



CHARLES KING/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Evans has 10 boys soccer players with Haitian backgrounds, including Lukenson Joseph, left, and Wendy Edouard.

## Haitians help teams thrive

Nation devastated by quake has ties to Evans, Oak Ridge

**BY JOE WILLIAMS**  
Staff Writer

Living two hours away from the epicenter, Wendy Edouard felt the tremors under his feet and saw houses shake.

As a 14-year-old, he knew Jan. 12, 2010, was different than any other day in his life. But it wasn't until a couple of months later, when he saw the destruction the 7.0 magnitude earthquake had done to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, that he realized the extent of the devastation and loss of life.

"I was shocked," said Edouard (pronounced Edward), a senior defender on Evans' boys soccer team.

"Where I was [in L'Asile, Haiti,] there wasn't a lot of damage. But when I went to Port-au-Prince, I saw a lot of damage,

*Please turn to **HAITI, C6***

# HAITI

Continued from Page C1

buildings destroyed.”

Evans coach Elie Jean, who was a student at FSU when the earthquake struck his homeland, coaches 10 players of Haitian ancestry on Evans' 13-player soccer team.

Only Edouard arrived after the natural disaster that claimed as many as 300,000 lives, and many are seniors this year.

Evans will host Oak Ridge, another school with a rich Haitian tradition, at 7:30 tonight. Boys soccer

district tournaments will be held next week.

The Haitian community, which — according to the 2010 U.S. census — consists of 36,500 residents in the metro Orlando area (Orlando, Seminole and Osceola counties), is largely responsible for the growing soccer success at Orlando high schools such as Evans (16-3-2) and Oak Ridge (13-3-2).

“Before my freshman year, I heard a lot of bad stuff about Evans' soccer,” said Alberto Escobedo, a senior midfielder and a native of Mexico. “I didn't want to go to school here.

## Video

For more on the Haitian influence on Evans' boys soccer team, go to [SentinelVarsity.com](http://SentinelVarsity.com).

My mom kept saying, 'Just give it a try.' Then I heard we were getting a new coach [Jean].

“We used to be called an underdog team, but not anymore.”

For Evans, with a 30 percent to 35 percent Haitian student population, the turnaround has been dramatic.

Jean, in his fifth season,

took over a program that won one match in the two years before his arrival. The Trojans are a combined 56-20-9 under Jean.

Evans has reached the playoffs four times, including last year when it lost 5-0 to Oviedo in a Class 5A region quarterfinal. That was its first playoff appearance since 1982 after state semifinals appearances in '77 and '81. Oak Ridge, with 17 Haitian players on its 22-player roster, has made it to the playoffs three times, all since 2005, including last year.

“Soccer is very important to these kids,” Oak

Ridge coach Kenny Coutain said. “That's their motivation in life, to play soccer and go to college. Since I started here in 2008, we have averaged three or four [Haitian] players who have been able to go to college.”

The players in the programs know each other, sharing the common bond of their homeland and their Creole language.

They often see each other during club soccer, at church and during community celebrations, such as on Jan. 1 (Haitian Independence Day) and May 18 (Haitian Flag Day).

Evans senior defender Lukenson (pronounced Luke-in-son) Joseph moved to Orlando from Haiti 10 months before the earthquake.

“I was at school that day, and I came home, and my parents were telling me people were dying in Haiti,” Joseph said.

“That was so sad. I remember watching on television and seeing how sad everybody was. I was afraid for my family because that was where most of them lived.”

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