

Despite Pandemic's Crushing Blows, Fijian Rugby Team Celebrates Olympic Gold by Offering Praise to God

They could have emphasized the negative: a nation decimated by COVID, their months-long quarantine away from families or the fact that they had to share a cargo flight with a few dozen crates of frozen fish to reach the 2021 Tokyo Olympic Games.

Instead, the rugby team from the tiny South Pacific island nation of Fiji focused on one thing after beating New Zealand 27-12 for a back-to-back gold win (the first in 2016) in the Games: offering praise to the Lord.

After the victory, players gathered on the empty field to share their team hymn, "E Da Sa Qaqa," a traditional Fijian anthem with these God-honoring lyrics: "We have overcome/ We have overcome/ By the blood of the Lamb/ And the word of the Lord/ We have overcome."

Sing it loud and proud, Fiji rugby! What great voices!
#TokyoOlympics

— #TokyoOlympics (@NBCOlympics) July 29, 2021

This type of praise is nothing new for the Fijian team. "We always start with our prayers and songs, and we always end with our prayers and songs," team captain Jerry Tuwai said, according to The Guardian. "And that song says that our God is a loving God, and that while we always tend to go stray from what He expects from us, He still loves us, and gives us good things."

Fiji, with a population of just 900,000, has dealt with a

devastating COVID-19 outbreak this year that has resulted in more than 25,000 cases and 200 deaths, per Insider.

To avoid the risk of infection, players had to spend the last five months away from family and friends training in Australia, not allowed to return home. Tuwai told The Guardian he tried to jump camp one night because he missed his three children so much, but Coach Gareth Baber persuaded him to stay on. Tuwai helped lead his team in again bringing home the gold and is now the team's only dual gold medalist.

"It is more special than 2016 because we have been away from our families for about five or six months," Tuwai told Insider. At the awards ceremony, he took off his own medal and placed it around Baber's neck.

Despite the pandemic, Fijians took time to celebrate the team's victory, cheering, singing hymns and dancing in the streets, per The Associated Press. Fiji Broadcasting President Jacquee Speight shared the joyful scene in a tweet:

WHAT A GAME last #Olympics we gathered in numbers, tears flowed & bells were rung. Tonight in the middle of a pandemic & #Fiji under curfew, pots & pans ring, fireworks go off in yards & the cheers from every house can be heard! GOLD BABY 🇫🇯 #Tokyo2020 #TeamFiji

– Jacquee Speight (@jacqueespeight) July 28, 2021

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.