

## The Dream of Afghanistan Water Polo

Jeremy Piasecki, is on a mission to develop an Olympic water polo team in Afghanistan. He is a US marine reservist who went to Afghanistan with one mission and left with an entirely different one.

In January 2008, Piasecki, who coaches water polo at home in California, headed to Camp Pol-e-Charki, about 15 miles east of Kabul, to assist the Afghan army's 201st Commando Battalion. After a few weeks on base, he spotted a swimming pool on the other side of a steep hill, surrounded by bombed-out buildings. Farther out, beautiful purple mountains towered above the pool deck, he said. Inside the pool: mud, broken glass, scraps of metal and something that looked like a dead animal.

Soldiers rarely swam in the pool - instead, it was used for bathing, washing clothes and dishes, even for drinking. One day, the camp held its annual swimming competition. The pool was cleaned and opened for swimming for the first time in almost a year.

Hundreds of soldiers watched, and many participated in races. Most had experienced swimming only in lakes and rivers, if at all. Afghanistan has little history of competitive water sports - it is estimated that the country has fewer than 20 pools, and only one in five Afghans can swim.

The swimmers were hardly experts, but Piasecki was touched. "It was so exciting just to see their desire to compete and do something other than trying to find out how they're going to support their families," he said.

The base sports officer approached Piasecki at the competition, having heard he coached water sports. The officer wanted to start a team and asked Piasecki to coach it.

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Jeremy held tryouts for a water polo team and chose 26 team members. He hopes to bring the team members to the United States to train for the 2016 Olympics! He started a non profit organization called The Dream of Afghanistan Athletics, drafted a plan and created a Web site, [www.afghanistanwaterpolo.com](http://www.afghanistanwaterpolo.com), to spread the word.

Jeremy explains "I know some people might say 'It's just a sports team' but that's just the unifying factor. I gave my promise to them that I would do it. If I didn't do it, I'd just be like every other Westerner or American with great intentions, but they end up leaving Afghanistan and not following through."

Ultimately, he hopes his players will return home to start sports and educational programs and share what they've learned abroad.

The website accepts donations if anyone is interested. His goal is to raise \$1 Million to get the team over to the States to train. And even if you don't want to donate, take a second and bookmark / share this article with others.

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