



## Thrilling competitions in the latest Aspire Academy Tri-Series tournament

Aspire Academy recently hosted more of the best youth teams from around the world to compete in the hugely popular “Aspire Academy Tri-Series”. Taking place from April 10–14, the tournament pitted U13, U14 and U15 teams from Zenit St Petersburg in Russia and Greece’s Olympiacos against players of the same age from Aspire. The visiting clubs have been involved in the Tri-Series before, invited for fulfilling the participation criteria, which include the standard of the youth development programme at their clubs, their profile and background.

Winning these games is not the primary goal for Aspire’s teams, since the tournament provides opportunities to compete against strong teams and gain exposure to different styles of play and systems as well as the valuable experience of a playing in a competition setting. The sides and staff from both Olympiacos and Zenit St Petersburg explained that they valued the experience for similar reasons.

On his first visit to Qatar, Artem Fomenko, Director of Youth football at Zenit St Petersburg, was won over by the Tri-Series tournament, the overall format and level of organisation. “In St Petersburg we don’t really get the opportunity to play against such strong competition. **Taking part in the Tri-Series pits us against very worthy opponents and gives us the chance to play in the sorts of challenging matches that we only experience when we reach the advanced stages of our league competition.** We are just starting our season and couldn’t have asked for better preparation than playing here in Qatar and taking part in the Tri-Series.”

Highlighting how all the staff and players from Russia were inspired by the whole experience of playing in the tournament, Fomenko’s colleague and Zenit Administrator, Arnold Kasparov added: “It is evident how much planning, preparation and investment is made in the development of all sports at Aspire. We all feel very privileged to be here, and we’re keen to do our very best. You can’t come here to Aspire and not be motivated and inspired.”

Meanwhile Greek side Olympiacos were pleased to use the Tri-Series to fine-tune and prepare for the final games of their season. Their U15 team faces PAOK in the national final once they return home. Nikos Topoliatis, coach of the U15 team commented on how both matches in the tournament against Aspire and Zenit stretched his players. “There are definitely things we have picked up and that we will focus on ahead of the national final. Taking part in the Tri-Series is a really valuable exercise, providing us with an excellent means of measuring our progress and identifying areas to work on.”

Aspire Academy Director of Football, Robert Olabe remarked how the Tri-Series is going from strength to strength as a result of his team’s hard work. He applauded the quality of the visiting sides, along with their strength and determination and acknowledged that both Clubs had helped raise the bar even higher.” This is the first time in the Tri-Series tournament that our teams have not managed to



win at least one of the age categories. But for us, the development and progress of individual players and team spirit – which comes from taking part – are much more important than the final results.”

Zenit St Petersburg achieved a clean sweep of victories in this edition of the Tri-Series tournament, winning across all age categories. The teams from Aspire are now busily preparing for the next edition of the tournament which takes place at the end of April (25- 27) when Red Bull Salzburg (Austria) and Chile’s Universidad visit Qatar.

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