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DEVELOPING GREAT INDIVIDUALS THROUGH THE SPORT OF SOCCER

## '04 GIRLS TAKE MAGICAL JOURNEY TO FLORIDA FOR THE 2017 PRESIDENTS CUP NATIONALS



Once upon a time, in May 2017, the AR Comets 2004 Girls team began a magical journey that started

close to home at the Arkansas State Championships in Bella Vista. In June, the team then traveled to the Presidents Cup Regionals for Region III in Tulsa, OK where they found themselves going through to the finals...and winning! Their efforts in Tulsa created a third and final destination in July at the Presidents Cup Nationals in Auburndale, Fl., a trip never before taken by a Comets team during the 24 year history of the club. Although their journey didn't finish atop a Magical Kingdom, it did create a magical experience that will be remembered for a lifetime!



at Nationals were from California (Region IV), Ohio (Region II) and Virginia (Region I).

On day one of the competition, the girls lost to a very good California team before rebounding on day two to tie the team from Ohio. Game day three saw the girls lose to Virginia, before playing in the consolation game on day four.

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**"I was proud of the girls,"**

– Coach Dave

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The 04 Girls Navy team competed in the U13G division of the Presidents Cup Nationals, July 12-16. . Nationwide, there were over 1000 U13G teams competing in state Presidents Cup competitions. By the time of the Presidents Cup Nationals Tournament, only 4 remained, one winner from each region of the country. The Comets qualified by winning the Region III Presidents Cup in Tulsa, OK. Their opponents

"I was proud of the girls," said Coach Dave O'Brien. "The first game got away from us. California was a very strong team, but the girls rebounded and competed very well after that. We were still in the hunt to make the finals on day 3, so that was good. We knew we





could play California much tougher than we did on Day 1." The first game aside, the tournament really hinged on the game against Ohio on day two. The Comets went up 1-0 only to see Ohio come back to make it 1-1. The Comets regained the lead and went up 2-1 where the score remained until stoppage time. Over a minute into stoppage time, Ohio had a length of the field counter attack that they converted to tie the game with only seconds remaining.

"That was tough," said O'Brien, "but a good experience. We should've managed ourselves out of that game, but our team is young and inexperienced in that situation. It was a tough lesson, but one that will stick with them for years to come."

The result against Ohio took the Comets from just needing a win or tie in game three to reach the Finals, to needing to win with a big goal difference, AND get help from California.

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## "This trip to Nationals was a BIG bonus!"

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– Coach Dave

"We knew we needed a big win on day three to have a chance. I think that resulted in our play being too frantic," said O'Brien. "Virginia was a big, strong team and they defended very well. We needed to attack patiently and persistently against them, but we were in a hurry and that hurt us." After a rough first half the girls rebounded and played well in the second half, but came up short and lost 0-1.

The event was a wonderful experience for the 04 Girls. The competition level was great and the facility was beautiful, including the resident alligators in the park's pond. No soccer balls were consumed by alligators.

"I'm pleased," continued O'Brien. "Nationals wasn't on my radar at all. I was just pleased that they reached a regional event and could get an opportunity to gain the experience of competing at such an event. This trip to Nationals was a BIG bonus!"



In addition to the team results, there were individual awards on the last day. Antonella Tovar, Jayden Tyler, Kate Bishop, Diana Ramos and Tyler Outhouse were named to the “Top 18” all-tournament team. Those awards were voted on by the opposing coaches. After every game the coaches had to submit the top three players from the opposing team, and also rate the opposing goalkeeper.

The girls won't have much of an offseason as their practices start again on August 8. “We're going to hold off as long as we can to give them a bit of a break,” said O'Brien, “but our league starts on August 19, so we can't wait too long.”

He continued, “This is a great group of girls and parents. As I said, this wasn't on anyone's radar and everyone rallied in short order to make this trip possible. Vacations were rearranged, fundraising was done, and travel was planned. Our manager, Kelley Evans, did a wonderful job pulling everything together and lots of parents kicked in to make sure everyone that could go did go. Kendall Spencer and Ben O'Brien also went along to help with the coaching, and they were very valuable on the sidelines.”

Thanks to hard work on and off the field these girls had a soccer experience that they will never forget, and they have a bright future ahead of them!

*Photos courtesy of Comets Coach, Bill Birnie.*



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