Women’s Soccer Team in Zimbabwe Fights AIDS Stigma

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A soccer team of HIV-positive female athletes in Zimbabwe is using the sport to reduce stigma against people living with the virus, IRIN Plus News reports.

Before and after every game, the women open up to the crowds about the effect HIV/AIDS has had on their lives and how they’ve come through their struggles. At the same time, peer educators pass out information on the virus and condoms.

Known as ARV Swallows, the team has already won three competitions and has helped alter the perception that positive people are too ill to enjoy sports. “Through [soccer] we’ve gone a long way in fighting stigma,” said Janet Mpilime, the team captain.

According to the article, Chris Sambo, a veteran soccer player, came up with the idea in 2007 to use the sport to fight stigma. Today, Sambo coordinates 16 teams of HIV-positive women in three of 10 Zimbabwe provinces.

“[Soccer] is the most popular and unifying sport in the world,” Sambo said. “I believe that it makes a very good platform for encouraging behavioral change and the fight against the stigmatization of people living with HIV.”

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