



Girl's Football Tournament Report

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Preparations

The girl's football tournament was one of my earliest ideas when I arrived on the Ilha. There is not a lot to do on the island, other than lying on the beaches, swimming or football. As a result there are quite a few informal 5 a-side teams in competition, always looking for some sort of tournament to get involved in. Preparations for the tournament took a good 3 weeks, which included an incredibly frustrating and unsuccessful trip to Nampula, numerous meetings and letters written to the Conselho Municipal (Municipal Council) and the Secondary School, a good number of set backs and difficulties, but in the end everything led to a successful tournament on the weekend of the 9th and 10th of May 2009 with *Lar Dos Estudantes* being the eventual winners, triumphing 1-0 in near darkness on the Campo do Sporting with a packed, emotive audience watching and shouting from the sidelines.

Being my first Project since my arrival in Mozambique, I wanted to make sure that the tournament was a success and the community benefited fully from it. A guy who I had met, who played for the Island Football team with me, was keen to get involved and help me organise everything, so after an initial few meetings, Rogerio and I wrote a draft, outlining the number of teams, the format and a possible weekend to run the tournament. At this point we also planned our trip to Nampula, and wrote lists of items we needed to buy and our budget. The following week, Rogerio and I left for Nampula hoping to buy balls, shirts, prizes, and numerous other things, however owing to the fact that I had left my passport on the Ilha and only had a photocopy; it turned out to be a one of the most frustrating days ever. I was stopped and interrogated twice by police for not having my original documents, and was forced to return to the Ilha immediately. The following day we also had our first meeting with the Conselho Municipal, where we had to present our plans, write a letter of intent and explain how this will benefit the community. As expected, the Director was not there so we had to wait and then meet with someone else and then we were asked to return later on in the week. I designed the poster and once all grammatical errors had been removed I printed it and put them up all around the island with the help of Projecto Oceano students. The next day, having already had quite a few replies from teams wanting to enter, I realised that there was a game for the team on the Island on the Saturday at the same time as my tournament was supposed to begin. Rogerio and I decided to try and change the venue from the Campo de Sporting to the Campo Escola Secundária where we could start the Tournament in the evening after the afternoon's game using the School's floodlights. I wrote letter to the Physical Education Professor, but having met him, I was told that I he did not have the authority to decide on such a matter so I was passed on to the Senhora Directora. I was asked to write another letter and meet the Directora the following day at 8am, then 11:30, then 16:30. Eventually I was given permission to use the pitch and their floodlights, and I quickly changed the information on the posters around the Island. Teams continued to sign up and things came together. With 2 days to go, we had a full allocation of teams, referees, helpers, equipment and having been given permission to use all the facilities I was ready and began drawing up the fixtures.

The Tournament

I arrived at the Campo Escola Secundaria just as the Provincial game against Nampula was finishing. I managed to speak to the Guard and get the floodlights up and running and clear the court of benches and chairs. A guy from the Municipal turned up, informing me that as I had not informed them yesterday of the change of time and venue then I would not be able to run the tournament today. After a lot of grovelling and pleading, he agreed to let me off, but warned me about the importance of Municipality consent at every stage of organising projects on the island and that I must learn my lesson.

Teams started to arrive at around 17:30 and I hoped to begin on time at 18:00. All my friends, Rogerio and about a hundred other people were all trying to help organise everyone, with a million conversations going on at once about what kit should be used, whether linesman were needed etc. Eventually people cleared the pitch and with a good few people watching, the first game started on time with Mini - Sporting being the winners 2-1 against Gyca Bayd. I had hoped to get the 4 preliminary knock out games in before the semi finals and finals on the Sunday, but with Mozambique being Mozambique, everything took ages, such as the turnaround between games, the constant discussions between players and coaches and the claims of debatable refereeing decisions.

The second game was between Enigma and Wadolofo and after 30 minutes it was 2-2 so it went to a further 10 minutes of extra time. A lot of people had heard the commotion and made their way to support so the atmosphere was brilliant for extra time and eventual penalties, which Enigma won 5-4, prompting celebrations like they had won the world cup. Two of the teams that were supposed to be playing in the next matches had failed to turn up, so I made the decisions to postpone the next matches to the Sunday and start earlier as it was already 20:45 and the cost for the use of floodlights kept going up. I wrote out the fixture list for the Sunday and printed it off early and posted it up around the Island as promotion for the tournament as well as a reminder for the teams of what time to turn up and who they would be playing. I arrived at 13.30 to prepare the pitch for the 14:00 start. Not one player arrived till 14:30 and everyone strolled up relaxed and in no rush. (I'm still not living on the Mozambican clock where it is normal for everything to start an hour late.) We managed to get all the 6 games in before complete darkness including the semi finals, 3rd 4th place play off and the final, and in the end, the day went really well. There was everything an African Football Tournament should have: - debatable referring decisions, red cards, fans running on the pitch, big tackles, late goals, massive arguments between all the players, coaches and helpers and often me, with people forgetting that I am English and don't speak Macua and everyone running up shouting 'Já acabou!!!!' ('the game is over!!!') and smacking their watch.

The final was played in near darkness between Lar Dos Estudantes and Enigma, with Lar Dos Estudantes winning 1-0 with a late 'goal mouth scramble' goal. Everyone ran on the pitch again at the final whistle, but I managed to push everyone back in order to hand out the cup for the winning team and prizes for the best player, goalkeeper and referee.

Conclusion

The support, the commitment and the enthusiasm were the key components for me - everyone involved was so positive that no matter what went wrong such as players not having shoes, or the nets for the goals not turning up, or players not wearing the same kit - in the end the girls got to play football, compete against their friends and play in front of a lot of people all supporting from the side. It was a far more stressful experience than what I had expected, but also far more enjoyable both for me and I hope for everyone involved. I have learnt a lot about the requirements of organising events and projects in somewhere as chaotic and at times 'pedantic' as the Ilha, but I definitely feel better prepared and understand far better what to expect for my future projects over the next 5 months.



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