

A GREATER GOAL

Inviting others to Church activities is a great way to help us fulfill our priesthood duty of inviting “all to come unto Christ” (D&C 20:59).

By Nereida Santafe de Salinas

Our stake in Venezuela decided to organize a soccer tournament for the Aaronic Priesthood youth. This activity had more than one purpose, including building friendships and strengthening the various priesthood quorums.

The stake leaders said that only the young men of each ward or branch were allowed to participate and they were to encourage new members and less-active members to join them so they would have full teams for each age group. In our ward there were only two deacons, one teacher, and a few priests.

Building a Team

My son, José Francisco, whom we lovingly call “Junior,” was part of the deacons quorum, with his good friend Oscar Alejandro. It was obvious that there were not enough boys to participate in the soccer tournament. So they worked with the missionaries and ward leaders to find all of the less-active youth. They spent time each

week seeking out these young men, encouraging them and gaining their trust. Because of the efforts of this pair of 12-year-old boys, they were able to get enough young men for a team. One of the miracles that resulted from their efforts was that our ward gained several more active youth!

During the week they would pick up their new friends and then practice on a community field. It was a lot of work, and they were always tired. They had little coaching or strategy, but the young men didn’t let that stop them. They were happy with what they were doing.

Starting the Tournament

At last, the first day of the competition arrived. Our valiant team of deacons arrived at the stake center. They didn’t have much of a crowd to cheer them on, nor did they have a coach to help them or uniforms like most of the other teams. But they played with enthusiasm, unity, and love.

They lost the first game by a landslide. But they didn’t give up, and the entire stake began to encourage them,

saying that the boys were such good examples.

Junior was the goalkeeper. He defended the goal with such fervor that the balls he blocked left marks on his hands. That night at home, he told me that his hands really hurt and that he needed some gloves. We got out our savings so we could buy him a pair of gloves. But the gloves at the store were more than we could afford, so we had to buy some fabric gardening gloves. He took them with much gratitude.

I don’t know where his team got the motivation to continue. They were last in the rankings, but they kept playing.

Finally it was time for the elimination rounds. Due to the lack of deacons in the stake, this valiant group was able to play in the finals, but they played against a practiced team whose coach was a very good player. He had spent a lot of time working with his team. They were the top team; they had matching uniforms and exhibited the discipline





that came from training. Their coach likely felt confident about winning the game because my son's team was not very good.

My husband had just returned from a trip, so he decided to help the deacons. He encouraged them, gave them some pointers, and surprisingly they won. So they were able to face the other stake team. Our young men won again!

When the game ended, everyone applauded. The crowd could hardly

believe that those young men were able to win first place in the deacon's category and third place in the stake for the entire Aaronic Priesthood.

Accomplishing Their Goals

This experience taught us about principles and eternal truths that

would serve us here in this life. The young men of the stake were examples of love, activation, perseverance, enthusiasm, and working together as a team. They demonstrated the true objective of the activity. They built bonds of friendship with others. **NE**