

Costa Rica Journal: February 5–12

By Ben Lemay

Minnesota ODP players Ben Lemay (Hugo), Ryan Herold (Fridley) and Tyler Anderson (Bloomington) were part of a International Tournament in Costa Rica with Region II ODP in February 2011. Toby Khounviseth (Lakeville) also participated in the event with the 1996 age group. Sophie Babo (Maple Grove) travelled to Costa Rica and Kylie Schwarz (Plymouth) to Holland both with Region II ODP. Congratulations to each of you and thank you to Ben for keeping a journal of the Costa Rica event.

John Curtis

MYSA Director of Coaching and Player Development

Saturday February 5

Woke up at 4:00 am to catch my 7:00 am flight to Houston and then connect to Costa Rica. The whole team met in Houston and then we flew together to San Jose, Costa Rica. We arrived at around 3:30 pm (there is no time difference). I didn't realize how many mountains and how hilly Costa Rica was. From the airport we had a half hour bus ride to our hotel. Along the way the sights were amazing. Everything was so much different than in Minnesota. It was so surreal to actually be in Costa Rica. The landscape was beautiful with all its mountains and different trees. It definitely had a "3rd world" feel to it that was different than Minnesota. We saw plenty of slums along the way, which were just basically overcrowded neighborhoods with tin roofs. Everything was held in by metal gates, usually with barbed wire on top. Besides this, all the people we met were really nice.

Once at our hotel, we had a few minutes to get settled before we had a training session at 6. The hotel was really nice. There were outdoor hallways and all the rooms had outdoor patios. Training was pretty light, just basically getting to know each other and a few passing drills. Dinner was at 7:30. I expected something like rice and beans but it was actually very good. By the time dinner was over we were all exhausted. We went back to our rooms to watch some Spanish T.V. and then were in bed at 10:30.

Sunday February 6

Up at 6:45, for a 7:00 breakfast... only to find out that our coach had the schedule wrong and breakfast wasn't actually until 9:00. After breakfast, we had orientation. Our guides from Costa Rica soccer tours had a presentation telling us all about Costa Rica and our schedule for the week. When that was over, we had a tactical training session at 10:30, where we went over our shape and style of play. We came back for lunch at 1:00. After lunch, we had a little break and then training at 3:00. Training was still pretty light.

At night, we had opening ceremonies for the tournament. All the region teams and the Costa Rican teams ate dinner together and we got a chance to meet and talk to the Costa Rican players. It was fun and the food was great, but we had to miss the super bowl. We came back to the hotel, and we're in bed by 10:30.

Monday February 7

Up at 6:45 for breakfast at 7:00. After breakfast, we did a walk through training to go over our formation and restarts such as free kicks and corner kicks. After training, we came back for a light lunch. After lunch, we had some downtime before we left at 12:30 for our first game. We played Brujas U17's. All the teams we played were the youth teams of professional Costa Rican clubs. We played all our games in the actual professional team stadiums which was really cool. We came out pretty fast and had a few early chances, but couldn't finish. The rest of the game we played well, but couldn't keep any real possession. We lost 3 to 1. I played alright. I had a free kick that hit the cross bar and my teammate scored off the rebound. We were all happy to get the first game jitters out of our system, and looked forward to getting a better result tomorrow. We came back for dinner and then bed at 10:30.

Tuesday February 8

Up at 6:45 for breakfast at 7:00. We had a light training after breakfast to go over our defensive strategy before our second game. We came back to the hotel for a quick lunch at and then left at 12:30 for our game. We played Heredia in their stadium which was really big and nice. We played really well and got a 2-0 win. I played pretty well and had an assist, but missed a couple of really good chances. I hit the post once and put another easy chance right at the goalie. Besides that, it was really nice to just get a win and the team was really excited. That night we went out to eat at an authentic, Costa Rican restaurant. The food was actually really good and the team had lots of fun. We came back to the hotel for some relaxation time and were in bed by 10:30.

Wednesday February 9

Today was a long, but it was really fun day! It was our day off from playing and our chance to see some of the amazing tourist attractions that Costa Rica has to offer. In the morning, we were up for a 6:30 breakfast and then left at 7:00. We had a long two hour bus ride to get to the coast, but it was definitely worth it. We started the day off with a zip-line tour through the canopy of the rain forest. We were able to ride eight different zip-lines through the rain forest, which were

about 100 feet high. It was amazing and definitely a once in a lifetime experience.

We then went to Playa Blanca, or white beach. It's considered one of the nicest beaches in all of Central America. We spent our time just relaxing in the sun and doing a little body surfing.

Finally, we came back to the hotel for a quick dinner at 6 and then left to see a professional game between Heredia and Alejuela. The game was at Heredia's stadium, where we had played yesterday. It was pretty cool to see all the fans go crazy for the teams, and it was overall a very good game. Alejuela was clearly the better team and they won 1-0. We came back exhausted and were in bed by around 11:00.

Thursday February 10

Since we were out late last night, we were able to sleep in a little bit. Breakfast wasn't until 8:30. After breakfast, we went to a local community center to play with some local kids. It was a pretty amazing experience and all the kids were so excited to see us. They gave us big hugs and always wanted to ride on our shoulders. You couldn't help but smile the whole time. It was pretty amazing.

After this we had to settle down and focus on our game that afternoon. We played Saprissa who was tied for the lead in the tournament. Unfortunately, I did not start in the game, but it was probably better for me because our team came out really flat and we went down 2-0 in the first 20 minutes. I came in about half way through the first half and played pretty well. I scored a free kick late in the game but we lost 3-1. It was a disappointing loss but I was excited because I was awarded player of the game. We came back for dinner and had some relaxation time before bed.

Friday February 11

Up at 6:30 for breakfast at 7:00. After a quick breakfast, we left for our city tour. It wasn't so much a tour, but rather shopping at a flea market. The market was really interesting. They had all the souvenirs you could imagine, including t-shirts and jerseys which were really popular. I bought myself an Alajuela jersey.

After shopping, we went back to the hotel for lunch and then left for our final game against Alajuela. Unfortunately, we did not end the tournament well, and lost 3-0. We came back after the game for dinner and a closing ceremony, in which we were shown videos of the week and had an award ceremony.

The week went by so fast and was really an amazing experience. I am so glad I was given the opportunity to go.