

UPF Australia's Soccer for Peace Tournament 2014

Yu Mi Go
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Cheon Il Guk Youth Missionary



The Alliance Team hoists the winning trophy

In anticipation of an upcoming interfaith conference, UPF Australia organized the Soccer for Peace Tournament 2014 in collaboration with Iraqi Renaissance, Inc. on Sunday, November 2, in Sydney. More than sixty athletes, grouped into two Muslim teams, one Burmese team and UPF Australia, played against each other in the tournament.

The purpose of this futsal competition was to encourage harmony, understanding and friendship among youth from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds as well as to promote leadership, good character and world peace through sport, following in the footsteps of UPF's founder Dr. Sun Myung Moon. Futsal is a type of association football, played indoors with five players on each team. The word comes from the Spanish language *futbol* and *sala*, which means "indoors."

The young participants had various religious affiliations including to Islam, to Buddhism and to Unificationism and were ethnically diverse. The games were futsal-style consisting of ten-minute halves, with a five-minute break. Four teams played eight games in this round-robin tournament. The Alliance Team won first place and the "Best Scorer" award went to Khalefa Khoiber of the Iraqi team. Heung Ghe Stone from the Eco Dogs (the UFP-Australia team) won the MVP award and Khalil Mohamed of the Alliance Team won the "Best and Fairest" award.



A Futsal game in action

Although UPF was holding the tournament for the first time, the response from the participants was positive. After the end games ended, the coaches and athletes were interviewed. Alex, the captain of the Alliance Team remarked, "We are grateful for being invited to this tournament.

I am happy to be able to play for peace. I was happy to be able to play shoulder-to-shoulder with my brothers." When asked, "Do you think some change can be made to the culture in Australia through these interfaith events?" he answered, "If a variety of cultures can get together through these events, I am sure Australia will become stronger, and we will be able to understand more people.

Although we come from different backgrounds, if we can try to understand each other's culture, help and understand each other, I believe we can create a better culture."

Khalil Mohamed indicated his hope to play next time saying, "It was a good match. Next time I hope we will have more teams to play with."

He also expressed his appreciation to the sponsors by saying, "These days, people often judge another person's faith, religion and culture. There is a lot of misunderstanding of each other's cultures and religions. I hope that such misunderstandings can be dispelled through these games. I made some good friends through these matches. We exchanged our numbered uniforms and promised to play again. If it weren't for this tournament, I would not have met my new friends. I am happy to have come to know them at this time."

Ghassan Alassadi, an ambassador for peace who served as the co-sponsor and head coach expressed his views on building peace through sports saying, "This game was held for an even better event in the future. All the team members were happy. I believe this is something of a practice for creating peace. I believe peace can be made through sports. Through sports, we build friendships and during the matches, athletes focus on the game rather than on religion, culture or tradition. By doing so they learn to become one."

If there is a way to break down the walls between religion, culture and race by exchanging looks and gestures rather than words, it would be through sports. In Australia, the call for building world peace does not remain an empty slogan but is being realized by the young people who are taking action with this vision. They will be the ones who will lead Australia in the future. Under the vision that "World Peace begins from Australia" we will continue to develop this Soccer for Peace initiative.