Entry 5 - The Gang Heads to Holland

After spending a great 8 days in Paris the group boarded a bus for a 7 hour ride to Amsterdam. As luck would have it, the only 10 people on the 56 passenger bus were the Rush coaches, so everyone had plenty of room to stretch out. Upon our arrival we met our guide Maarten and he took us to our hotel and then out to see the sights of Amsterdam.

The next day the group attended the first day of the International Football Expo. We were joined in the audience by the likes of our French friend Laurent Papillon ("negotiated" with his wife to make the trip), Stuart Pearce (England U21 coach) and Rush Executive Board Member and Liverpool legend Gerard Houllier. After the morning sessions, the group had a chance to speak with Mr. Houllier for about 30 minutes about football, his time as a player and about the next steps he feels football needs to take. Of all the educational components of the trip, this small amount of time was by far the most informative as coaches and awe-inspiring as fans of the game.

After a nice Italian meal and a special tour of the city from Maarten Van der Schaaf and his friend Gijs (pronounced Hice) the group rested up for a morning at the conference and an afternoon trip to visit the famed Ajax Amsterdam Academy.

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Though the temperature dropped below freezing, we saw the U13, U15, U17 and U19 men's teams and the newly formed Ajax women's team train. The environment was different to any other sessions we had seen, very laid back but hardworking and in every session at least one of the coaches jumped in and played (almost every coach there is a former Ajax professional).

After resting up, the group went out for one last meal together before everyone headed their separate ways. A few that don't leave until Saturday are heading to the FC Twente game in the Eredivisie Friday night to cap off the trip.

Overall, the trip was an amazing experience and everyone is greatly looking forward to the next time we can do something like this. In the words of our friends Laurent and Fredi, Bon voyage et au revoir!

Day 4 - Lindsey Horan and Clairefontaine

After seeing Lindsey train on Saturday, the coaches attended the PSG vs. Juvisy women’s game. The Rush Coaches were hosted in the Presidential Box to watch the game and saw Lindsey score PSG’s opening goal in their 2-1 win.

Read more about Lindsey's goal here.

After the game the guys took in the sights of Paris on a River Boat Dinner trip followed by the world renown Moulin Rouge show in the Theater district of Paris.

The final full day in Paris was the one that most coaches were very excited about. The morning started with a visit to the home of the French Football Federation where Fred Lipka (who had previously joined Nik Penn and Brian Lux as a guest of Rush Pikes Peak in Colorado Springs) showed the coaches around the Federation building. As has been the custom the whole trip, the coaches were given breakfast pastries and coffee for their welcome.

The coaches then met with UNICATEF and their representatives Didier Christophe (substitute to Marc Collat for International relationship) Joel Muller President, and Pierre Repellini vice-President who explained how the coaches organization works, the benefits the coaches across France have being part of the organization and how UNICAEF helps place French coaches around the world (pictured at right).

Next, Fred took the coaches by train to the world famous Clairefontaine, the National Training center for the French National teams, where they had the pleasure of meeting with Gerard Precheur the Technical Director of the Academy who oversees the male and female side of the center. Gerard met with the coaches for over an hour, explaining the inner workings of the training center, a little history, and answered many questions that the coaches had. The next step was a private tour of the facility, seeing the training sites for the full men's and full women's National teams as

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well as the youth program and its facilities.

After taking some time to observe a UEFA 'A' License training course, the coaches spent time watching Gerard work with the French National 97 boys team in a 75 minute training session.

The coaches will now head off to Holland, to attend the World Football Expo, and meetings with Gerard Houllier (Board member of Rush Soccer and World Marketing Director for Red Bull Soccer) and Steve McLaren (Ex-England National team coach and coach of FC Twente of the Dutch league).

Day 3 - With a day to rest yesterday, due to inclement weather cancelling all soccer activities, the guys went around Paris, visited the Mona Lisa in the Louvre and went out to eat. Today the schedule ramped up again, where the ten coaches made their way to Bourgival, the home of the PSG Women's team and Rush's very own Lindsey Horan.

The guys got to watch the training session of the womens first team, on a damp afternoon, but you immediately could see the quality of the players and coaches on view. This was followed up by a traditional French Welcome, a glass of red wine and some regional cheeses put on by the coaching staff. The PSG coaches sat and chatted with the Rush coaches, and spoke a little about their preparation for the following days game vs. Juvisy – who are in third place just one point behind PSG.

This was followed be a full steak meal provided by PSG in the players eating area.

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After the training the guys jumped back on to the Metro to Parc des Princes, where they watched the PSG 1st team dominate Evian in the Ligue 1 matchup 4-0 with Zlatan Ibrahimovich pulling the string scoring one and assisting in the other 3. With 45,000 packed into the stadium the atmosphere again was fantastic and the guys had a great time. Sunday the group is off to see Lindsey play in her game and then off out to Moulin Rouge to take in some French Culture.

Day 2 - After the amazing first few days in Paris there was no slowing down, and Laurent Papillon continued to show us around.

Wednesday morning we took the fast train to Lille in northern France traveling up to 200mph. Laurent showed us around the beautiful city and even the rain could not dampen the visit.

The evening was spent in the brand new Grande Stade of Lille. A 50,000 all seater stadium built in August 2012. With the weather looking ominous for the evening the stadium closed the retractable roof.

Nik Penn and Laurent were granted access to all areas through Laurent's UEFA credentials and were given a tour of the inner workings of the stadium and down on the field. The good fortunes continued and Nik and Laurent joined the President of Lille in the Presidential Suite to watch the Champions League game with Lille taking on Valencia.

The rest of the group had awesome seats too, behind the benches in the front row. The atmosphere was great although the home team lost 1-0 on an unconvincing PK call.

The next morning after a small snow fall the guys met for a 2 hour discussion on all things French Football with Laurent who previously held a role as technical advisor in the FFF.

Lille provided transportation for the Rush coaches to Luchin, the state of the art training facility of the Lille youth and professional teams.

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The guys met with Jean Michael Van Damme the Academy Director who explained the philosophy of the Lille Academy and the relationship between the youth and the senior teams. Last year Lille qualified for the Champions League with 6 players from their academy starting in the first team. The academy has recently developed players such as Gervinho of Arsenal and Edin Hazard of Chelsea.

After the tour, the Rush coaches watched the first team train for a short period before watching the U19 academy session.

The evening was complete with a meal at the exclusive restaurant L'Orange Blue and the fast train back to Paris.

With the forecasted snow the coaches have a day off of soccer before heading out to the women's and youth training and another PSG game v. Evian back at Parc de Princes on Saturday.

Click here for day 1 entry.

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