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## Strikers off to Ireland

Bucks County Courier Times

On Aug. 4, the Langhorne Strikers, an elite 17-man travel soccer team, and their family fan club will board Aer Lingus headed for Dublin. Ultimately, they're bound for Galway and the Umbro Galway Cup Tournament, where they'll match skills with players from Ireland, England, Scotland and Canada.

The team will be assigned a Scottish coach to help them tune into how the game is played there — more physically aggressive than here.

But these are teenage boys, and it's not just gearing up for heated competition on their minds, coaches joke. It's food, Irish girls (whom they've been told like American boys), the Irish drinking age ("It's 21!" say coaches), and lots of sightseeing.

There was the worry about passport backlogs — a more than 15-week wait in some cases. Among those waiting at the last minute were coach John Rumsey, his son Joe, and player Tim Keough, son of coach Larry Keough (Council Rock High's offensive soccer MVP in 1978).

The last passports finally arrived Friday morning. I pictured the coaches doing a happy little Irish jig at the mailbox.

It's possible they know a jig. There's Irish blood pumping in the team, where players represent eight high schools (Archbishop Ryan, Archbishop Wood, Bensalem, Conwell-Egan, Council Rock South, Holy Ghost, LaSalle and Neshaminy) and begin each game with a team huddle and a Hail Mary.

Player John Glenn's mom, for instance, was born in Galway and worked as a police officer in Dublin. She's made arrangements for the boys and their families to be feted with a Dublin picnic.

Lately, the Strikers have spent as much time focused on fundraising as they have playing ball. They sold tickets for all kinds of outings — golf, baseball, skiing — and relied heavily, too, on the "beg-a-bucket." In pairs, the guys positioned themselves outside supermarkets and convenience stores in all kinds of weather, at all kinds of ridiculous hours to collect shoppers' change.

Bensalem High's Kyle Sibley, 16, is the team's most accomplished beg-a-bucketeer. Soft spoken and polite, he raised \$350 in three hours the other day.

Each player has raised the \$2,350 he needed, thanks to a very generous community, Rumsey said. The Langhorne Athletic Association treated these 2006 league champions to handsome team shirts for the flight.

The only hurdle now will be finding suitable sustenance abroad. There are a handful of not-so-adventurous eaters on the team, including Joe Rumsey, who's a big fan of Fruity Pebbles and not much else, if you don't count junk food from 7-Eleven.

"Not a clue," says player Kyle Dufresne, 16, of La Salle with a smile, when I quiz him about Irish cuisine.

Dining aside, all look forward to the soccer tour with excitement. The coaches consider it a culminating celebration of the years they've spent proudly watching these boys grow as solid athletes and men. Soon the guys, some of who've been playing together since grade school, will be off to college, and they'll be sorely missed.

"They all are like sons to us," said Keough.

That makes this excursion a kind of family vacation with some quality soccer on the side. Here's wishing the Strikers and their fans a winning journey.

*Kate Fratti, whose column appears on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, notes you can follow the tournament standings at [www.galwaycup.com](http://www.galwaycup.com).*

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