

Jenn Bennett recounts her international experience in Portugal

Resource Center – U.S. Soccer Referee Department (May 8, 2003) U. S. Referees At The Algarve Cup

Jennifer Bennett, who was named to the International Panel of Women Referees on Jan. 1, 2003, and Karalee Sutton, who became a member of the International Panel of Women Assistant Referees on the same date, recently officiated at the Algarve Cup in Portugal from March 14-20, 2003. The Algarve Cup was their first assignment outside of the USA since they earned the FIFA badge.

Below are excerpts from Bennett's report about their experience in Portugal.

Before we left for Portugal we were given a schedule for the week with our assignments, which included games on Friday, Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, and match debriefings on our off days.

At the opening ceremonies a highlight video from the previous year was shown and each of the teams was acknowledged individually. Following the ceremonies, we had a technical meeting with the coaches and the tournament committee. At this meeting, there was a discussion about the rules of the tournament and the team colors for the matches were finalized.

Following the technical meeting, we had a referee meeting where the referee committee clarified the rules for the tournament and coordinated schedules and transportation to the matches. Most of the matches were in nearby towns throughout the Algarve region, and all of the stadiums were within an hour drive of one another. On Friday, Sunday and Tuesday there were two games each day at 2 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. The placement matches were scheduled on Thursday with three games at 10 a.m., two games at 3 p.m. and the championship match at 6 p.m. We finally wrapped everything up around midnight.

Karalee and I were assigned to the opening match in Group C, which was Portugal vs. Wales in Lagoa. The match was at a fairly old stadium, but the field, which was short and wide (about 100 x 80 yards), was in good condition. The First Lady of Portugal, Maria Jose Ritta, was attending her first soccer match and performed the ceremonial kickoff.

At 10 a.m. on the day following the first match, we had a debriefing in one of the hotel conference rooms. Because there were only two match inspectors for three fields, one of the locations did not have an assessor. The match inspectors chose to attend the Group A and B matches the first game day, so our match was not officially assessed. At the meeting the match inspectors gave feedback for the four Group A and Group B games. We thought the debriefing was over, but one of the match inspectors said that they had someone unofficially observe the Group C matches. The comments about my match were about my positioning on a corner kick, which they said was too close, and that I should

be outside the penalty area. Also, they said that I did not play advantage enough. I accepted the feedback and thanked the match inspectors for their input. There really was not too much feedback for the assistant referees. I did notice, however, that the mechanics of Karalee and some of the more experienced assistant referees stood out.

We all started each day the same way, eating a buffet breakfast together around 9 a.m. On game days, we were on our own until lunch, when we would meet with our crews depending on the match time. We were also given a lunch bag to take with us. The referees and assistant referees had only one game and the fourth official (a referee from the group) worked two games back-to-back. We arrived at the stadium about an hour before kick-off. When we arrived at the stadium, we inspected the field and went over pre-game instructions. I found most of the referees and assistant referees had the same signals and pre-game instructions, but on some occasions I noticed some differences, so it was important to be thorough in our preparation and review everything.

We warmed up with the teams until about 20 minutes before kick-off. We did the international walk-on, the anthems were played, players exchanged handshakes, we performed the coin toss and then we were underway. The referees were responsible for making sure the teams were out on the field on time, which in some cases was quite a challenge.

There were no individual debriefings. The group debriefing sessions were very positive and focused on areas of improvements, as well as strengths. After my next game, I was the last one to be debriefed. Before each debriefing, the inspector would ask the referee crew how they felt about the match. I was very impressed with one of the referee's self-assessment. She was obviously a seasoned veteran, and it showed. She made a list of the important areas to cover and gave a one-line assessment for each. I thought her approach was very effective and professional. So when it was my turn to answer the leading question of "Tell me about your match," I took my cues from that seasoned referee and presented several points of emphasis regarding my match.

The assignments for the final and placement games were handed out Wednesday. Karalee was assigned to work with Sonia Denoncourt (from Canada) on the third-place match. I was assigned to work with the Finnish assistant referees on the seventh/eighth place match. I think we were both pleased with our assignments, particularly given the experience level of the other referees.

All in all, it was a great trip. Every referee was given the opportunity to referee at least two matches and the assistants refereed at least three matches. The games were challenging and the atmosphere was very good. We made some friends along the way and were able to enjoy the week in Portugal. All of the referees seemed to be getting along very well, and we had fun learning some words in the various languages. For the most part, English was the language of choice. The Swedish and Norwegian referees understand each other's language very well so whenever they were together, quite often the language of choice was Swedish or Norwegian. The atmosphere amongst the referees and the players was very special and added to a great trip. The relationships and

camaraderie that we developed with the other foreign female referees were invaluable and made for a memorable trip on and off the field.

Jennifer lives in Boxford, Mass. and started refereeing with U.S. Soccer in 1995. Her next assignment outside the U.S. will be in Canada