

## Costa Rica: Day ONE and TWO

We arrived in Costa Rica International Airport around 7pm on Saturday evening, safe, sound and just a bit tired from a full day of travel. The airport in Costa Rica is very simple to navigate and we were literally on our team bus within a few minutes after arriving and being warmly greeted by our wonderful hosts of Costa Rica Soccer Tours. We all boarded our bus, which we will have for the week, and headed to our hotel in the outskirts of San Jose in great time. The boys had a light dinner and we put everyone off to sleep, as tomorrow, Sunday, would be our first and only day to prepare on the field before the tournament begins.

Sunday morning, Day Two, started with 9 am breakfast consisting of rice, beans, eggs, pancakes, and fresh fruit. Randall Pochet, President of Costa Rica Soccer Tours, personally gave all the Regional teams a good overview of the tournament and week ahead. We have a full schedule ahead of us, with four 90 minute matches played throughout the week, versus the youth teams of four of the top professional soccer teams in the Costa Rica: Heredia ( Monday) , Saprissa ( Tuesday) , Brujas ( Wednesday) , and Alajuela ( Thursday). We also found out that these top youth teams are also comprised up of mainly players born in 92 and 93, which poses a strong challenge for our group of 94's.

We trained twice today (10am and 3pm), both short in duration as to not spend too much time out in the heat. This morning the training focused on our team's defensive shape as getting organized is perhaps the best way to be competitive with the teams we are to play this week. The trainings take place at the Costa Rica National training grounds are of a very good quality and are very wide: over 80 yards wide. We worked with our back-fours in staying connected as well as our distances of cover and body-positioning. We headed back after training satisfied that we had taken a good step forward in getting a bit of organizational understanding.

Our awesome trainer Holly Snair reminded all the boys just how important it was for each player to take responsibility for their bodies, their hydration and their recovery time. Each player is required to carry around their own bottle of water, which they should be hydrating from throughout the day. We know the heat here will take its toll, and good hydration will be very important.

The afternoon session consisted of a dynamic warm-up, some goalkeeper work and a passing exercise for the field players. We ended with some attacking shadow play in our formation versus some limited pressure. Again, the session was shorter, about an hour, and used to familiarize the players on some of the ideas on how we want to support and move for each other in attack.

We all had a fun and eventful evening tonight after these two sessions. Everyone was pleased again with the food and many hungry players were fed very well. After dinner we treated to some traditional Costa Rican dancers who gave us a very energetic and spirited show and then called up some players and coaches to the dance as well. Coach Josh Kalkstein got called up and did his part to the laughter of all. There was even a "Dance Off" in which one player from each region came up and showed their best moves to the applause of the crowd. Robert Beltran, from Oregon, was our Region IV rep and he was the clear winner, with some great moves including the "pin drop" which he will be teaching his teammates later.

Some other events have also made headlines throughout the day. The SUPER BOWL is on and New Orleans has just won it. The players all seem happy that they have become champs. Also, the election for the new Costa Rican President has taken place... we are all awaiting the news and many predict Laura will win, the first female ever if she does get the needed votes. Tomorrow it should be official who the new President of Costa Rica will be.

We finished off the evening with short film sessions (20 minutes) with each of our lines, GK and back four, midfielders, and midfielders and forwards and a brief tactical talk to further prepare for tomorrow's opening match. Tomorrow is Monday and we will officially open up the tournament with our match versus Heredia at 10 am. Now it is time to get some sleep as we are up early tomorrow morning for breakfast before the game. We are all excited to be playing this top team. PURA VIDA

Paul Holocher  
Assistant Coach  
Region IV 94's