



## **Staffer, student help U.S. team win world goalball championship**

Sept. 13, 2002

KALAMAZOO -- A staff member and a graduate student from Western Michigan University have returned from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, after helping the U.S. Women's Goalball team become world champions.

Jennifer Armbruster, a staff member, and Robin Theryoung, a graduate student in the Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies, were part of a six-woman team that competed in the VII International Blind Sports Association World Goalball Championships Sept. 1-7. The U.S. team also included Nikki Buck, a Paw Paw High School student, and Jessie Lorenz, of Berkeley, Calif., both of whom learned to play goalball at WMU sports education camps. The team was coached by Armbruster's father, Ken Armbruster of Colorado Springs, Col.

The U.S. team won six matches, beating teams from Korea, the Netherlands, Denmark, Spain, Germany and Canada. By winning the tournament, the team qualified to compete in the Paralympics in Athens, Greece, in 2004. The Paralympics is the Olympic equivalent for athletes with disabilities.

"Our primary goal was to qualify for Athens," Theryoung says. "To do that, we needed to be in the top four. But after we knew we qualified, we were going for the gold. I'm finding it a little unbelievable right now that we did it."

Goalball is an action-packed sport similar to hockey or soccer, but played by visually impaired or blindfolded players. It was developed by blind veterans in Eastern Europe after World War II, brought to the United States in the 1970s and today played around the world.

Three players on two teams face off on a surface the size of a volleyball court with raised cord boundaries. Competitors use a 3.5-pound ball equipped with bells that travels at speeds exceeding 40 mph. Using their senses of touch and hearing, competitors pass, block and try to score by rolling the ball across the other team's goal line, which spans the entire width of the baseline.

The U.S. team beat Korea 7-3, with Theryoung scoring one goal. The team then defeated the Netherlands 4-1 and Denmark 6-5, before losing to Canada 4-3. The team went on to beat Spain 2-0, then squeezed out an agonizing 3-2 semi-final overtime win over Germany to secure a medal, before finally winning a decisive 6-2 victory in a rematch with Canada for the gold medal.

Theryoung is studying for a master's degree in blindness and low vision studies, while Armbruster is the coordinator of the National Sports Education Camps directed by Dr. Paul Ponchillia, chairperson of the Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies.

"This was definitely a dream come true," Theryoung says. "To stand on that podium and hear your national anthem was truly unbelievable."

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