

UPF Israel and Italy Collaborate on Youth Soccer Exchange Project

Hod Ben-Zvi
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Turin, Italy—An Arab-Jewish soccer team, comprised of fourteen (7 Arab, 7 Jewish) 11-year-old boys, visited Turin, Italy from March 19-26, 2015, to participate in the “Un Calcio per la Pace” (“Football for Peace”) project. The team, named "Peace Dreamers", was formed to play friendly soccer matches with Italian children's teams.

The project was conceived by the UPF chapters of Israel and San Marino, and was developed and carried out in partnership with the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) in Turin with support from UPF-Italy; the municipality of Turin; and the municipalities of Afula and Iksal in Israel. Several Italian individuals and organizations, most notably the famous Juventus and Torino football clubs, were also of great help.

Upon arriving in Turin, the team was met by Mrs. Maria Gabriella Mieli, vice president of WFWP Italy, who organized and planned a tour for the group.



On the first day of the tour, the team visited the famous National Automobile Museum, which was fascinating for the boys.

The first challenge over the weekend was not on the field but rather the complexity of providing Kosher and Halal food, as well as observing the Shabbat. The benevolence of the Italian hosts was key in meeting these needs.



On the second day, the team was invited to Juventus Football Club's (FC) facility to participate in a soccer tournament dedicated to fighting racism and discrimination, hosted by "Football Against Racism", an initiative started by Juventus FC and the UNESCO Centre of Turin in 2009 that involves schools and young people in the Piedmont region, and that grants scholarships to projects that support integration.

The Juventus team of coaches organized several games with teams of Italian, Jewish, and Arab children. It was fun for everyone, and at the end, trophies and awards were given to all the children by the co-organizers, Juventus FC, the UNESCO Centre of Turin, and WFWP.



The third day began with a soccer tournament at the Turin FC's—one of the top soccer leagues in Italy—facility. This time, the Peace Dreamers were a little more challenged, with the Italian kids trained by players in the club. Although it rained, it didn't prevent the teams from playing.

Mr. Giorgio Gasperoni, president of UPF-San Marino, who was instrumental in carrying out the project, joined the event with his son David. All the children were allowed to keep the Turin FC uniforms they wore for the games, and a ball.

In the afternoon, the team watched a soccer match between Juventus FC and Genoa FC, the tickets for which were donated by Juventus.

On the fourth day, the children visited the United Nations Campus in Turin and met with a representative of the UNESCO Centre of Turin, as well as the director of UNICRI (United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute).

The children next visited a mosque in a Muslim community in Turin. The imam gave an orientation, and the children were treated with traditional Arabic sweets.

Afterwards, the team visited a Jewish community. The community embraced the children and provided them with lunch, which was followed by a spontaneous soccer game with almost the entire school. The visit concluded with a tour of an impressive synagogue that serves as a miniature museum for Jewish history.

Day by day, the Arab and Jewish children grew closer, sharing games on their cell phones.

On the fifth day, the team traveled to the lovely village of Bruzolo in the province of Turin in the Piedmont region. The mayor and a teacher of Italian literature showed the delegation around the two-story building in the village that serves as both the city hall and the primary school. The team also met local children, who were very excited to meet them and had a list of questions written in English for them, which were translated into Arabic and Hebrew.

The big moment of the day was the soccer tournament with the Italian children. In spite of the rain and cold wind, everyone played enthusiastically, and devoured homemade pizzas and cookies that were offered at the end of the games.

On the sixth and last day, the team was treated to watch a training session of Torino FC players.

Next, they visited a sport museum at the Olympic stadium and then participated in a special soccer tournament organized by the youth department of Torino FC, named CIT TURIN. Hon. Dr. Piero Fassino, mayor of Turin, together with Dr. Giovanni Maria Ferraris, sports councilor for the Piedmont Region, opened the games.

The four mixed teams did their best in spite of the drizzling rain, and everyone joined the closing ceremony. Mrs. Sabrina Gonzatto, who coordinated the Italian teams, tearfully received an Ambassador for Peace award prior to delivering the medals and trophies to the children.

The day ended with a farewell party for the children, which was organized by local students. The children enjoyed fun and games well into the night, leaving them with little time to pack all the presents they received.

Upon the children's return to Israel, the teachers continued to foster the friendships that were created between the children on the team.