

Challenger Soccer Camp Returns to Vernonia

By Scott Laird

Those coaches with the interesting British accents and unusual terminology were back for a second year of Challenger Sports British Soccer Camp in Vernonia.

Twenty-five young soccer players were one hand for daily sessions during the week of July 16-20, joining



camp instructors Charlotte Sant and Curtis Grant on the pitch to learn some soccer skills, get some exercise and have some fun.

Challenger Soccer Camps are the most popular soccer camp in the country. Over a thousand Challenger coaches each year have helped the company develop one of the most innovative approaches to coaching youth soccer in the US.

Sant and Grant are spending the week living with the Lemay family while they work with Vernonia youngsters. Grant is 19 and comes from Cardiff, Wales. This is his first year as an instructor with Challenger. Grant says his favorite soccer club is Liverpool and he plays for his University of Wales Institute Cardiff team. Sant is 21 and is from

Warrenton, England, about 20 minutes from Manchester. This is Sant's second year working for Challenger. She says her favorite soccer club is Manchester United. She says she doesn't play anymore but likes coaching and is also a physical education instructor. Both Sant and Grant have been in the United States now for five weeks working in camps in California and Oregon and spent the week of July 4th at Lake Tahoe.

"We just stay with a different host family every week and so you get to see loads of places in America that you probably wouldn't get to see as a tourist," says Sant. "That is a really great part of the experience. You get to meet loads of people through the host family and it's really nice to get to meet the locals and see how they live and what they like to do. That's always good fun."

Sant says Challenger Sports Camps don't just teach athletic skills. "Yes, we teach soccer, but we also promote what we call the 'Five Champions of Character' as well," Sant explains. "The five characteristics

playing soccer and they have to come up with examples. And then we highlight



when the kids actually do some of those things during competition. So we promote that all through our camps. It's not just about the soccer and the skills, it's about the whole player. And that's really important to Challenger Sports and important that the kids learn it during our camp."

Observing a day at a Challenger Soccer

Camp is an education for anyone who visits. I couldn't figure out what the instructors were getting on about at first, as I tried to adjust to the thick accents and unusual jargon. On the second day their campers didn't seem to have any trouble figuring it out and were quick to

have a go at the drills they were asked to perform. And like the campers, I quickly picked up where I left off after last years

camp. A season of Downton Abbey and re-watching a couple Guy Ritchie films recently also helped my comprehension level.

The camp is a mix of games, drills disguised as games, scrimmages and lots of fun and laughs. Coaches Sant and Grant do a fantastic job of encouraging and involving all the players and keeping the activity and learning level high. The youngest campers play games like "Mr.



Wolf" as they learn to dribble the ball while the older kids spend time in the "stinky box" when they are eliminated from a heading competition. On the final day of camp there is a graduation ceremony and the older players hold a "World Cup" tournament, complete with flags from the countries they represent.

The Challenger Soccer Camp is a great way for young children in Vernonia to learn about and try playing the game of soccer. It provides entertaining exercise and exposes the campers and their families to a different culture.



Photo courtesy of Mark Lemay.

we teach are respect, responsibility, sportsmanship, leadership and integrity. We encourage the kids by asking them to think about the definitions of these things at home. Then during camp we discuss them and ask them how they might show respect on the pitch when

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