

Collin Burks – Soccer Without Borders – First Report

I am three months into my year with *Fútbol Sin Fronteras* (Soccer Without Borders) in Granada, Nicaragua and am so glad I have the opportunity to spend 9 more months here. From the very first day I arrived here in July, the staff and other volunteers of Soccer Without Borders have been incredibly welcoming and always willing to help me out with anything! During my first week in Nicaragua, I received a thorough introduction to the program's mission, goals, and everyday life. Our mission here in Granada is to use soccer as a tool for positive youth development. We offer soccer instruction and off-the-field education to girls of Granada aged 7-17; our focus is on girls because they have long been denied the same opportunities as boys. Leading the girls are four American coaches, six Nicaraguan coaches, and one American director.

For the first two weeks, the other two new volunteers and I spent time with each of the four teams in order to meet all the girls and figure out which team would fit us the best. I learned so much and had so much fun with all the teams, but I ended up working the best with the team of girls aged 12-15, the *Estrellas* (Stars), and am now one of their coaches. Below is a picture of my team after a morning of playing soccer and running on the lake shore!



Along with two Nicaraguan coaches, I lead a group of 20 girls. Each week, we have two days of soccer, two days of non-soccer educational activities, and an optional day with a special soccer session and a health education session. Learning to work with my fellow coaches to design and implement the soccer practices and educational activities has been a process filled with challenges, rewards, frustrations, and absolutely beautiful moments. We each bring different strengths and weaknesses to leading the team and have learned so much from each other already! Through practice, feedback, and reflection, I am constantly developing my skills in coaching, teaching, and mentoring.

During my first month here, we started off the new season with a week of Olympic-themed activities. On the first day, we divided the approximately 80 girls in the program into five teams: Canada, China, Brazil, Germany (see picture below), and South Africa. Each team was given an information sheet to learn facts about their country and memorize a few words of the country's official language. We then held an opening ceremony filled with speeches, flags, and creative performances by each of the teams. The next day, we headed to our field for an afternoon of relay races and a penalty kick competition. Watching girls of all ages work together was an awesome sight! The rest of the week included playing Olympic-inspired games inside our office space, including a long jump and mini-marathon competition, and a soccer tournament.



Another one of the highlights for the program over the past three months was a weeklong celebration of the U.N.-declared International Day of the Girl (October 11th). We started off the week by holding conversations on girls around the world who have overcome obstacles and made huge contributions to their communities. For another day, we paired up the older girls with the younger girls and had them discuss their past, present, and future selves. The week ended with a morning of team-building activities and the decoration of a banner – Day of the Girl: Now is my time. Hearing the girls speak about their rights and their hopes as women was incredibly powerful! Below is a picture of one of the girls on my team holding up a note that says “I am strong because I am a girl.”



I have had a great time getting to know the girls on my team so far and am so excited to continue developing relationships with them and their families. Besides continuing to produce soccer and educational content for my team, upcoming projects include creating a comprehensive school scholarship program for the girls and developing a satellite *Fútbol Sin Fronteras* program for girls who live too far from our main office. I am grateful that I have nine more months here in Granada to help the program expand and to continue learning and growing as a coach, educator, student, and friend!