

My trip to Ireland



At the end of regional camp this year, I was really nervous. The competition at camp seemed very tough and I wasn't sure I would get selected to the regional pool like I had done before. We found out during the week that 18 players were going to be selected from the pool to go to Ireland and play in two weeks. I was really excited, but I didn't want to get my hopes up too much. It was a long, hot and tiring week, and Friday finally came. I had been on the pool list all week, but I was still really nervous. I woke up and we trained for the last time at camp.....that was it. Then, we had to wait for the closing ceremony. I could hardly stand the wait, and not knowing if I made it. Then, they announced the names of the players selected to the regional pool, and I heard mine. I was really happy and relieved. Just after the ceremony, they asked some of us to stay behind and meet as a group. At this time, we were told that we were the 18 players who were selected to also go to Ireland. I could not believe it! I was so excited and so honored. I couldn't wait to tell my family.

Having been chosen as one of the players to represent Region 1 and New York State West in Ireland meant so much to me. Much of my family's heritage began in Ireland. When my Grandmother found out, she was so happy and she requested that I look up information about my ancestors and of course....take tons of pictures for her. The rest of my relatives were jealous, but happy for me too. I was a bit nervous about the flight, but when I saw the airplane which had a shamrock on it, I knew right then that I'd be fine, and I was "lucky" to be going.

We stayed in Dublin at a beautiful hotel on a beach and golf course for ten days. Each morning we went for a run on the beach, trained, and either played in a game, or we went sight seeing. Some of the sights we visited were the Malahide Castle, downtown Dublin, the Guinness Factory, and we even watched the men's Irish National Team play a game. I thought it was pretty cool to see how the Irish people drove on the opposite side of the road, and how they had different sayings for things than we do. It took a while for me to get used to the money as Euros instead of dollars too.

We played four games, and our first one was against the u16 Irish national team. It had rained all day, but we were ready to play. We played through about 30 minutes into the first half, when the Irish team scored. At 1-0, the game went back and fourth, but we couldn't finish. The game was

called early in the second half due to the rain, and we ended in the 1-0 loss. We all felt kind of down after the defeat, but we were determined to come out strong in our next game. Next we played the older Irish national teams (u17, u18, & U19s). Coach "D".... (Darren Marshall) really motivated us to work hard. We ended up playing much better, and we went undefeated in all of the 3 remaining games. Coach D was so proud of us for finishing strong, and it seemed that each game we worked better together and we were more organized.

Making friends with my teammates was so fun and easy for me. Our chaperone Lisa Cole, Coach D, Coach Meredith Flaherty and our Trainer Al, made us feel like family. Coach D had a way to get us all pumped up before we played. We even made friends with the hotel staff. They were awesome and so nice that they even came to our last game to cheer us on.

For me, being able to play internationally was way more exciting and meaningful than I could have imagined. I was so honored to not only represent Region 1, but also the United States in another country. To me, Ireland meant a chance to see what my ancestors have seen, learn a bit about the culture, but with soccer, to continue to work on things to make me a better player so that I may be able to travel to represent Region 1 ODP again sometime. It made me realize that I need to continue to work hard if I want to experience something like this amazing trip in the future.

I learned many things on my trip, but the most important was not only a lesson for soccer, but a life lesson. Coach D told us all something that made an impression on me. He said that, "ten out of ten times to win" which also means to "never give up and persevere until you succeed." I would like to really thank my NYSW coaches, Maureen Dracup and Dan Shoniker for helping me this year with a ton of pointers and support to help me out and continue my development. I would also like to thank all of the coaches including my club coach, Mike Paolini, who put in a lot of time to train me. I would like to thank Coach "D", Coach Mer- Flar, and Lisa for an exciting and definitely memorable trip, and especially to Region 1 for choosing me for this event.

~Jackie Firenze



Jackie Firenze - 93 Region 1 pool



93 Region 1 Pool with Irish National u18 Team