

**JUAN DIEGO BLAS**  
UNOSDP YOUTH LEADER



My name is Juan Diego Blas, I am from Guatemala and am 25 years old. I was born with congenital absence of the fibula, which is the reason I need to use a prosthetic in my right leg. It was thanks to my parents that I became involved in several sports, despite my disability. When I was 12 years old I decided to play a sport called Fronton to the best of my ability, and started competing in several World Cups, Pan-American Games, Central American and Caribbean Games, Bolivarian Games, and other International Tournaments.

‘Sport helped me to overcome the difficulty of my prosthetic and now I am happy the way I am. In 2015 I went to Greece to the International Olympic Academy representing Guatemala to learn more about the values that surround the Olympics. The trip really changed my focus and after the event I started to work on my National Olympic Academy, creating volunteering programs for athletes relating to sport for development. In the National Olympic Academy we created a project called “My Olympic Friend” that uses athletes as mentors of classes in different schools, who send in videos of life lessons and life skills each month through a whole school year. The teacher gives support with different activities developed in the manuals of the program, and at the end of the year the athletes make a visit to their students to close the program activities. This program is made possible through the support of Classroom Champions and UNICEF Guatemala.

I am so thankful that this year I had the opportunity to go to Florida to participate in the United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace Youth Leadership Program. At the camp our two main mentors from Youth Sport Trust International trained all the participants on how to be a sport for development coach. Their coaching was so incredible and inspiring, it really helped me a lot and has changed my life. Since that camp I have decided to dedicate my life to sport for development in my job at my National Olympic Academy and in personal projects.

During the camp I met Tyler Collymore from Canada and we became great friends, he has a foundation with some friends in Canada Called United Play, and we decided to expand the foundation to Guatemala. I am now the CEO of United Play Guatemala, which has the mission of donating sports equipment and play packages to communities throughout the country. We aim to mentor youth within our communities, by using sport as a tool for development and peace. Also the idea is to mix up Frontball a sport related to my sport Fronton that only needs a ball and a wall painted with a court so it’s very accessible for the poor communities we have here in Guatemala.

I truly believe in the speech Nelson Mandela gave about sport in 2000: “Sport has the power to change the world; It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than government in breaking down racial barriers.” So let’s be change agents in our countries using sport as a tool for development and peace.



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