



Malaysia America Soccer Exchange Program

The 2009-2010 Malaysia America Soccer Exchange Program, led by The International Center's Sports Corp Division, in partnership with the Football Association of Malaysia and its affiliated football departments at the State level, served to strengthen relationships between the two countries through the sport of women's soccer. This exchange program was made possible by a grant from the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational & Cultural Affairs and brought U.S. and Malaysia citizens together in the spirit of sport, camaraderie, and team building, while supporting efforts to strengthen the overall bilateral relations with Malaysia.



The Malaysia America Soccer Exchange Program consisted of two main components. The first component included sending four American soccer coaches to share the United States Soccer Federation's latest coaching methods including "US Best Practices" and its "E" license manual to youth players and instruct local coaches in the Malaysia cities of Kuala Lumpur, Kuantan, and Sabah. The American Coaches included Janine Szpara, a US "A" Level License coach, top Oregon youth club and NCAA coach, plus former US National Team, WUSA, and NCAA All-American player; Joy Boswell, a top Oregon Youth coach and former University of

Portland Final Four player; Anna Short, a top Northern California High School coach and former Academic All American NCAA player; and Karen Willoughby, an Oregon youth club coach and former NCAA All American player who also serves as the International Center's Sports Corps Program Director.



Malaysia currently enjoys a strong passion and interest in football on the men's side, but the women's side has struggled in recent times with no organized activity at the National or State level for its youth or women's players. As part of the Malaysia American Soccer Exchange Program, the Malaysia Federation showed a renewed interest in promoting the women's side with personnel dedicated to creating the infrastructure needed for the grassroots player clinics and coaches education sessions. Over 300 Malaysia players from the ages of 12-18, attended these grassroots player clinics, including 22 people with various forms of disabilities. Some of the players were experienced football players and other practiced soccer on their own with friends, but most of the clinic players had not played the sport for several years, if at all. In addition to teaching these 300 players, the American Coaches also put on three 90 minute coaching sessions to address and discuss issues relating to coaching and building community programs for people who wished to learn more about coaching, including providing the US Soccer Federation beginning "E" course manual. Over 55 current or prospective coaches attended these coaching sessions- most of these coaches had never received any formal training or coaching manuals. Still, the focus of these coaching sessions was to empower these individuals with basic skills to go out and organize their communities even without ideal resources. As the Malaysia Federation is attempting to restart its women's national level player pool, the Federation encouraged all members of the National Women's player pool to participate in the coaching clinic.



The American Coaches also visited the Kulu Lumpur Boys' Orphanage to gain a better understanding of the cultural dynamics that shape the country's challenges and to enjoy a high spirited evening of playing with the orphanage boys.

The Federation of Malaysia hosted a dinner in KL with the US Embassy and participating soccer groups attending to welcome the American coaches. There was also State Association hosted evenings in Kuatan and Sabah. These evenings served as a forum for discussions of improving the athletic opportunities for girls. The Kuatan local governing soccer body committed to starting a State soccer team for young girls and the Minister of Education in Sabah promised to ensure the next public school curriculum included soccer opportunities for their girls as well as their boys.

The Malaysia America Soccer Exchange program also included private partnerships with companies, including Nike. Nike provided soccer balls and t-shirts for all participants as well as give-away mementos for both clinic players and for the blind school and orphanage. Most important, Nike shared personnel resources on the ground in Malaysia as a bridge to develop and strengthen the ties between the people and cultures of these two countries.

The second component of the Malaysia America Soccer Exchange was held in April 2010. The Malaysia Delegation included 13 players, 1 coach, and 2 administrators who visited San Francisco and its surrounding areas, as well as Portland, OR, for a nine day United States tour. The delegation enjoyed a unique balance of American soccer training and cultural activities to forge strong relationships with the American soccer community. In the Bay Area, the delegation participated in a private soccer training and motivational session with world soccer ambassador Brandi Chastain. Brandi imparted her technical soccer expertise, but just as importantly she shared her belief that Dreams Do Come True and that hard work and passion are important to live life to the fullest. The players and coaches also watched FC Gold Pride's season opener and met the FIFA's best player in the world, Marta, and FC Gold's top scorer, Christine Sinclair. The Malaysian delegation was awed by the level of play and opportunity to take the field and meet the FC Gold Pride players and coaches.



To create deep long lasting friends between the two countries, local youth partner, Santa Teresa High School welcomed the delegation to their home fields in South San Jose and shared a typical high school training session and life as an American youth with songs and taking their guests to an American eatery. The fast friends laughed, shared pictures, stories of their families, dress, favorite bands and celebrities. The Americans felt honored to host such far away visitors and discover the bonds of soccer and similar age could create such strong ties. Lastly, the Malaysian delegation toured the city of San Francisco and its many neighborhood such as little China town, Fisherman's Wharf and even walked over the Golden Gate Bridge to gain a better closer understanding of American life.



The delegation then traveled to Portland, Oregon to gain another perspective of life in the United States. In Portland, Oregon, the Malaysian delegation toured the Nike campus and met with top women business leaders. The women business leaders shared their insights into the importance of education and taking risks in an American company such as Nike. The players also trained on the Nike pitch with some of Oregon's top youth coaches. Portland's youth hosts, the Northeast United Soccer Club, took the Malaysian players to American schools and homes, shared their training field for practice, and had a memorable send off celebration with American and Malaysian songs and jerseys exchanged. Again, this deep sharing of training and school experience bonded the players between the two countries in an amazing personal way. The Malaysians were treated as local celebrities in Portland's

schools and were eager visit homes and meet families. The Northeast United Soccer team shuttled the Malaysians to schools, training sessions and dinners to further deepen the American life experience and friendships. The Malaysian Administrators and Coaches also met with Oregon's Director of Coaching to share best practice youth development plans in assisting with Malaysia's goal to build youth development academies. The Malaysian coaches wanted to better understand how to create youth academies and share information on how to gain better parental support for athletic pursuits.

To continue the relationship between the two countries and to share photos and stories of the exchange program, a special Facebook group was created to connect the new friends and keep them updated on activities.

