

Soccer Superstar Shares Jesus on National TV

Ricardo Izecson dos Santos Leite, affectionately known around the world as “Kaká,” recently shared his faith with millions of prime time TV viewers in Brazil.



[] During prime time viewing last Thursday night, millions of Brazilians watched their TV screens transfixed as their national sports hero talked intimately about his hope and faith in Jesus Christ.

Ricardo Izecson dos Santos Leite, commonly known as Kaká, is a world-renowned midfielder who plays for a premier club in Italy and on the Brazilian national team during World Cups. He played a lead role in kicking off “Minha Esperança Brasil,” My Hope Brazil—a three-night, TV-based outreach sponsored by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) and reportedly one of the largest evangelistic crusades ever.

“I truly cannot imagine my life without Christ,” said Kaká on national TV, as translated from the Portuguese language by Brazilian BGEA representatives.

“Everything I’ve accomplished, everything that God has done in my life ... was because God has a plan and purpose for my life,” he said. “The Bible says that he will do more than we ever thought or imagined, and this is truly how it has been. If God wasn’t in my life, then my life certainly would not be like this.”

BGEA organizers praised Brazilian believers for networking nearly 50,000 churches nationwide to participate in the initiative and for providing more than 850,000 homes to host the evangelism effort on their TV sets.

Ministry leaders said Christians involved at the local level, or “Matthews,” were trained to share their own testimonies after the TV program and invite others to accept Christ.

“The churches in Brazil have put an enormous amount of time and energy into reaching their loved ones with the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” said Bill Conard, vice president of international ministries at BGEA.

We know God performed “powerful things through their faithful efforts,” he added.

National reports included accounts of demonic deliverances, prisoners coming to Christ, freedom from drugs and alcohol, thousands of conversions and even the story of a former priestess of the voodoo cult Macumba, who recently accepted Christ and held My Hope Brazil meetings on the site where she once practiced Macumba.

For his magical footwork on the field Kaká has won many international awards, including last year’s prestigious Ballon d’Or [Golden Ball] trophy from France as well as FIFA’s World Player of the Year.

This year, Kaká was among *Time* magazine’s 100 most influential people in the section titled: “Heroes and Pioneers.”

Last Thursday, Kaká told a national audience however that nothing in the world compared with the peace of knowing and serving Christ. “In 2007 I was named best soccer player in the world,” he said. “This for me was a great honor. But the greatest honor in my life is serving Jesus Christ, because he gives me hope.”

After a championship game in Europe last year, Kaká tore off his jersey to reveal a white T-shirt that bore his personal devotion to Christ. It read: “I Belong To Jesus.”

Following the three-day event last weekend—which included Kaká’s testimony, messages from BGEA founder Billy Graham and his son, Franklin, and an evangelistic film called *A Vow to*

Cherish—organizers said Brazilian church leaders repeatedly thanked the Graham's for helping them reach so many millions with the gospel via the São Paulo-based Rede Bandeirantes (Bandeirantes TV Network).

The BGEA also purchased time on local TV stations where the Bandeirantes Network has limited coverage, even pre-distributing thousands of DVD's of the program to remote villagers by sending teams carrying projectors in canoes on Amazon jungle rivers and on trucks to remote cattle plains.

BGEA's Web site indicates that more than 9 million commitments for Christ have been recorded worldwide since 2002, when the My Hope initiative launched in Latin America and has since appeared in many other nations, including India, Belarus and Russia.

My Hope Singapore takes place in mid-December and church leaders from Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic and Thailand have expressed an interest in participating, according to the BGEA. **-Paul Steven Ghiringhelli**