

Youth soccer goes global on field at Reading High

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By Becca Y. Gregg

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Ecuador, Mexico, Morocco, Honduras and of course, the United States, were just a few of the countries represented on the soccer field last week at Reading High School.

For children taking part in soccer drills, those were among the countries their families were originally from, sort of a World Cup right here in Reading. Adding to the mix were the nations of two special guests who paid a visit to the youth soccer academy run by the Reading Recreation Commission.

Dressed in navy blue, Reading United AC players Paul Marie of France and Charlton Muhlauri of Zimbabwe stood among more than 30 kids, who took turns waiting for the United players to pass them a ball so they could take a shot at the goal. "Their daily routine is training, training and game," Reading United president and General Manager Art Auchenbach said of his players, both college students playing in the development league, the official minor league affiliate of Major League Soccer's Philadelphia Union. "They're here for the summer," Auchenbach said. "We're just excited to give our players the opportunity to give back, and give them the chance to interact with some of the people they see at games." Watching the clinic from the sidelines on Thursday, one might not guess that the Reading youth soccer program is still in its infancy. "This is the first time we've done this," said Daphne



Klahr, recreation commission executive director. "We have so many kids that love to play soccer, but we don't have a lot of organized soccer programs." Enter Kevin Devera, brought aboard by the commission as the new sports program manager this past spring and charged with building a soccer program in the city. "Kevin is very passionate about it," Klahr said.

Devera played soccer in high school and college and has served as an announcer for Reading United. "So it's a perfect fit." Running until Aug. 6, and then continuing in the fall, Reading's inaugural soccer academy has drawn players from first to eighth grades and has received assistance from Berks high school soccer players. Reading United players paid a



previous visit to the clinic on July 2, and children in the academy have been given tickets to the team's home games, played at Exeter's Don Thomas Stadium. "It was a great opportunity to partner with Reading United," Klahr said. "Especially when the kids see these role models. They're all college students. They're coming from foreign countries, and they represent a lot of the diversity we see with the kids in our program. So, I think it's a win-win for all of us. "Many people, Camille Stock said, don't realize the high level of soccer and talent right here in Berks. "It's great just to give these kids an opportunity to see - this is what happens if you keep playing," said Stock, the recreation commission's chief development officer. "The whole idea is to keep the kids off the street. And there's a very big community that's very passionate about soccer." Contact Becca Y. Gregg: 610-371-5032 or bgregg@readingeagle.com.