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College athletes experience the ultimate training camp.

Captions by Mark Winz • Photographs by Guy Gerrard

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ULTIMATE VICTORY

by Jeff Grant



Reza Zadeh never meant to fall in with Christians.

The football player moved off campus near Colorado State University because he heard it was the place to party during the summer. He hadn't bargained for a neighborhood full of Athletes in Action missionaries running the Ultimate Training Camp, but—barbecue by barbecue—Reza and his friends got to know their Christian neighbors.

At the end of the summer, an AIA staff member walked Reza through the Four Spiritual Laws evangelistic booklet. “I grew up Muslim, but that night sitting on my bed I said, *God, I trust those people. If what they said tonight about Jesus is true, then I want to have Him in my life.*” This began my faith journey.”

Jeff Prior, a staff member with AIA, mentored Reza for the next few years and encouraged him to go to UTC. Reza was a student assistant coach for the CSU football team.

“I was out of shape. The camp intentionally puts people where you have no more strength, so you learn what it means to rely on Christ. Near the end, you run up this big hill with a two-by-four on your back as Christ carried the cross. I was elated yet broken because I quit on Him and walked for a few minutes. He never took a break for me.”

Reza immediately enrolled in the next week, still exhausted from the first week. “In athletics, how well you perform determines how much people appreciate you, but camp taught me that I can't earn God's salvation. He already displayed His love on the cross, so there's nothing I can do to cause Him to love me. That will always stay with me.”

Reza returned for parts of UTC eight more times. “AIA had gotten me addicted to watching Jesus change lives, and I knew that would happen year after year at camp.” His life as a coach began to change too. “I'd find myself in a room with athletes, during away games,” Reza says, “talking to them about Scripture and reading the Bible with them before games, after games, on the airplane. I really enjoyed getting into the lives of people more than I enjoyed football.”

Eventually, Reza left coaching to work as a pastor at Timberline Church in Fort Collins and then to plant a church in nearby Windsor. “Having been a local church pastor for almost 11 years,” Reza says, “there are principles from UTC—what it means to live as a church body, relying on Jesus and the Holy Spirit and one another—that I use almost weekly in my teachings and interactions.”

As he continues to serve as the intern director for the camp, Jeff fondly remembers mentoring Reza: “You never know who the next Reza will be when these 150 men and women college athletes walk through that door on the first Sunday night of UTC.”

For more information, visit www.ultimatetrainingcamp.com. ■