Farmer's Goal:
Using Soccer to Minister to Kurdish Refugees

Soccer practices weren't easy for the first year. In fact, they often resembled nightmares. But as Farmer and his colleagues at Ultimate Goal Ministries, a soccer ministry in Nashville, had been working with young Kurdish refugees — youth who oftenatteaked for drugs, "One shot and it's over," Farmer said. "Everybody's fighting and they take sides and they're all fighting on the field. We had to end practice every single time for the first year." Smith was Farmer's introduction to ministry with the Kurdish refugees. But the students didn't stop him from befriending the Kurds. They didn't stop him from loving them. If anything, they only made him more resolute. "We're all built for fighting and shaping them," Farmer said. "As they look at our lives, they're seeing Jesus. It's transformed them." Said, 18, said. "That's the best way I can phrase it." 

Farmer now refers to as his brothers. It's a fraternity Farmer didn't expect to find when he left Union in 2001 to join the staff of Ultimate Goal Ministries. Farmer was a member of Union's soccer team, and he seemed like a perfect fit for him. "I can stay in the U.S. and I can have an outreach to all these different international people," Farmer thought. "Ultimate Goal Ministries didn't provide. Farmer with a salary, so the Farmers moved to Nashville on faith. They worked to raise their own support, until Farmer eventually got a job as a graphic designer for Dave Ramsey Ministries. His soccer ministry became something he did on the side. "Every time I see them I don't go preach the gospel to them, I just kind of just keep them straight," Farmer said. "It's the Holy Spirit. It's an icon. It's a language that we can speak. Soccer opened doors for Farmer gradually to get more involved in their lives. He played soccer with them regularly and coached them on a club team. He'd visit them in their neighborhoods. He loved them unconditionally. "These Kurdish guys, since I've narrowed in on them and I really feel like God has placed me in their lives, they're like my brothers," Farmer said. "Every time I see them I don't go preach the gospel to them, but it's like my life with them." He does, however, preach the gospel to them every Thursday night at a Bible study. After getting to know the players, Farmer and Smith approached them about starting a Bible study. "They've been coming for two years now — every Thursday night, to hear Farmer and Smith talk about Jesus Christ. Six of the Kurdish students have been baptized over the two-year period with another committing to being baptized in the next few months." Farmer and Smith point to Christ as the only hope for salvation. He went to Iraq to do the same thing. "I could possibly get my head chopped off," Farmer said. "The results of the Bible study have been positive. Farmer said. It's not easy for Muslims to convert because of how ingrained Islam is in their culture. Conversion to Christianity often means being cut off from family. But while Farmer has yet to see any public professions of faith in Christ, he thinks a few of the players are close — and he fully expects in a few years to see God using some of his Muslim protégés as ambassadors for Christ through Ultimate Goal Ministries. That's what keeps Farmer laboring for the Lord. That's what drives him. That's what has changed his life. "I grew up the whole time thinking that ministry was working in churches and missions was being overseas," Farmer said. "My perspective has radically changed through this ministry."