

A Double Blessing: Sequel to NSA Eurotour Even Better Than the Original

As Coach Fred always like to say, “only the lucky ones get to go.” At first, we thought this statement was hyperbole, but having now been through a few Eurotour cycles, waiting on the pandemic for our chance to go, and seeing so many players and families want to make it happen, but could not for one reason or another, we’ve come to believe 100% in its truth. So, what does it mean if you get to go more than once? Our family considers it a blessing.

While the 25th Anniversary Eurotour in the Summer of 2022 had already exceeded all our expectations and we made such good friends (the Gautams were there too), and yes, the weather was slightly better, but as great as it was, Eurotour 2023 exceeded 2022’s lofty standards in almost every way. While we could recount every aspect as a highlight, there are three that rise to the top of our list as being amongst the most memorable:

The people, it is always the people. Last year we had one team, this year we had five (more on the chaos as a result below), five times the people, five times the fun, and five times the relationships. But even more than the number is who attended, we reconnected with old friends and made many new ones, some of whom were greatly unexpected. Chloe and Riley had gone to school and played with a few of their NSA teammates this year giving them and the team an instant foundation from which to build from despite much of the team never having played together before. But the unexpected new friends were the more local guest players that brought such a great dynamic that is typical to an NSA Eurotour that was completely missing last year because of the pandemic. While every team had guests yielding from countries such as Norway, Sweden and Germany, the 2009 girls from the local Gothenburg club Alvsborg FF and their families were such great hosts during our week at the Gothia Cup, that they made our stay there extra special. We were treated to dinner at one of the family’s restaurants, hosted for another home cooked meal (and a swim) for forty that left us in awe, and finished with fika (a Swedish tradition of coffee, pastries, and warm conversation) at the island home of one of the players a 20-minute ferry ride from the mainland. At the end of the first week, one of those players even continued unplanned with us to Dana Cup in Denmark. While NSA doesn’t typically bring a 15yo team on the trip, we have begun planning for one only because those families and others on their team have already expressed their desire to play with and host us again next summer, showing us the beauty of the unexpected through NSA.

Five times the people, five times the fun, five times the relationships, but also five times the chaos. While Coach Fred is a wily veteran by now in his third decade leading NSA to Europe, Eric’s first experience on staff coincided with a return to normalcy that felt anything but normal to a rookie who had only been on the trip once with only one team. One team meant one game and one field and one transportation route and one meal team and, you get the picture. Times five and it’s not actually just five times, but many more times the complexity, confusion, and therefore chaos. With one team there weren’t any staff meetings, this year the first one took well near, you guessed it, what felt like five hours. Five different fields for each game meant we were scheduled at fields even Coach Fred hadn’t been too before. 8am games, meant 7am arrivals which meant 6 am departures which meant 5 am wake up calls for jet-lagged players,

coaches, chaperones, and families. Then there was the bus and tram system in Gothenburg, which by all measures is great except when they are doing construction and rerouting and bus-gapping in the middle of their busiest week of the year. Rental cars for the Dana Cup were only marginally less chaotic because a small town means not enough cars, which meant carefully counting available seats (with seatbelts right?;) both directions because cars going somewhere didn't always come back depending on needs elsewhere. But somehow with our big group we managed the chaos, players arrived where and when they were supposed to, no one was lost (at least for long), fun was had and most importantly games were played.

As Coach Herm Edwards was once ridiculed for saying, "You play to win the game!" While not our priority and every year is different, results do matter. Last year the team competed well and advanced out of the group stages into the winner's brackets, but soon ended their fun there. Every team played well this year too, but the two girls teams brought home some medals for themselves and three trophies to add to the NSA collection back in Davis, CA. The 2009 girls team made it to the quarterfinals at the Gothia Cup before falling to the Finalists from the Philippines that their coached called potential future national team players. They then improved upon that result at the Dana Cup finishing third earning themselves and the club bronze medals. The 2011/12 girls did even better, they finished third at the Gothia Cup resulting in a medal ceremony celebration during halftime of the Championship game. But that wasn't enough for them because at Dana Cup they finished in the silver medal slot after a hard fought 1-2 loss against our friends from the Ukraine. Almost exactly a year earlier because both teams were already out before the last day, we played a friendly and developed an ongoing relationship. This year the two teams had a photo op while waiting for the opening ceremony parade as Ukraine and the United States were next door neighbors alphabetically in line. While results matter, it is the memories of those results and relationships and experiences made through them that will live on in our memories and those of NSA.

So how can you improve on a double blessing? Maybe the third times a charm? Not sure, but maybe we'll just have to go back and join that 15yo girls team next summer to visit our new Swedish friends to find out.

Eric Quan 8/25/2023

