

Quan Family Eurotour 2022 (Jen and Eric Quan) 8/25/2022

We travelled as a family of 5 (we are actually 6, but dropped our oldest in Paris for a summer program so she wouldn't be complaining the whole two weeks about needing to be at soccer fields all day watching her kid sisters play) with two players, two parents and the 7 year old baby of the family tagging along for the ride.

While our highlights could easily mirror any best of list for the Gothia and Dana Cups including perhaps most notably Gothia Cup's Olympics-style opening ceremony in the sold out 40,000+ person Ullevi stadium in Gothenburg, Sweden and Dana Cup's parade of nations through the quaint town of Hjørring, Denmark with its residents standing outside of their homes and restaurants cheering us on, but it was two of the most human and touching experiences during our two weeks that have created the most endearing and enduring memories.

Among the song and dance and pomp and circumstance, most countries were introduced a couple or a few at a time at the Gothia Cup opening ceremony, but there were two groups that were given the stage all to themselves.

Special Olympics (SO) was the first. The moment the SO athletes were introduced, we immediately leapt to our feet to cheer them on. Our girls were in the process of volunteering to work with SO here on Hawaii and were so excited to see a contingent at Gothia Cup. Then coincidentally the girls played the majority of their matches at the Kivberg sports complex (a highlight in and of itself with endless soccer fields, volleyball courts and even year-round ski training facilities with actual snow) just beside the fields dedicated to the SO athletes. Outside of the group championship games, SO fields were the only ones with announcers and music, the energy from those fields was palpable and the cheer after each score echoed many fields away. While global (70+ countries) and gender (many girls and boys teams) inclusion were a given, our hearts were warmed not only by the participation of the SO athletes but also by the way their participation was honored and celebrated at the Gothia Cup.

The other group named individually at the Gothia Cup opening ceremony was the two teams from Ukraine. Given the circumstances surrounding the war this year, the entire stadium immediately stood in celebration of all that their presence represented. But our connection with the war-ravaged nation was only just beginning. During the Dana Cup parade, as a part of the United States contingent, we proudly walked immediately behind our new friends and their blue and yellow flag, which has become a global symbol for resilience, democracy and freedom. But the best surprise was saved for last. After all the matches were done, the Ukrainian DUFK Chernomorets 2010 girls team reached out to play a friendly. The girls played as opponents in the first half, but then mixed the teams with shared jerseys to play together in the second half. Photos were taken, gifts and flags were exchanged, and friendships were created. If only global diplomacy was as simple and pure as the laughter of children and a game of soccer.

We wanted our girls to see the world, learn from how others play and cherish the game of soccer and make some friends. Yes, yes and yes, but they got so much more, they learned that

even though life is so much bigger than a game, it can be experienced and made better through it. Soccer is about more than kicking a ball at our local park and even more than winning or losing, something that far too often we limit it to in our country. Soccer is a way to talk to, learn from and love our neighbors even if we don't understand each other's languages or know anything else about each other. Soccer is a tie that binds, the beginning, but not the end. Soccer isn't life, but it certainly helps make life worth living. And the Eurotour with NSA definitely qualifies as life worth living.



NSA 2010 team



Skagen



Dana Cup Opening Ceremony Parade



Ukrainian DUFK Chernomorets 2010 girls





Gothia Cup





Coach Fred, Chloe, Sonu, Zoe, Teegan, Riley, Coach Carlos

Jeimi, Haley, Abby, Kaelyn, Kara, Rebeca, Cherelle