



U.S. Department of State

World Cup Sports Initiative Soccer Diplomacy Finds a Common Voice

The U.S. Department of State’s World Cup Sports Initiative, exemplified “sports diplomacy” at its best. The initiative will have an impact on the lives of 30 young soccer players and the hundreds of Americans, Germans, and others who met them long after the FIFA 2006 World Cup final match.

Thirteen girls and seventeen boys, ages 13-18, representing thirteen countries around the world, demonstrated how we can build bridges of understanding even in the framework of one of the world’s fiercest sports competitions. A partnership between the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Soccer Federation, and Major League Soccer (MLS), the World Cup Sports Initiative embodied the theme of this year’s World Cup, “a time to make friends,” with an emphasis on increasing international understanding and respect between young people around the world.



Through the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs’ Sports Visitor Program, these young soccer players participated in events in Washington, D.C., New York City, and Germany demonstrating that engaging youth through sports can spark meaningful and lasting cross-border and cross culture dialogue. Through clinics and events with MLS, DC United, the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Washington, the University of Maryland, and Top Soccer, an organization focused on providing soccer for youth with disabilities, the delegation had the opportunity to learn about the structure of sports in the United States and how grass roots community sports programs serve young people.

Through the World Cup Sports Initiative these young players discovered how success in athletics — with an emphasis on teamwork, respect, leadership, and conflict resolution — can translate into the development of life skills and academic achievement.

“I’ll tell (my friends back home) about all the things I learned here,” said Yasmeen from Bahrain. “How to work with each other, how to communicate with different people from different countries.”

