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## A FILIPINO CHRISTMAS

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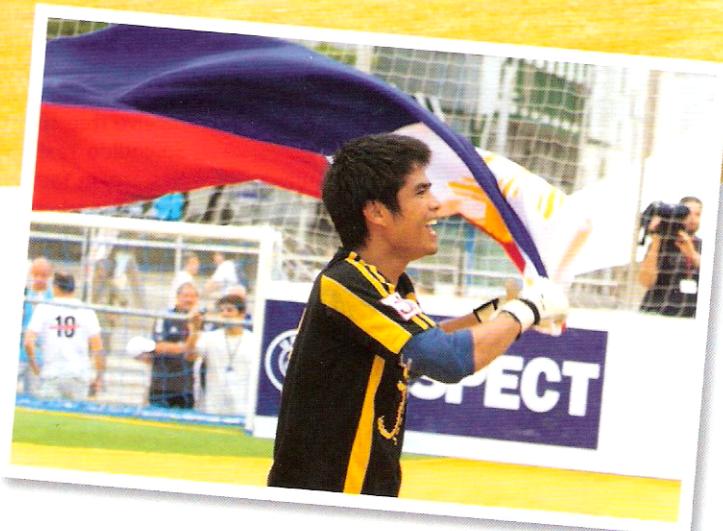


# TROPHY of HOPE

*When the Philippine team returned from this year's 8th Annual Homeless World Cup's (HWC) international football competition in Brazil, the trophy they carried with them stood for more than just winning a game. SUNSHINE LICHAUCO DE LEON tells the story, with photos by DEBBY SHAW.*

THIS IS THE THIRD YEAR THAT THE Philippines has participated in the HWC ([www.homelessworldcup.org](http://www.homelessworldcup.org)), an annual event highlighting the issue of homelessness worldwide. HWC Founder Mel Young says, "There are one billion homeless people in our world and that is unacceptable and unnecessary. We can fly to the moon, we just need to focus on creating a world where everyone has a home."

The Philippine team was chosen from tryouts organized by Urban Opportunities for Change Foundation (UOCF) and its members, aged 18-26, live in squatter areas, and spend the majority of their time on the streets. Bill Shaw,



**(ABOVE) FOR COUNTRY AND CHANGE.** The Philippine Team sings their National Anthem at the final game of the Host Cup against Norway. **(INSET) CHAMPIONS.** Goal keeper Mark Maravilla runs with the Philippine flag, celebrating victory over Norway which earned them the Host Cup.

co-founder of UOCF says, "As the players saw each others' lives, they became less insecure in their own situation. They bonded together by their circumstance and opportunity."

Team Coach Rudy del Rosario speaks proudly of their determination, "They give all out in training. They have a lot of heart. It's everything for them. They started as individuals, used to fighting for themselves and now they are a family, like brothers."

The commitment, discipline and focus that each player had to develop to train for this event also changed each of their characters. Before joining the team, Leopoldo



**GAME OVER.** Goal Keeper Mark Maravilla blocks the shot of the Norwegian team, preventing them from scoring.



Aragon, age 19, was a high school dropout who drank regularly at home. Now he says, "I don't drink anymore. I am an athlete."

For Abdullah Pasion, 20, football has given him invaluable self-confidence: "I can now show my family and friends that I am doing something in my life and have a direction. I am now representing my country. I am proud."

The eight-day tournament was held on Copacabana beach, where 51 teams' nations competed for six different cups. Winning eight consecutive games, the Philippine team beat Croatia, South Korea, Sweden, Argentina, Germany, Finland, Norway (twice), earning the Philippines a rank of 25 out of 65 nations! Their only losses were to football powerhouses Brazil, Chile and Italy.

The opportunity to travel internationally and be part of an event with a larger common purpose also left an invaluable imprint. Aragon explains, "I learned to have trust, conviction, courage." Pasion adds, "It's important to be able to adjust. And with perseverance, you can achieve success." Mark Maravilla, 27, who will become the Assistant Coach for the 2011 team, says, "In the HWC you can really feel we are all equal." HWC studies have shown that 70% of those who participate continue on to change their lives in some way. As Young says, "The HWC has created a level of change in homeless people not seen before. They move from the margins to take to a global stage. You can't go back from that."

The Philippine team returns home with a shared goal of finishing their education and getting jobs to help their families out of poverty. Goal keeper Tonie Mark Arinal, 24, explains how football has changed his world. When his brother was working as a seaman, his family had a good life. When his brother died, they lost everything. He describes, "I felt like I was in prison. There was no hope. I was already involved with gangs... I thought life was over." Since joining the team, he plans to become a seaman himself.

Lexter Maravilla, 23, says, "People may help but the change starts in me. I want others to know that by working hard there is a way out of poverty. Poverty is not a hindrance to success."

For players like Michael Quinlat, 24, it has inspired him to create his own ripple of change. One day he noticed Nathaniel, an impoverished 14 year old boy, who was always drinking around the area the team lived in. The team decided to "adopt" Nathaniel, letting him sleep with them, using their allowance to feed him and be their ball boy. When asked what made him reach out, Michael's answer comes straight from the heart, "I saw myself in Nathaniel. I want him to have another chance to have a changed life." ●



**TIMEOUT.** Philippine Team, Coach Rudy, and Bill Shaw celebrate on the beach after beating Germany in the Quarter-finals.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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