Khamko's Legacy

Sarah Moss
*Dordt College, sarah.moss@dordt.edu*

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When Anneke Tel, a freshman from Puyallup, Washington, inquired about Dordt last Christmas, Elgersma knew she possessed those intangibles and would be a good candidate for the scholarship. “She is tenacious, fierce, technical, and a competitor,” says Elgersma. “We were short on backs, and, in December, she showed up to fill that need—seemingly out of thin air.”

When Tel came to campus to train with the team last spring, Elgersma saw that her greatest asset was her tenacity in defending and in her leadership. “It’ll take a year, like it takes for all freshmen, but she’ll lead by example, and that is infectious,” says Elgersma.

“Leading by example” is what Elgersma looks for in the recipient of the Baccam Soccer Scholarship. It also reminds him why the scholarship matters so much to him. The Baccam Soccer Scholarship was established by the brother and sister-in-law of Khamko Baccam, a Dordt soccer player who died in a tragic car accident on November 3, 1990. Elgersma, an assistant soccer coach at the time, recalls how Khamko also led by example—he was quiet and unassuming, but he delivered on the field. The other players looked up to him, and he was an instrumental part of why Dordt’s soccer team made it to the district championship game against Grand View University, which they forfeited on November 4, 1990, because of Khamko’s passing.

After Elgersma alerted Tel to the scholarship, she said she would talk with

"Over the years, I’ve heard the name ‘Khamko’ many times,” says Anneke Tel. “My dad would show me old pictures and speak so highly of him. The story of Khamko’s tragic death hasn’t ever gotten easier to hear.”

KHAMKO’S LEGACY

Dr. Bill Elgersma (’81) doesn’t award the Baccam Soccer Scholarship to just anyone. Elgersma, Dordt’s women’s soccer coach, looks for a leader who can shape a stronger team.
her soccer coach and father, Art (’92), about it.

Elgersma had just pulled into his driveway after a long day of work when he received a phone call from Art Tel. “Do you know if the scholarship was named in honor of Khamko Baccam?” asked Art. “And did you know that I was in the car accident with Khamko in 1990?”

No, Elgersma did not remember that Art was one of the five passengers in a car that, on the way back to Dordt from a Blades hockey game in Sioux City, careened off the road ten miles south of Sioux Center. Art Tel was one of the four passengers who walked away from the accident, while Khamko Baccam did not.

Sitting in his car, Elgersma got chills. “I don’t think most people will understand the incredible unlikeliness of this: Syla and Tanya Baccam, Khamko’s brother and sister-in-law, establishing this scholarship, the award being offered for the first time last year, and this year’s recipient being a child of another passenger in that car,” says Elgersma. “Don’t tell me about coincidence.”

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

When she thinks of her little brother, Bouala (Baccam, ’95), Lo remembers how Khamko tried to set an example for their younger siblings. At 15 years old, Khamko started working at the AutoDine in Sioux Center—rather than pocketing the money he made, Khamko gave his earnings to his parents. He paid for his siblings’ clothing; he put himself through school. Khamko’s younger brother, Syla (’99), recalls a time when he wanted to go to Worlds of Fun in Kansas City, and Khamko gave him the money so that he could go.

ABOUT THE BACCAM SCHOLARSHIP

Two years ago, Syla and Tanya Baccam decided to establish the Baccam Soccer Scholarship. Their family has always had a passion for soccer, and that is in part due to Khamko, Syla’s brother. The scholarship is intended to attract top quality athletes who will contribute to excellence in the Dordt athletic program, specifically in the women’s soccer program. Members of the athletic department select the recipient of the scholarship based on athletic ability and leadership promise.

After graduating from Western Christian High School, Khamko decided to follow Bouala, who was working on a two-year degree, and attend Dordt for a four-year business degree. Khamko lived in North Hall, which is where he met Art Tel. Art says Khamko was friends with everybody.

“We liked hanging out with our group of friends, just talking about anything and everything into the wee hours of the night,” recalls Art. “We learned a lot from one another. I very much enjoyed and cherished those moments.”

By Khamko’s senior year, Bouala had graduated and moved to Kansas. In late October, she returned to Sioux Center to visit her family for a week. When she
got back to town, she called Khamko and asked him to stop by.

“We could see Dordt’s campus from our backyard, so Khamko wasn’t far away, but he was too busy to come home because of school and soccer,” says Bouala with a chuckle.

That week was a big week for Khamko, who played forward and was a captain for the soccer team. On Saturday, the Defenders would take on Grand View University in the championship game.

But Khamko had rolled his ankle. After the game, Elgersma, Khamko, and Quentin Van Essen, the soccer team’s head coach, stood under the line of evergreen trees at the southside of the soccer field.

“You got any more goals in that foot?” asked Van Essen.

Khamko was quiet for a moment before replying, “I think it’ll be okay for tomorrow.”

