



UNFC Hosts Soccer Camp

La Gonave, Haiti
October 8 - 12, 2009

The United Nations Football Club (UNFC) was founded in June 2009 with the mission of exploiting the unique power of the world's most loved sport in order to build a better future centered on *leadership, team work, discipline, and respect*. Since their official incorporation, UNFC had been actively seeking a community service opportunity that would allow the non-profit to put their vision into practice.

In August 2009, UNFC President Raphael Rezende and Vice-president Gustavo Netto came across Haiti Lumiere de Demain (HLD); a non-profit organization based in Stratford Connecticut dedicated to promoting literacy in primary and secondary schools in Haiti. In a joint effort, UNFC and HLD organized a soccer camp in Haiti with the goal of enlightening underprivileged children about the benefits of education and dedication to sports.

Prior to taking on the project, UNFC and volunteers knew little about Haiti with the exception of what they had heard from friends and teammates. It would soon come to their attention that [Haiti](#) is the least-developed country in the Americas and that about 80% of the population is estimated to be living in poverty. Studies have also shown that most Haitians live on \$2 or less per day and the poverty has forced at least 225,000 children into slavery, working as unpaid household servants. The facts gave UNFC yet a bigger sense of responsibility and aspiration to get involved.

Preparation

UNFC's first initiative was to reach out to the exact same network from which the club was founded. Family, friends, sponsors, and local businesses were encouraged to support the efforts by volunteering and joining them on their trip, donating soccer equipment, or through a financial contribution. By engaging several sources, Raphael, Gustavo and HLD managed to collect 60 soccer balls, 30 pairs of cleats, 15 trophies, and hundreds of jerseys in a two-month period.



Rather than supporting the endeavor from the U.S., UNFC opted for the hands-on experience and on October 8, Raphael, Gustavo and volunteer Nikhil Gangaraju departed JFK Airport on a non-stop flight to Port Au Prince, Haiti.



UNFC Volunteer
Nikhil Gangaraju

UNFC founders Gustavo Netto (left) & Raphael Rezende (right) arrive in Haiti



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Soccer Camp

In preparation for the soccer camp set for October 9-10, HLD had worked closely with public schools on the island of La Gonave to select 60 fifth grade students based on their academic achievements. This was a very important component of the venture because it coincides with UNFC's view that one should not turn to soccer solely for the joy and beauty but for the opportunities one receives from leveraging its benefits. In view of that, Raphael and Gustavo drew on their experience as players and certified coaches to put together a lesson plan centered on UNFC's four focal points: *leadership*, *team work*, *discipline*, and *respect*.

Day 1



Day 1 was comprised of two-hour morning and afternoon sessions consisting of drills, tactics, and scrimmages. UNFC and HLD also provided the children with water and snacks. Throughout the day, coaches and volunteers kept a close eye on players that stood out in terms of technical ability and that also displayed their understanding of the four focal points. At the end of the day, 30 children were selected from the original 60 and then assigned to two teams. Raphael would coach one team and Gustavo another in an official match held on day 2.

Day 2

The 110° F heat did not seem to intimidate the locals or players and a crowd of nearly 300 gathered for the match. The children played two remarkable halves of soccer and the coaches were ecstatic with both teams' performances.



Day 2 was concluded with an awards ceremony and a powerful speech from the coaches on how dedication to education and sports has influenced their personal and professional careers. 1 MVP was nominated from each team and awarded a backpack, full soccer uniform set and a pair of soccer cleats. 10 other players were selected to receive soccer jerseys.



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All the remaining soccer equipment was donated to Haiti Lumiere de Demain who will sustain the soccer program in conjunction with the public schools. UNFC and HLD's intention was not to play the 'Santa Clause' role and randomly hand out all the equipment but to get the community to realize the only way to progress towards a better tomorrow is through hard work and commitment.

Coach's Soccer Match

As a way of appreciation, the local soccer team of the city of Anse-a-Galets invited Raphael and Gustavo to play in a friendly match against a neighboring town. Raphael and Gustavo played two 45 minute halves of the beautiful game and contributed to the 4-2 win which included a goal and assist from Raphael.



UNFC deems the project a success and those fortunate enough to participate have described it as a life changing experience. "I am now more appreciative of things I took for granted. We are often so preoccupied with immaterialities in our day-to-day lives that we don't cherish the simple things in life such as friendship. Furthermore, the project has given me a desire to do more. Even though we can't single handedly change the world overnight, it doesn't take much to make an impact and if we all collaborate in our own respective ways, we can take bigger steps towards a better future," says Raphael.

Gustavo was particularly impressed with the sense of community the 125,000 resident of La Gonave share. As he described it, "The only visible light after 7PM was from the stars. Even without electricity, running water, and a basic infrastructure, I'd sense the happiness and warmth from the community. This is one of many things the residents of La Gonave have made me appreciate and I hope I was able to teach them a thing or two as well."

UNFC is currently pursuing its 501c3 status to get officially engaged in a volunteering program within a Fortune 500 company based in Fairfield County Connecticut. Additionally, UNFC is designing a soccer program for a local organization in Norwalk, Connecticut.



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If you would like to learn more about UNFC or ways in which you can support their efforts, visit www.unitednationsfc.org.

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