asked what they wanted to be when they grew up, all of the children said "a pilot." Pilots were the guys driving the Land Cruisers.

During that first visit to Africa, I was overwhelmed by the inequality of opportunity, the poverty, and the inexplicable contrasts with life as we know it in the United States. Mostly, I was captivated by the spirit and indomitability of the kids we saw.

"What is This Baseball?"

Early in 2010, I was invited to go to Kenya for ten days. I would be part of a Baptist missionary contingent and teach baseball to kids. Having spent countless evenings and weekends playing baseball with my sons—literally saying out loud, "What could be better than this?"—I jumped at the chance to go. My friend Drew Sauer and I collected baseball gloves, bats, balls, catchers' equipment,



Play ball! That's Drew Sauer as catcher.

shirts, and other gear. We traveled with 400 pounds of luggage to rural Western Kenya, where I found out baseball would be wildly popular.

Our first night there, a crowd of kids appeared at our guest house and joined us playing catch. By the time we walked to a nearby field, there were probably 150 kids in tow. Whenever we played at schools, countless kids from nearby schools crowded around to watch.

Although they had never before seen the game of baseball, the kids could play quite well—and the girls were at least an equal match for the boys. Everyone had fun. When a kid swung the bat and missed the ball, 200-plus kids howled with laughter.

Teachers and headmasters also joined in. Once, the local police chief demanded that we come by the police station. After five minutes of formalities, the chief said, "What is this baseball? I want you to teach my men this game!"

When we finished a session at a school, the kids would mob us like we were rock stars. They peppered us with questions—some so profound they stopped me in my tracks ("How come we are dying of AIDS and Americans are not?"). The kids laughed, joked, and mugged for the camera. A full range of personalities was on display by these wonderful kids. Meeting them and playing ball with them was many times more fun than we could have imagined.



Left to right: Drew Sauer, Chief Fanice Amalemba, Jim Cederberg, and Peter Agoos.



St. Boniface students with author Jim Cederberg.



Drew Sauer and players from Ngeny school.

Life in a Kenyan Village

Due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, Kenya is rife with orphans who have lost their parents and other relatives to the disease. Two Kenyan Baptist pastors, Joshua and Peter, were assigned to accompany us, translate for us, learn the game of baseball, and help us teach it to the kids (and some adults). We spent all day every day with Joshua and Peter. We learned that Joshua and Peter each had responsibility for approximately thirty orphan children. Each evening, when Joshua would get out of our vehicle alongside the highway, invariably six or eight kids would run to greet him. He patted their heads as they jostled to be close to him and hold onto him as they walked down to his little orphanage.

The orphanage is a sheet metal building. The orphans' home is a room filled with rows of bunks. A stick-and-mud building serves as the kitchen. On a good day, thirty orphans share a pot of corn mush and chopped greens. The orphanage's monthly budget is \$600, which includes four pounds of meat for the entire month.

When we played ball with Joshua's orphans, one little girl, Dorothy, was off to the side by herself. I asked her if there was

something wrong. She showed me her right hand, which, along with the right side of her face, head, and body, had been badly burned in a grease fire. The hand had only a thumb and one finger. I fitted her with a lefty's glove. Suddenly she had fingers. She was able to throw pretty well with her left hand. That was the most memorable game of catch I have ever played.

On many occasions, Drew and I were approached by other pastors who would say, "I have an orphanage. My kids have never seen a white person. Would you please come and play with them?" By the end of our ten days with Joshua, Peter, and the kids, a bond had formed among us that transcended religion, race, history, and geography. We could not simply walk away from this experience and leave it all behind.

Humanity Through Baseball

Shortly after returning from our trip, Drew and I established a foundation called 42/22: Humanity Through Baseball.¹ The foundation provides a way for us and other interested Coloradans to go to Kenya and play baseball with the kids there, establish relationships with directors of small orphanages, donate food and other necessities, and raise funds to further support the orphan children. The recent death from malaria of one orphan child, 11-year-old Rihana, reminds us of the daunting task facing the pastors whom we support emotionally and financially. Not only must they supervise, feed, educate, shelter, and nurse the children, they also must weep for them when they die.

ships with directors of small orphanages, donate food and other necessities, and raise funds to further support the orphan children. The recent death from malaria of one orphan child, 11-year-old Rihana, reminds us of the daunting task facing the pastors whom we support emotionally and financially. Not only must they supervise, feed, educate, shelter, and nurse the children, they also must weep for them when they die.

Impending Trips to Kenya

We hope to make three trips to Kenya every two years. Our next trip is scheduled



Pastor Joshua with several of the orphanage children.

for December 2 through 18, 2010. Tentative plans are in the making for another trip in August 2011.

Traveling to Kenya, meeting children there, and holding hands with orphans to let them know that they have people who care about them and will support them is an intensely enriching experience.

The program's ultimate success depends on having others join us on these trips. We're fortunate to be welcoming Colorado lawyer Ralph Ogden on the December trip. Ralph's experience coaching baseball and his extensive duty in Third World countries make him an ideal participant.

The trip to Kenya is exciting, exotic, and includes sublime wildlife viewing. More important, though, is the experience of interacting with the Kenyan people. Though physically, emotionally, and spiritually challenging, the effort is simultaneously inspiring, uplifting, and rejuvenating. If you're looking for a meaningful endeavor, consider participating in the Humanity Through Baseball program. For more information, visit www.42-22.org or call Jim Cederberg at (303) 499-0449.

Note

1. The numbers in the organization's name have specific meaning. The number 42 was worn by Jackie Robinson, the first African American baseball player in the major leagues; it is Drew's favorite number. The number 22 was worn by Hall of Fame pitcher Jim Palmer in the heyday of the Baltimore Orioles, whom a young Jim Cederberg idolized. In Kenya, Drew was called "42" and Jim was known as "22." ■