Elgersma left straightaway for Sioux City’s Tyson Auditorium. As head coach of the Dordt Blades, he and his hockey players had a big game against Iowa State University. He recalls how, that year, the soccer team had a tight relationship with the hockey players, so he wasn’t surprised when the auditorium was packed with Dordt students, including Khamko and other soccer players. The Blades ended up beating Iowa State for the first time in the program’s history.

After the win, Art, Khamko, and three others headed back to campus. Ten miles south of Sioux Center, the vehicle lost control, went into the ditch, and rolled. Khamko was rushed to the Sioux Center Hospital, but he had already died.

Bouala remembers waking up at 3 a.m. to the sound of knocking on the front door. She flipped on the light to find Reverend Don Draayer, Dordt’s campus pastor, standing on their porch. He asked her to wake up her parents; he had something he needed to tell them.

REMEMBERING KHAMKO

Soccer has always been important to Syla (’99) and Tanya (Draayer, ’97) Baccam, just as it was important to Khamko. Syla and Tanya have encouraged their four children, Avril, Kylie, Skylar, and Tegan, to give soccer a try, and try they have. Avril, a junior in high school, is a starting center midfielder who plays for the FC Dallas Development Academy (DA). The DA is what feeds the national team, and its players are top in the nation. Last year during their inaugural year, Avril’s team won the DA national championship.

Kylie’s team and Skylar’s team both won the 2019 3v3 soccer national championship at Disney in their respective age groups. Kylie’s team returned to Disney in July 2019 to play in the World Futsal Championship where they walked away as champions. Syla and Avril were there on the sidelines, coaching Kylie’s team to victory at Disney.

“Soccer just means something special to our family, especially because of Khamko,” says Tanya.

Their family has found other ways to remember Khamko, too, particularly with Khamko’s jersey number, 16.
“Avril wore 19 because her team didn’t have 16, so she flipped the number upside down for Khamko,” says Tanya. “Kylie claimed number 16 in Khamko’s honor as well, and she has worn it throughout her soccer career.”

In Puyallup, Washington, Art Tel has kept Khamko’s memory alive, too. He has told his children about Khamko, sometimes pulling out an old scrapbook he put together that includes pictures and stories about Khamko.

“Over the years I’ve heard the name ‘Khamko’ many times,” says Anneke. “My dad has spoken so highly of him, and it’s clear to me that Khamko was someone who meant a lot to him.”

When Anneke found out that the Baccam Soccer Scholarship was from Khamko’s family and that she had received it, she was in shock.

“Being awarded the scholarship is both a blessing and a responsibility—a responsibility to bring honor to God, Khamko, and his family while I play the beautiful game that is soccer,” says Anneke.

“WHEN GOD CALLS YOU HOME, YOU GO HOME”

After Khamko passed away in 1990, Elgersma says it felt like a black cloud hung over campus. As assistant coach, he watched his players navigate a world where one of their own was gone. Grand View offered to delay the playoff game until after the funeral, but the team opted to not play at all and instead closed the season out with Khamko’s funeral.

“Nothing prepares us for death, particularly of classmates and peers,” says Elgersma. “And for many of my players on both the hockey and soccer teams, this was the first time they came to realize how short life really is and what is truly important.”

Talking about Khamko’s death is painful for Bouala. Still, she believes everything happens for a reason—including the timing of the Baccam Soccer Scholarship being awarded to Art Tel’s daughter.

“Maybe God had a plan that at this time we should talk about what happened to Khamko, and maybe the pain will be lessened for everyone,” says Bouala.

Looking back at the years following Khamko’s passing, Bouala says she and her family are grateful for the support of the Dordt and Sioux Center community.

“Dordt was wonderful to my family. They gave us a lot of support through a difficult time, and I think it helped strengthen my faith. At some points I have questioned why things happened the way they did, but I’ve come to accept that when the time comes for him to call you home, you go home.”

Was it random? If you want to call the Holy Spirit “random,” then fine. What are the odds of this happening? It’s not a coincidence.

— Dr. Bill Elgersma, women’s soccer coach

When Art thinks back to the months and years after Khamko’s passing, he remembers long conversations with professors and friends, trying to deal with the trauma of what happened. He learned to rely on God’s promises, even though it wasn’t easy to understand why what had happened did. Today, as then, Art finds comfort in the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism: “He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my father in heaven.”

Would Elgersma have thought the power of the Holy Spirit would work through a scholarship? Hardly. Still, Anneke appeared just when Elgersma was looking for someone who could lead his team by example—someone like Khamko. And it just so happened that Elgersma, the Tels, and the Baccams had all been impacted by Khamko.

“Was it random? If you want to call the Holy Spirit ‘random,’ then fine. What are the odds of this happening? It’s not a coincidence,” says Elgersma. “Regardless of who receives the scholarship in the years to come, no story will ever entwine the recipient with the family like this one.”

SARAH MOSS ’10