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Soccer team hops pond for tourney

Kristina Osberg

While the majority of Eden Prairie teens were probably relaxing in the sun during spring break, the Eden Prairie boys U16 premier **soccer team** was experiencing the Super Bowl of European **soccer** on its trip to Chester, England. In the United States, where American football is regarded as America's game, nearly every young boy dreams of his chance at making it big as an NFL icon. However, for young boys elsewhere in the world, especially in England, that dream involves their deep passion for their beloved football - **soccer**.

Player development, a cultural awakening and personal growth were all objectives of the spring break trip to England. Wayne Harrison, coach and director of player development for the Eden Prairie **Soccer** Club, said that he wanted to expose the boys to the "passion [for **soccer**] that we don't have in America."

With the level of play in England, the Eden Prairie **team** showed no mercy as they finished with only one loss. The **team** participated in four games where they faced a Chester Club **team**, select **teams** and Liverpool's best amateur under- 16 **team**. Coach Harrison noted that the level of physical play presented much more of a challenge than the boys were used to in the States. In addition to the difference in level of play, parent Mike Petersen was astonished at the cultural differences in **soccer** etiquette. The British parents were much more calm and disciplined on the sidelines compared to the loud atmosphere he was accustomed to. Petersen also noted that British players were not allowed to be videotaped for legal reasons.

Not only did the boys experience firsthand what it was like to play against a European **team**, but they also attended two professional games. The passion, excitement and level of play were all elements that enhanced the boys' experience, said Harrison. The games gave the **team** the chance to understand the love for **soccer** that the Europeans have.

"The crowd was simply electric," said Harrison.

The passion of the crowd spoke to the love for **soccer** that is rarely seen in the United States. Its inspiration left a lasting memory on each individual player. Petersen is appreciative of the opportunity that the boys were given to "see kids from a different country that shared the same love for **soccer**."

Captain Alex Petersen, 16, also expressed his enjoyment of the games, but noted his appreciation for Harrison because he took them to "see a lot of older things" in terms of architecture and art.

The **team** visited numerous 600- to 700-year-old towns, the Manchester United grounds, a castle and many other places. As a result, the boys on the **team** were given the chance to form deeper **team** chemistry through their cultural experiences that will ultimately help them on and off the field.

Harrison hopes to make this a recurring trip for different **teams** throughout the club. Alex recommends this trip for future **teams**, saying it "gave our **team** experience that we couldn't have gotten in the States. And we are better for it."

Kristina Osberg of Eden Prairie is a freshman at the University of Loyola in Chicago.

The Eden Prairie U16 **soccer team** poses in front of England's Blackpool stadium. The Eden Prairie squad, accompanied by Wayne Harrison, Eden Prairie **Soccer** Club director of player development, traveled to England over spring break.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

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