

Ben Burnett – Soccer Without Borders  
Report #2 – December 8, 2014

*Introduction*

The first half of my yearlong commitment is coming to a close. Looking back on the past five months, I have come to realize the importance of making a year-long commitment to Soccer Without Borders and the girls in our program. As mentioned in my first report, the first two months were very much about learning and acclimation. I can now attest that this process never stopped; over the past three months, I continued to learn and make connections in ways that now benefit the program and our girls.

*Projects and Responsibilities*

As in the previous report, there are three parts to my projects and responsibilities: FSF Programming, Special Events, and School Visits & Expansion.

FSF Programming

Since my last report, practices and activities with the Mariposa Jrs have improved significantly. I now feel confident planning and leading sessions, knowing what works with my girls and what does not. Recent practices have addressed issues that the girls need to work on on the field (positioning and passing) and recent activities have addressed issues that are relevant both on and off the field (communication and positive attitude). Though the girls are a rowdy bunch, their involvement in both practices and activities shows they understand and are retaining the positive messages and information we are sharing with them. Some highlights from the past three months with the Mariposa Jrs include a friendly game, a community outreach project, and an end-of-the-year trip to the pool to celebrate the girls' hard work this season.

Special Events

- *Copa de la Paz*

Report 1 discussed some of the planning for our annual *Copa de la Paz*, a girls soccer tournament held every year to celebrate the International Day of Peace. Held on September 20<sup>th</sup>, the tournament was an overwhelming success, with over 20 teams participating from all over Granada and the surrounding area. Participation in the event was free, and all teams received a set of matching t-shirts to serve as jerseys (only one team already had jerseys) as well as access to water, Gatorade, and a light lunch. The *Copa de la Paz* is a very important event for Soccer Without Borders. Not only does it offer our teams a chance to play and compete, but it also extends this opportunity to girls who do not have access to our normal programming. Tournaments of this magnitude for youth in Granada are uncommon, and tournaments for girls even more uncommon. Each year we have hosted this event it has grown, and every year is a learning experience for the staff. As we grow and become more comfortable with the organization and execution of the *Copa de la Paz*, we hope to offer more tournaments and events of this magnitude to girls in the future.

- Scholarship Program

Last year, Soccer Without Borders Granada began offering scholarships to girls in the program. These scholarships cover the cost of matriculation, uniforms, and school supplies. In addition to receiving material and financial support, the girls also receive academic support. Every afternoon, we offer study hours here in the office; two or more coaches attend study hour to help with homework and the girls have access to computers and Internet. Finally, scholarship

recipients are also assigned a counselor, one of the coaches, who reviews the girls' grades and creates an action plan if they are falling behind.

The first year of the program, 2014, saw 12 scholarships awarded. In order to apply for a scholarship, girls must currently be enrolled or about to enroll in secondary school. There is an application all girls and their families must fill out, which takes into account a girl's participation in the program, attitude, grades, the family's financial need, and a personal statement from the applicant. Every girl who meets the requirements receives a scholarship; there is not a limited number of scholarships. Of the original 12 recipients, 10 continued to receive their scholarship throughout the entire year, while the other two were suspended for failing to attend school.

This past October and November we began the application process for 2015 scholarships (the Nicaraguan school year begins at the start of the calendar year). Now, with a year of experience under the staff's belt, we hoped to receive more applications from girls in the program and offer more scholarships. At the end of October we had received over 40 applications. The staff went on house visits to talk with the girls' parents, gauge their interest in their children's education, and do a rough check on the families' financial need. After finishing the application process, we elatedly announced that 29 girls had qualified and will be receiving scholarships for the 2015 school year. I was particularly excited and proud that two of the older girls from the Mariposa Jrs will be receiving scholarships.

#### School Visits & Expansion

School visits for the last three months have continued to focus on the new neighborhood, *La Villa*. After spending more than four months in total visiting schools, we have formed solid relationships with many of the girls and gym teachers in *La Villa*. One of the most rewarding connections has been with a gym teacher, Edgar. Not only did he welcome us into his classroom, but he has also taken a great interest in the work we are doing. He brought a team of girls from his school to compete in the *Copa de la Paz* (walking over 3 miles with the girls to get to the field) and has helped organize friendly games between his girls and the teams here at Soccer Without Borders. Going forward, he is a key resource for us in *La Villa*.

In addition to the school visits in *La Villa*, the past five months have seen a tremendous growth in potential for forming a new team there. As part of a community service project, one of our older teams, *Las Estrellas*, hosted a one-day clinic for girls in *La Villa*. Using our connections in the schools, we publicized the event, and over 15 girls showed up, making the event a success. Furthermore, the clinic was hosted in *La Villa*, and we now have permission to use this field for further practices and events there. While people in Granada are used to seeing girls practice at the *Multiestadio*, our normal field, initiating girls' soccer in this new neighborhood will hopefully bring awareness to a new group of people and strengthen the legitimacy and support for girls' sports in Granada even further. With a good foundation of girls and a space to play, I hope to initiate a new Soccer Without Borders team in *La Villa* by February 2015.

#### *Conclusion*

While five months seems like a long time, I now realize that the whole first half of my experience here has been preparation for the second half. Over five months, I have developed a good rapport with my girls, made important connections in the community, learned to communicate effectively in Spanish, and, most importantly, discovered how *Fútbol Sin Fronteras* works in Granada, Nicaragua. Now, with everything I have learned, I am excited to return in January full of ideas, changes, and plans to put into action.