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Spirit of Soccer Team Cambodia captures festival fair play award

WEDNESDAY, 21 JULY 2010 15:00 | H.S. MANJUNATH



THE Spirit of Soccer Cambodia team captured the hearts and minds of a global audience, not with their mastery of the Jabulani ball, but with their exemplary behaviour on and off the pitch. When the curtain came down on the Football for Hope Festival in one of the poorest slums in Johannesburg's Alexandra township, the loudest cheers were reserved for the Kingdom's squad, who claimed the coveted Fairplay award at the 2010 World Cup sideshow.



Spirit of Soccer Team Cambodia celebrate winning the Fairplay award at the 2010 Football For Hope Festival in Johannesburg. STEVEN SONDERMAN/SOS

The festival, which is a strategic alliance between the world football governing body International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) and the streetfootballworld network.

Thirty two teams drawn from disadvantaged communities around the world took part in the week-long event played from July 4-10, which uses the profile of football to help achieve sustainable social development.



Spirit of Soccer Team Cambodia goalkeeper Rydam Sengvy rejoices after his side's victory over Team Finland. STEVEN SONDERMAN/SOS

The event was kicked off with two powerful messages from leading dignitaries of the 2010 World Cup. FIFA president Sepp Blatter and South African premier Jacob Zuma both attended the opening ceremony, and emphasised the significance of the festival which was running alongside the biggest sports show on Earth.

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"We aim to leave a legacy in Africa that will last long after the final whistle of the 2010 World Cup is blown," declared Sepp Blatter, while Jacob Zuma's said "football is more than football; it is something far beyond."

The most poignant observation came from Jurgen Griesbeck, Managing Director of Streetworldfootball. "From the minefields of Cambodia to the slums of Nairobi, football can bring hope to the lives of young people," he stated.

For the eight Cambodian participants who went on the unforgettable South African excursion, life has seemingly turned a full circle.

"It was meant to be a game changer, and it has indeed changed their lives and their attitudes towards it," said Stephen Sonderman, director of local NGO Spirit of Soccer, which gave the team, moral, material, logistical and financial support for the trip.

In terms of results, Cambodia ended in the less illustrious second tier having won two games and drawn two from their ten fixtures.

"The result simply did not matter, though some of the girls broke into tears and long spells of sadness after every defeat," said Sonderman, who accompanied the team along with colleague Rachel Haig.



Spirit of Soccer defender Yem Vith battles with a Team England player during their Football for Hope Festival match at the Alexandra township pitch near Johannesburg. STEVEN SONDERMAN/SOS



With the Cambodian flag painted on her face, Spirit of Soccer striker Keng Channou sounds her vuvuzela in the stands during the 2010 World Cup quarterfinal between Spain and Paraguay. STEVEN SONDERMAN/SOS

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