



As the middle of the week approached for the B16 Select team, the trip just went from good to great. The Rayo Vallecano game gave the boys a new level of play to aspire to and getting back on the training field with Jose was just what was needed. The coaches continued to work on getting the ball in to bigger areas after some short passes to draw in the defense, and being as clean as possible with the passing and receiving.

Before the next day the players and staff took a guided trip around Madrid, taking in many of the historic palaces, buildings and shops before having a couple of ours to themselves to explore. This was the perfect relaxation that was needed for the following day, which was certainly to be the most inspiring yet. A morning relaxing with a short walk over the mall, was followed by the short journey back to Ciudad Real Madrid, where the opponents were the B16 Real Madrid team. The team is arguably one of the top five B16 teams in the world blessed with skill and athleticism combined with tactical knowledge and maybe most dangerous of all their soccer savvy.



The first 20 minutes saw the Select boys defend resolutely, staying organized and keeping Real at bay. Not really creating anything the boys were certainly a little nervous but moreover the speed that Real Madrid moved the ball and the fact they very rarely misplaced a pass or a first touch meant it was very difficult for the Select team to get the ball back once they turned it over. The 20 minute mark saw Real scored their first goal, a turn over half way inside the Select half, saw Real penetrate with a succession

of wall passes and fire pass Molde in goal. This certainly drove on Madrid and within the next 8 minutes they had managed another 3 goals to make it 0-4 at half time.

The second half saw more of the same, Rush defending a lot, creating a couple of chances, the best that was pulled back for a foul, and Real putting in another rally of goals. The last (and eighth) saw a corner cleared off the line, unfortunately only into our GK that could do nothing but deflect into our own goal. The spirits of the boys after the game were very high. Most of them suffering the biggest loss of their career, understood that they have faced some of the best players on the planet at their age group and took away with them the positives of the experience and where the bench mark really was. There was not much time for reflection as the next stop that evening was the Estadio Santiago Burnabeu to watch Real Madrid put 4 past FC Copenhagen in the UEFA Champions League. Ronaldo scored twice much to the delight of the players.



The following day came the third and final game of the trip versus La Liga 3<sup>rd</sup> Division side Las Rozas. That was not before the boys took a trip back to the Burnabeu to take a tour of the stadium and gift shop. The third and final game was much better and it was evident that the boys had come to terms with the Spanish style of play, and after going down 1-0 early from a wonderful volley off a partially cleared corner, Michael Swift (TN) put Joe Ortiz (NM) through to poke past the GK for 1-1. The second half saw the guys jump out to a 2-1 lead after Shandon Hopeau (HI) cut inside from the left flank to fire past the keeper. Unfortunately the boys could not hold on and with 5 minutes left, a penalty for Las Rozas saw the game end 2-2. Select had a wonderful chance to win it in the dying seconds after some great work from Roberto Hernandez (TX) but he Stephen Siegfried (DE) was unable to turn the ball in from just inside the area. The boys were very excited about the result, believed they could have got more out of it, but as always, no time to rest and they headed to the Spanish Football Federation headquarters to tour the Spanish Football Museum and see the trophies as the current World Cup holders and two European champions.

This has been an amazing experience for all the boys and still 3 days to go.