



BRINGING BEACH SOCCER WHERE THERE ARE NO BEACHES

The pitches were dilapidated and the players didn't have proper gear, but it was soccer all the same. Chris Lemay, a Cal South soccer coach of ten years, and his brother Scott had traveled to Monze, Zambia to find that love for "the beautiful game" could survive and flourish anywhere. Lemay, who owns Soccer in the Sand, a company specializing in beach soccer tournaments, had brought his passion for the game to Zambia to organize games for underprivileged children to educate and enhance their lives and provide the tools for future soccer organization in the area. Chris tells his story below:

CHRIS LEMAY: It has always been a goal of mine to have the opportunity to go to developing areas in the world to give back some of the knowledge I have gained to children who literally have nothing.

At the 2007 NSCAA Convention in Baltimore, I met the director of a non-profit called Coaches Across Continents, which allows experienced soccer coaches to work and assist developing regions using a designed soccer education curriculum. We discussed the possibility of our organizations teaming up to run tournaments for players in the areas in which CAC was currently working. After a full year of planning, we agreed Zambia would be a good fit for us to combine efforts.

Many aspects of the journey were amazing to experience, like the fact that 4-year-old girls were sent out of the house for the day with the obligation of caring for their younger siblings, or seeing the condition of the houses in which most of the kids lived. Digesting all of the differences between our worlds was life-changing, giving me a sense of what is really important. But equally amazing was the smiles and appreciation we received upon our arrival and discovering the technical ability that some of the players had.

After our first 24-team BU14 5v5 tournament, we had a proper trophy ceremony, similar to any tournament back home. I had collected the medals my teams had won over the past decade and brought them with me to distribute as prizes. The players had tears in their eyes, showing such pride from their accomplishment and excitement to have been awarded a medal.

The next day we started our set-up for the first-ever all-girls event in that region. At a location 16 kilometers away from the first tournament, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned to see a young boy with a very worried face. He said, "Excuse me sir, I think that there has been a mistake." He extended his hand, and there was a medal I had presented to him the day prior which read SURF GIRLS CUP CHAMPION. I dug into my Nike sackpack and pulled out a new medal. The boy was elated! I learned he had walked nearly 20 kilometers in hopes to find me and exchange the award.

The next day, the girls competed mostly in dresses and without shoes. I had thought I couldn't be more affected from the previous day but I was very wrong. It was unbelievable to see the celebrations after every goal. Not only did the scorer's teammates run on-field to hug and scream, but so did the opposing players and all of the spectators, many of which were boys. In this community, it is not often that women get any recognition. To describe how I felt to have been able to provide a platform for these girls to showcase themselves and their confidence is impossible.

We left Monze's players with tournament t-shirts, official beach soccer balls, and goals donated by I-Goal. Our mission was to give the children an opportunity to play in refereed games, to learn teamwork, and learn how to apply it to their lives. We hope that we succeeded, but it was the smaller, personal moments that made the journey unforgettable.

CHECK OUT SOCCER IN THE SAND'S BOOTH AT: SOCCER NATION EXPO 2010.

