



Contact: Matt Dougherty, NFHCA Director of Communications

Email: matt.dougherty@nfhca.org

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Monmouth Enjoys First International Experience

By Matt Dougherty, NFHCA Director of Communications

For Monmouth Head Coach Carli Figlio, the first foreign trip in the 20-year history of her program provided memorable moments and team-building for her student-athletes on and off the field.

“We had a small group that went because our team was relatively small,” Figlio said. “The girls were amazing, they were respectful and adults. The bonding that happened with them as well as with the coach-player relationship is not something you are going to get in practices every day. Seeing everyone in different environments and social settings makes everyone more relatable. We always say we are a family away from home but it kind of really showed when you are in different cultures and trying to understand the language and ask questions to work together.”

The Monmouth squad departed on May 16 for its 10-day trip to Holland and Italy. Figlio felt the two locations brought together the on and off the field experience for her team.

“We picked Holland because we have two players on the team and we wanted to have them show us where they’re from. We chose Italy as a bit of a bonus and more as a cultural experience. Our university believes strongly in doing a trip every few years and participating in community service with a different culture that the kids can learn about. We were in Holland for the majority of the time and spent the last three or four days in Italy.”

The journey began with time in Holland, where the Hawks played against Victoria HC within nine hours of landing on May 17 followed by contests the next two days against Leiden Ladies and Rotterdam HC. The trip to Holland was a homecoming for a pair of Rotterdam natives on the Monmouth roster, Julie Laszlo and Josephine van der Hoop.

“We played against Julie’s club team first,” Figlio said. “The level of play there is very high. It gave our girls an opportunity to play against a really skilled team that also had a lot of fitness. We had taken a red-eye and then we got off the plane and

played. The next club team we played was about the same level, and the third club we played was Josephine's team and it was the second level of the club, more around the 16-17-18 age range. We had an opportunity to see the best and then a level below where we got a couple shots. The girls were definitely nervous playing back at home, but it was great to get a taste of their club and their everyday life. Everyone kind of grows up in that club environment over in Holland, and we were able to have some incoming freshmen from Holland who came to see our last game."

While the games gave the team an opportunity to build cohesion on the field, the rest of the trip featured moments that to remember for a lifetime. "In Holland we did a really amazing bike tour in a small little town," Figlio said. "We went to the Anne Frank house in Amsterdam. We also worked a clinic with about 150 youth that all kind of came from lower income areas. It wasn't an after-school program, but something very similar to that. We just had a sports day and were out there with them the whole time. A lot of the kids couldn't speak English, so it also gave us an opportunity to see how hard it is to communicate when it's not your first language."

Figlio added, "We went to a little city called Delft in Holland, and in Italy we did a lot of sightseeing in Rome, Capri Island and Sorrento. We went kayaking, had a paddleboarding experience in the canals and had tours of some amazing cultural sites. We gave the girls some free time to explore, but every day was pretty packed."

The trip was organized by Zag Sports, and the student-athletes all had an opportunity to see sights and learn culture, and also find out more about their sport and how it is played in a different country.

"It was definitely the first time for a lot of them to go out of the country," Figlio said. "Just to see two totally different cultures was amazing, not just from a cultural standpoint but also from a hockey standpoint. In Holland hockey is like a lifestyle for enjoyment and you start at such a different age. It was really cool to be able to see both of those. It was a great balance from seeing a lot of beautiful things in Holland and Italy from also being able to give back to kids who were less fortunate. They got a kick that we couldn't speak their language so it was kind of a talking point there."

She added, "By going to Holland they kind of get their teammates more. If you're not an hour and a half from the university, you have to get on a plane and it's an entirely different culture and environment. Seeing a different perspective and worldview will help them grow as people."

The opportunity to go on an overseas trip for the first time was very important for Figlio as she aims to provide a complete experience for her student-athletes.

"It means we are invested in not just field hockey but we want to be able to bring a well-rounded experience to these girls," Figlio said. "Athletes in college have different priorities in their time and this way we can reward them with life experiences that they can talk about for a long time to come. For anyone we are recruiting to see us on an international stage and see how seriously we are taking it, hopefully it translates into our recruits in the future to see us having that experience."