



Mini World Cup a mighty big deal

By **TIM BAINES, OTTAWA SUN**

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With so much talk of the Beautiful Game, with the best of the best gathering in South Africa for soccer's once-every-four-years celebration called the World Cup, there was a pretty wonderful story playing out much closer to home.

Last weekend, the FC Capital United Soccer Club hosted its annual Mini World Cup. A tournament by name, but so much more in reality.

Picture some 500 kids, 10 and 11 years old, parading onto a soccer pitch, wearing jerseys of countries from so far away, their faces lit by smiles. So much pride. So much joy. The parade line looked like it stretched out for miles. The high commissioner of South Africa, Dr. Abraham Sokhaya Nkomo, was there. It was a great thing.

"It's amazing," says the director of the Mini World Cup series, Debborah Evraire. "There's music and dance, flags and parents crying. It's the whole experience. You would swear you were in South Africa for two days."

The tournament's organizers from Capital United — Andreas Noe (FC Capital United president), Raz El-Asmar (director of youth), Traian Mateas (head coach), Robin English (merchandising), Keith Howard (Director of Logistics), Dave Wilson (coach), Henry Chan (volunteer co-ordinator), Cindy Chan (referee co-ordinator), Rico DeFrancesco (canteen), Pierre Cantave (director of officials), Paul English (logistics) and Nadia Rocha (VIP tent) are tireless, paying attention to the smallest of details, putting in endless hours around Evraire's dining room table to make sure each year's event is a highlight reel of memories.

"Our club is so wonderful to do such honour to this game," says Evraire. "There weren't a lot of people in the soccer community who thought we could pull this off because we were such a small club. But we have such an incredible group of people. This reflects every member of our amazing committee."

"We come from all areas, all backgrounds. And we're able to create one vision. This beautiful game should unite us. This is about creating a lifelong memory. For one weekend every year, the world comes to us."

So much of the success is also due to the sponsors, community-minded organizations like the Louis Riel Dome and Konica Minolta, who have been so huge with their commitment.

The Garlic King feeds the volunteers (some 110 of them) for two days. The Hill Charity Golf Classic stepped up a year ago when the tournament needed \$7,000 for nets.

Sobeys kicks in with cash and food for the VIP tent.

Professional Physiotherapy Centres are there for the duration of the tournament, taking care of those nagging aches and pains and adding in some cash for good measure.

A.J. Plant has also been huge with support, his donation covering 100% of the tab for the officials. And there are others. Many others. Sponsors with good hearts and open wallets.

The officials are treated like royalty. They get their own tent. They get a cooler full of ice, water and fruit. They get an ambassador taking care of their food needs. And they get a thank-you note.

The Mini World Cup began in 2006, the last World Cup year. This year, there were 32 teams, 17 of them local. The goal is to have 32 teams in 2014, 16 of those international.

With the registration fees, the kids get a jersey they can keep and continue to wear.

"FC Capital United is a small club," says Evraire. "We do not have a permanent home. We rent out the fields. We don't have the money it takes."

Yet the club successfully put on a showstopper of a tournament.

"We want to ensure young athletes are given an opportunity to see what it might be like if they pursued a soccer career and they could one day walk under the flag of a country," says Evraire. "Everybody wants to be Brazil, England, Italy, Argentina ... those kinds of countries. When a group gets a lesser-known country, they go look it up, who are the players, what are the cultural differences?"

Evraire says she is blessed to be surrounded by passionate people who work so hard to make this Mini World Cup a reality.

"Soccer is about being a team. We can only succeed at this if we're a team," says Evraire. "This tournament is the result of a very dedicated committee which believes in one vision and supports me 150%. If I expect 100% from them, I have to be willing to give them more."

It's a couple of days later and Evraire has gradually settled back into the real world. A senior account manager at PromoMedia Group and single mother of two — Bezick and Sapphire — Evraire says motherhood is the most awesome of experiences. Her children are her pride and joy, but soccer and the joy it can bring still have a large part in her heart.

She figures she got three hours of sleep a night in the two weeks leading into the Mini World Cup. She doesn't mind. There's time for sleep now.

"The only thing keeping me up right now is my support pantyhose," she jokes.

But she has a feeling of contentment knowing that she and her little soccer association that could have made a difference.

Evraire pours her heart into it, but she doesn't seek out recognition, at least not yet.

"My goal in life is that when I drop, I don't want the six guys from the church carrying my casket," she says with a smile. "I want to do enough in the community where six people come to the funeral and carry me out."

Years down the road, you can bet they'll be lining up to do just that. Maybe there'll be a parade of nations. Flags will be flying. There'll be some tears, some great memories. Just like old times.

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