

# 2013 US Youth Soccer ODP Girls International Tournament: Feb. 14–21, 2013 (Costa Rica)

By Abby Hess

## February 15<sup>th</sup> First Full Day!

Today began with an early breakfast and a chance for us girls to learn some of the names of our teammates. During breakfast, there was a little presentation with some facts about Costa Rica. We then headed to the fields for our first time ever taking the field as a team. It was SO hot...very different from Minnesota! I really had to adjust and I still will have to get used to the heat.

This morning, we just did a small defensive practice to ensure that when we play the U17 Costa Rica National Team, we will be able to defend them as a team. As long as we can defend as a team, the attacking side of it will be a little more natural. I can tell after one day that this team is so full of talent. Anyways, after the first training we went back to the hotel for a pool workout just to get our muscles relaxed. Then, we had lunch. The meals are so different than what we're all used to and it's really fun to experience a different culture! After lunch, we were able to relax for about an hour. Then, we went to our second training. It was odd, but it was so much cooler than earlier! The national team coach was there to just see kind of how we work as a team and how we started off the week. We worked on having good movement as a team and how to be a unit. We then came back to the hotel for another pool workout. After that, we had a chance to shower and then we went to dinner. So far, every meal has included rice and beans... even breakfast! After dinner, we all bonded as a team for a little bit. Then, we met in our team room and had a meeting with Coach Dickey and Coach John. We went over defensive ideas and our goals as a team and individually.

### Individual Player Goals:

- Learn a better mental game, tactics
- Better defensive tactics
- Reading the game better
- Awareness of players
- Able to play 80-90 minutes
- Seeing the gaps/space/splits
- Playing quickly
- Regaining possession
- Identify opponents' weaknesses
- Defensive specifics

### Team Goals:

- Exposure to international competition
- Possess to penetrate, 6+ players involved
- Ball winning mentality, 6 seconds to win ball back
- Creative risk-takers
- Fast ball movement
- Patience defensively against older players

- Winning for U.S.A. (protect a lead, take a risk)
- What if they don't come out of their half?
- Use the width
- Find a dribbler
- New ways of attacking
- Early services in
- Be a leader when the game is tough

I am so stoked to be here and I can't wait to play and represent not only our region, but the United States!



## February 16<sup>th</sup> Day 2

Today, we got to sleep in! By that I mean until 7:30, breakfast was at 8:00! We left for the fields at 8:30 for our first time ever playing in a game together as a team. When we arrived at the fields, we were taken to our personal locker room but we had to get ready and leave quickly to get out to the field. We were able to warm up for 25 minutes. I wasn't put in as a starter but my coach said he wanted to have as strong of a bench as he could. I took this as a positive and didn't even think about it. All I could think about was how was I going to change the game when I got to play.

Our team started off so strong and scored a goal in the first 15 minutes. We then kind of lost our rhythm. This was unfortunate, but we were able to talk about it for a while at half time. I went in for the second half and got to do what I love most. I was in at center forward and was able to "cause trouble for the other team" as my coach says. I was very proud of how not only I played, but of my team as a whole. We ended up losing 1-2, but the coaches were really proud of us and canceled our scheduled practice for this afternoon. That was a somewhat pleasant surprise!

Everyone was able to relax and do whatever for a little bit...after our freezing cold pool workout of course! After dinner we all just met up in our team room and had a meeting. We discussed for about an

hour and a half what we thought about our play overall today.

Discussion Points:

Finishing/cleaner shots

Stay focused in the last 10 minutes

Defending as a team/unit (6 seconds)

Connect the ball (find feet)

Move the ball around to slow the game down

Use the whole field (longer and wider)

Utilize the opportunities when created

Take advantage of wide players

**Be dangerous**

Spin with arm when back to goal

I found out I would be starting the match on Sunday as a right back. My coach said he'd just like to see "what I can bring to the table back there" and I am so excited! This is a once in a lifetime chance and being able to play defense is just another thing I can learn from Coach Dickey and Coach John. I am so excited and a little nervous, but in a good way of course! I know I will be able to do well if I just play with confidence. Today was another amazing day and I have so much to look forward to!



**February 17: Day 3**

This morning went the same as yesterday. Today we played a different team and I played right back. This was very new to me but I was more than happy to get to experience the game from a different position. The team did another great job today! We won 1-0 in the last seven minutes. It was a very well-matched game!

After our game, we had a pool workout and lunch. We then went to a small mall that was right by our hotel. It was cute and had a lot of stores! The looks we get when we all walk into a place are priceless! After the mall, we went back to the hotel and were able to relax for a little bit. We had to get ready for cultural night later and we were all really pumped for that! It was seriously a blast! We got to try so many cultural foods and all of the local teams brought something for the U.S. teams to try! We then watched Costa Rican dancers...this was the highlight of my day, besides winning of course! It was amazing and the dancers were so talented! After the dancers did their thing, we were able to dance a little bit and then take pictures

with them. I had so much fun! Tomorrow should be a lot of fun too because we will be at the beach the whole day and then zip lining as a team. I'm so excited!

