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Soccer, a Brazilian Experience

Summary: If you were a college soccer player and could go anywhere in the world to play soccer and study, which country would you choose? It's an easy response for soccer aficionados: Brazil, land of the famous Pelé and a record five World Cup championships.

(July 24, 2008)-by Zach Koenig—If you were a college soccer player and could go anywhere in the world to play soccer and study, which country would you choose? It's an easy response for soccer aficionados: Brazil, land of the famous Pelé and a record five World Cup championships.

A group of University of Minnesota, Morris soccer players departed Minnesota for Brazil August 5. The trip is being offered through the [Study Abroad](#) program on the Morris campus. Students who participate in the course, "Soccer: A Brazilian Experience," will earn four course credits.

If playing soccer in Brazil isn't thrill enough, this study abroad opportunity also offers a political and economic component. In a country where children see soccer as perhaps their only opportunity to escape the harsh realities of poverty, soccer becomes much more than a simple game to Brazilian citizens. It becomes a way of life.

The academic side of the trip will explore this question: "Does soccer have a bigger influence on people's lives than subjects related to politics or economics?" According to UMM men's soccer team member Brendan Harper, who had a very successful freshman season at UMM, "Soccer is a huge part of [Brazil's] culture and that will be something that we have never seen before here in the U.S. Soccer is kind of an afterthought here."

UMM's official course description states that "This course is an opportunity for current or past soccer players, coaches or fans to immerse themselves in learning about the world of Brazilian soccer and thus gaining a glimpse of Brazilian society." The academic portion of the trip also includes "various readings about Brazil and soccer in Brazil, blogging during the experience, conducting interviews with people of Brazil and completing a final paper using the experience to answer questions."

In anticipation of the trip, Harper feels that "most of the team will be looking forward to having the opportunity to play soccer on foreign soil against professional youth teams...it's the type of thing that most kids never get a chance to do." Harper is also anticipating "being in a country where soccer and not football or basketball is the number one sport."

UMM faculty member and [Men's Soccer](#) Coach Christian DeVries, who also teaches courses in sports management at UMM, will accompany the group. DeVries has achieved a USSF (United States Soccer Federation) "A" license, a NSCAA (National Soccer Coaches Association of America) Advanced National Diploma and a Brazilian "C" license during his career.

DeVries commented: "I am looking forward to taking the team to Brazil this summer as we are going to get the opportunity to learn soccer from the best in the world. The playing experience the team will have will only be rivaled by

their cultural experience of being in one of the top soccer nations in the world.” DeVries also hopes “that each player will return from Brazil with a great appreciation for the sport they love.”

On the topic of improving UMM’s soccer teams as a whole, Harper is excited to “be trained by professional coaches and put through the same drills as all the pro players in Brazil...not to mention playing the professional youth teams who will most likely be superior to us and force us to step up our game in order to compete with them.”

The trip also comes at a key time in UMM’s soccer development. Said Harper: “After coming off the best season in our program’s short history, every team in our conference will be after us, plus the fact that our pre-conference schedule will be much more difficult than previous seasons.” As a result, “the experience we will gain from training and playing against teams in Brazil could bring us a lot closer to reaching our number one team goal: a trip to the NCAA tournament (for which UMM soccer is now eligible).”

Some highlights of the trip include:

- Training at the ABC Futebol Club
- Brazilian beach soccer
- Tour of Natal—the “Sun City of Brazil”
- Buggy Ride to Geipabu Dunes (largest sand dunes in Brazil)
- Exposure to nursing homes, orphanages and inner-city life
- Private meetings with professional soccer coaches
- Attending practice sessions of professional teams
- Attending a professional soccer game

Follow the team's experiences via their blog at [Soccer in Brazil](#).

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