



'04 Alumnus helps organization deliver soccer balls, jerseys and equipment to Central America

Caleb Cooper, a 2004 alumnus and former soccer player, has been working with an organization called Peace Passers that donates sports equipment to needy nations. Cooper wrote this piece about his trip last year to Central America to deliver soccer equipment.

This morning, I woke up to the sound of roosters crowing and dogs barking. A truck drove by full of fresh fruit with a man on the megaphone saying "Piña, aguacate, plátano!" The offshore wind blew and I was cooled off momentarily. The morning felt especially good in Nicaragua because of the events that took place last night. I witnessed approximately 100 kids from San Juan Del Sur gather at the local community center, 'Comunidad Connect,' in great anticipation of the upcoming games.

As I walked through the gates of the cement court, I nearly got hit by a kid on his bike pedaling away from a friend. The chase continued into the middle of a basketball court where a "futbol sala" league game was being played. The chaos was topped with smiles, laughter and the sound of Latin funk blaring from the speakers in the background.

I felt proud of the Peace Passers team because our cause has really gained some meaning and momentum. It's a true team effort to raise enough money to sponsor this league, which has a spring and a fall season.

Six hours earlier, after carrying two boards and a bag full of soccer balls through the border of Costa Rica and Nicaragua, I was relieved to get offered the use of a cell phone from a local Nicaraguan who saw the panic in my face when I realized my ride was nowhere to be found. I call Jon Thompson, who is highly influential in the guidance of two non-profit groups in the area, including Comunidad Connect. He tells me he is right around the corner.

I got a good vibe — or "buena onda" — from Thompson, who I only knew through e-mails and Internet chats. I gave the stranger who lent me his phone a ball from the bag and we pulled away as he pointed to the Adidas symbol and said, "Bueno."

After being honored in front the crowd and given a true futbol sala ball signed by all of the team coaches, a local dad leaned over to me and said, "Muchas Gracias." Not two minutes later, I looked up to see the words "buena onda" painted on the brick wall facing the field. Then it struck me: What we're doing is spreading a good vibe to the people we encounter ... a true team effort.

Peace Passers is 501(c)(3) organization whose goal is to distribute soccer supplies around the world. To learn more, go to www.peacepassers.org.