**February 18: Day 4**

Today is considered a resting day although we won't be resting that much...at 8:30 a.m. we were starting our adventure to the beach! It was a pretty long drive, but it was so worth it! We went to a beach called White Beach. It is called this because the sand is very white. It was so hot and the water felt so amazing! After an hour at the beach, we went to a different beach that also had a couple of ponds. We got to spend about another hour there. After relaxing in the sun and swimming, we went to lunch at a buffet-style restaurant. This was like nowhere I've ever eaten before. There were these sloth-like animals all over! It was outside so the animals would come right up to you seeking food. It was very different but also very enjoyable.

After lunch, we went back to White Beach for another hour...until it was time to go zip lining! I was so nervous but I knew that it was pretty much a once in a lifetime chance, so I just embraced the opportunity (I'm very glad that I did)! The course was 14 platforms and 12 lines. The first three were incredibly high and scary. By the end though, I felt like a pro☺. This experience seriously has been phenomenal! I can't believe it is almost over. I am just going to make the absolute most of the rest of the trip. I can't wait to go to the orphanage tomorrow!!!

**February 19: Day 5**

Going into today, I didn't think anything could top yesterday, but I learned I was maybe a little wrong...Today started out with a morning practice. We just did a light technical shooting practice. I took a lot from it. I even learned a new cool way of turning with the ball!

After our light practice, we headed back to the hotel to rest and do some homework. We did that for about two hours! After that, we had lunch and then had a meeting. This meeting was about our futures. I really enjoyed it because it made me realize how many possibilities I have for my future. I am so excited to continue to grow and show my best performances and hopefully someday I'll make it to the top (aka a national team)!

The meeting was about an hour and a half. Then, we were off to the orphanage! I was looking so forward to this since day one! I love children so this was right up my alley! We were able to take soccer balls with us to give to the kids and they were able to keep them. When we got there and the kids came out, I immediately fell in love with them! They were so happy and cute. I made so many friends with the little kids but one little girl particularly hung on to me! She is literally the cutest kid ever and all she wanted was for me to hold her! I seriously loved her! We got to run

around and hang out with the kids for about an hour but it only felt like ten minutes. When we had to leave, my little girl grabbed me and kissed my cheek and said "te amo." This means I love you in Spanish. I seriously melted! I wanted to go back immediately after we left. The kids taught us all that it doesn't matter what you have as long as you are surrounded with love. They were all so happy and precious.



After we left, it was game time. We played our third game against the oldest team we would play this week. They were really good competition! We scored first making it a 1-0 game. It remained this way until half time. In the second half, they scored two goals making it 1-2. We really shifted into high gear and fought for a win but, unfortunately, it didn't happen fast enough. The final score was a loss for Region II: 1-2. Coach Mike was disappointed with the score, but not in us. He liked how we worked and we are all looking forward to the game against Saprissa tomorrow. Today, to say the least, was one of the best days of my life! I loved the orphanage so much, words cannot describe it. I am so grateful to be along on this trip.

## February 20: Last Full Day

Today began just like every other day, an early breakfast and a team meeting. We were trying to get ourselves mentally prepared for our hardest game... Saprissa.

Our tour guide led us on a city tour after breakfast in the capital of Costa Rica, San Jose. We learned about monumental things in Costa Rican history. Then, we went souvenir shopping for 45 minutes. We were able to really bargain to get a low price for things. This was a lot of fun and made us all feel smart! After doing some shopping, we went back to the hotel to have a light lunch and a final meeting to make sure everybody was ready for the game.

About a half hour later, we headed for the stadium. When we got there, we got ready to do warm-ups. I wasn't going to start, but I was so "in the zone." I wanted to do nothing but prove myself. I was pumped. The whistle blew and the game started. We could all tell it was going to be a tough game. We scored kind of early and this really frazzled the opponents. They began to yell at each other. We were up 1-0 at the half.

Early in the second half, we scored again... 2-0 us. Now, Saprissa was scared. They weren't used to being beat and they didn't plan on losing today. Half way through the second half, we scored again. 3-0 us. Saprissa somewhat checked out now. We just wanted to possess the ball or else just deny their shots. We did and the game ended 3-0.

We pulled out a solid win against our toughest competition. This week has done nothing but help me. Now I know how possible it is for me to be a national player. I have more desire than ever to be on the U.S.A. team. I am going to work my butt off and get myself in the best shape and do my best to make that opportunity possible. I am so blessed to have the support I have and I know that there is a lot of room for improvement and I plan on closing that gap. I am very determined!