

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Soccer Tournament Between USVI And Denmark Teams Shines Light On Sport's Potential In Territory

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ST. CROIX -- Soccer teams from the Virgin Islands and Denmark faced off in friendly matches set to commemorate the Centennial Transfer Day celebrations, but more importantly to build and promote the sport in the territory—in an event hosted by the St. Croix American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO). The St. Croix International Centennial Soccer Tournament was a series of events which began on April 13th, and ends today, April 15, with championship games and awards to be presented.

The AYSO, Region 1383, is a nonprofit organization established on St Croix since 1998, and is aimed at developing a successful youth soccer program on St. Croix. For the last twelve years they have worked to promote youth soccer on the island, and have been

working to raise funds to build a home field with a club house. They successfully relocated from the St Croix Renaissance Park to their newly owned field in Estate Fredensborg in July of 2015. This year the AYSO has over 200 children between the ages of 3-16 participating in their programs.

As part of their continued efforts, the AYSO sent two teams to participate in the Dana Cup International Soccer Tournament—the 3rd largest international youth soccer tournament—held in Hjørring, Denmark last summer.

“To see them grow and mature over the years has been really, really good, and in Denmark they stepped up big time. We played in a group that had almost a hundred teams and we were the top thirty-two. That’s growth. And you can see when their head’s in the game and they’re feeling it. The potential’s there, we have good talent here,” said Kim Hughes, a coach with the AYSO.

In addition, Mr. Hughes said the reestablishment and growth of the sport, especially seeing more of the talent that the island has to offer on a larger scale, is reliant on three things: a good volunteer staff; another sponsorship class that contributes more to the facilities, better equipment, and/or travel; and more space to accommodate classroom instructions, drills, practices, and other training.

Since the Dana Cup coincided with the Centennial celebrations, the AYSO integrated that with their first tournament to be held at their new location.

Shay Roberts and Garfield Doran—the commissioner and assistant commissioner of AYSO—said the purpose was to bring together members of the Danish team and members of local teams to not only reunite old friends and teammates, but as a mark to celebrate their move to a new location, and their hopes of rebuilding the sport in the territory. The two expressed their elation in seeing old and new faces participating in the event, and were even happier to see so many of the Danish parents coming to support the children.

In a message included in the official program, Governor Kenneth Mapp welcomed the Danish players as well as praising the efforts of the Youth Soccer Exchange Program’s benefits over the past few years. “As we observe the 100th anniversary of our political parting, events such as this soccer tournament remind us that we are still bound by lasting friendship, goodwill, and shared vision regarding positive human development. We have much to celebrate during these games,” said Governor Mapp in his message.

The commissioners of AYSO referred to the tournament as the beginning of grander things to come, but Mr. Doran said they decided that it was better to start out with something small.

“What we as a group decided was that it was probably better to start off on a smaller scale and just do a better job with a smaller number and see where can improve and then work towards having another tournament so individuals can plan appropriately. The bigger component was to actually see what we have in terms of resources here,” said Mr. Doran.

Unlike similar events that charge an entry fee for teams to participate, the International Centennial Soccer Tournament did not have such a fee. The tournament is also free to

the community to come out and support.

The final game of the 2016-2017 AYSO World Cup tournament and a welcome dinner for the Danish Team took place on the April, 8. This was followed by a Christiansted tour and a reception at the Government House on April 11. The official opening ceremony and first matches of the International Centennial Soccer Tournament were held on April 13.

Four under 15 (U15) teams participated:

1. The AYSO Select All-Stars, St Croix
2. USVISA Grassroots, St. Croix
3. Laraza VI, St Thomas
4. VBI, Denmark.

Matches:

Thursday, April 13th

AYSO Select vs. USVISA

VBI vs. LARAZA

Friday, April 14th

USVISA vs. VBI

AYSO Select vs. LARAZA VI

USVISA vs. LARAZA VI

AYSO Select vs. VBI

Saturday, April 15th

Third place game

Championship Game

Awards

The commissioner and assistant commissioner are encouraging the public to come out and support. They are also encouraging the community to volunteer so that they can better realize their goal of bringing soccer to the forefront in the territory much like basketball and baseball.

*Feature Image: St. Croix and St. Thomas teams compete in competition on Friday.
(Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)*