

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Down To The Wire: Denmark Wins Centennial Soccer Tournament In Final Match

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ST. CROIX -- In a fierce final game between the USVI and Denmark (played between the St. Croix and the Denmark teams on Saturday afternoon), the friendly Centennial soccer tournament organized by the St. Croix American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO), came down to the wire at the organization's new Fredensborg facility, with riveting action to the last minute. USVI supporters passionately cheered on members of the St. Croix team as they attempted to tie a 1-0 game that was in Denmark's favor. Meanwhile the Danes, who made the trip to the territory in support of their players, encouraged the team with cheers of their own to either build on the 1-0 lead, or hold on to it.

Strong plays were made by both sides, although Denmark, at least in the final half, appeared to be constantly on the offensive -- getting multiple opportunities to strike at the USVI's goalkeeper. In the end, Denmark won the tournament, beating the USVI team in the final game 1-0.

But the games were more than just winning -- they were about building relationships with Denmark team members (there's talk of the tournament returning next year); about strengthening the soccer league in the USVI; and, as AYSO members said on multiple occasions, the games were about the youth of the territory.



Teams gather for official photos following

tournament. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

"They are all our children" were the words repeated multiple times during the ceremony by AYSO volunteers and board members. AYSO members noted the monumental task in organizing the tournament, and continuously mentioned the youth as the reason for their perseverance.

Medals were awarded to members of all teams during the finals ceremony, with Danish player Bastian Christiansen being named most valuable player of the tournament, as well as highest scorer of the tournament (Mr. Christiansen scored the only goal to lead his team to victory).

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 AYSO has over 200 children between the ages of 3-16 participating in their programs.

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 heads are 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.

The tournament was Mr. Doran's last as assistant commissioner, as he'll be moving to the U.S. mainland. The beloved AYSO member was honored yesterday, with remarks being given by Ms. Roberts, who reminisced on Mr. Doran's dedication and passion for the organization as well as the youth.

"This guy, for the years he's been with me, he's been my right-hand man," she said, praising Mr. Garfield while presenting him with multiple gifts. Mr. Garfield thanked the AYSO organization, its board members, parents, coaches and the players.

"The comments that make this possible are the simple comments you hear on a Saturday morning when a grandparent or a parent says, 'You know why I am here? I got woken up because my child is reminding me we're going to be late -- yes, Crucian time -- late to the soccer field,'" Mr. Garfield said. "And they don't do it for school, they don't do it for any of the other functions, but they are excited about what we have going on here."

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," Mr. Mapp said.

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 we 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.

There was no access fee for the tournament.

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

Feature Image: Danish team celebrates win after being awarded trophies. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)