

Hungarian Missionary Hits Home Run for Christ

Terry Lingenhoel, 48, from the U.S., started Operation Mobilization's Hungary baseball ministry in 2002. Today, with more than 120 players on eight teams, the baseball club in Érd, Hungary, is the largest in the country.

Lingenhoel has found sports ministry to be the best tool in reaching non-churched youth and forming long-term, meaningful relationships. The response of the players testifies to its influence.

During a camp, one player said that his best experience in baseball was when his coach encouraged his hitting during his first practice eight years ago, despite the way he had played. Another player said that the spiritual input he had received from the coaches was "the icing on the cake."

Making contact with players is the most important thing, says Lingenhoel. He finds that oftentimes Christians have trouble making contact with teens and adult men, as many do not readily respond to an invitation to come to church or a church event. But they'll accept an invitation to play baseball.

The coaches interact with players two or more times weekly during practice, which gives them ample opportunity to demonstrate and share their faith.

Even though fewer than 10 people have come to Christ through the club's ministry, Lingenhoel is encouraged. Two players, Dori and Béla, gave testimony at their baptism this year of the transforming faith they found in Jesus through their involvement in baseball.

Dori joined the teen baseball team five years ago. Two years later she met Jesus at a Christian concert the coaches invited

her to. Last year, through the baseball party at the end of the year, she made contact with the local Baptist church youth group, which has enabled her to continue in discipleship.

Béla learned about the baseball program through his son who joined the youth team. Though he knew nothing about baseball, he fell in love with the sport, and through contact with the coaches, he also fell in love with Jesus. He now serves as the general secretary of the baseball club and helps others come to know Christ through baseball.

In addition to Érd, God is working through baseball to transform other communities in Hungary.

Only 2,500 people live in the village of Mikepércs in the northeast, yet baseball has already produced the village's first championship team in any sport.

Several years ago fellow Christian worker Russell Chun took up the challenge to use baseball to transform this community. Several players have since come to know Christ, and the entire village identifies baseball as a 'Christian' sport.

In Budapest's 11th District, several of the young leaders of a Baptist church caught the vision for the potential of baseball to draw young men into their fellowship and for discipling young believers. They now have a men's baseball team composed of believers and unbelievers and they're looking for a Christian coach to help develop the program to increase their impact in the community.

Lajos, a 60-year-old living in Hódmezővásárhely in the south of the country, decided that baseball would be the best way to reach the youth in his community. Within a few months, an adult team started playing in Hungary's NBIII League and baseball practice for children began.

"There is no doubt in my mind that we are transforming the baseball community in Hungary," says Lingenhoel. "The success

of these 'mission clubs' and the integrity and service of our Christian coaches displayed is proof thereof."

The president of the Hungarian Baseball Federation has asked Lingenhoel to find Christian coaches for even the 'secular' clubs in Hungary. On top of this, the Federation has given Terry the responsibility of developing youth baseball in Hungary.

"This opens the door to develop baseball for the Federation as part of my mission calling!" exclaims Lingenhoel.

By coaching and training the Hungarian National Youth Teams, Terry can talk about and demonstrate Christ's transforming power in his life to the best players in country.

During their upcoming Winter Training Week, over 50 percent of the baseball community in Hungary will have a chance to hear about Christ as Lingenhoel invites Christian coaches in the name of the Hungarian Baseball Federation to help with the training.

"The door is wide open!" says Lingenhoel. "Help us transform lives and communities in Hungary by becoming a baseball coach or player, or by giving money or equipment to develop these clubs throughout the country. Most importantly, pray that God would continue transforming lives and communities here in Hungary!"