My View from the Sidelines: Volunteering at the 2015 FIFA Women’s World Cup

By Alyse Hodgins RPT, Sport Certified physiotherapist

Many people ask me why I do it. Why I spend hours and hours working for free. It’s a simple answer actually: because it’s fun! I became a physiotherapist working predominantly in a sporting environment because I enjoy high level sport and competition. The way an athlete can call upon their bodies to perform such highly coordinated movements is beautiful to me, artistic even. I am fascinated at what the human body can perform. I was never a particularly skilled athlete, as a physiotherapist I still get to participate. I guess you could say I compete vicariously through the athletes.

Since I graduated I have been on the hunt for a sporting environment in which to work. After completing the Sports Physiotherapy Fellowship at the Fowler Kennedy Sports Medicine Clinic I was fortunate to be hired by the Health and Performance Centre at the University of Guelph. This is where I discovered why the world is obsessed with soccer. Having never played myself I didn’t understand the hype. Working with our varsity women’s soccer team I discovered the beautiful game. Ok, now I get it! The FIFA Women’s World Cup is the largest tournament I have had the opportunity to work at. I was impressed with the organization and planning that went in to providing the host medical services. My job was to make sure we could handle any situation that arose at my venue. Establishing the charge person and call person assignments, confirming the Emergency Action Plan protocol, making sure the lifesaving equipment was in working order, that I had brought all supplies that were possibly needed, were just a few of my jobs.

I was so excited I arrived an hour early for my first shift! Watching a game or practice from a first responder position is a little different than watching as a fan. Your gaze is slightly behind the play as you watch to make sure the athlete that was knocked down gets up or that she continues to play well after a collision. It’s exciting and nerve racking all at the same time. That being said watching sports from the sideline when you know or have met the athletes creates an emotional involvement you can’t get with television.

Thank you Canada for hosting the Women’s World Cup. Getting to sit sideline with the world’s best female players was the perfect opportunity to view my favourite masterpiece up close. It was an exercise in contrasts. I was stationed at the venue where Germany and Thailand were scheduled to practice. First Germany, where elegance and intensity meet. They practice like they play: hard, physical and full of finesse. Their scrimmage looked like it was the gold medal game and these women came to win. No wonder they are ranked number one going in to this tournament. They arrived with an army of support staff thus my role was mostly an exercise in preparedness than an exercise in execution. Since the planning and list checking had all been completed I had more time to enjoy the view from the sideline and it was beautiful.

Then I met Thailand, now that was fun. This team has never been to a world cup tournament before and their excitement clearly showed. The athletes were smiling and giddy and, despite the language barrier, I could clearly understand the love they had for the game. They were grateful to be here in Canada. Every athlete said hello, the doctor and physiotherapist chatted with me and the athletes were clearly enjoying themselves. It was a very cooperative practice in which the goal was to solidify teamwork. Or so I gathered not speaking a word of Thai. What a stunning picture of sport and competition.

For any physiotherapist who enjoys sports I encourage you to volunteer your time. Without skilled volunteers these amazing events would not be possible. I am fortunate to work at a clinic that encourages this type of involvement. Thank you.

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