

# DSS protects athletes and attendees at Women's World Cup



DSS special agents pose with the FIFA Women's World Cup trophy during a security check at the official FIFA Fan Festival located at the Cloud Convention Center in Auckland, July 22. Photo courtesy of DSS

By Eric Weiner

The U.S. women's national team was a crowd favorite at this year's FIFA Women's World Cup that took place in Australia and New Zealand, July 20-Aug. 20. The team exited the competition in Round 16, in a nail-biting match against Sweden that went into extra time and ended in a penalty shootout. That outcome notwithstanding, the Department of State's Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) was able to celebrate a different kind of win at the World Cup—protecting Americans throughout the tournament.

DSS had special agents on the ground embedded with the U.S. Women's national team and with the team's friends and family program. It also had special agents, watch officers, and analysts assigned to the joint operations center (JOC) at the U.S. Consulate General in Sydney. JOC served as a centralized communications hub where DSS personnel and U.S. interagency partners worked around the clock, sharing security and threat information regarding the World Cup with public and private partners in Australia and New Zealand.

"This year's Women's World Cup has two host countries, and that adds an additional layer of complexity when developing, coordinating, and implementing U.S. government security policies and operations," said U.S. World Cup Security Coordinator Mike Davidson.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of the DSS Domestic Operations Directorate Andrew Wroblewski reviewed security operations and met with local law enforcement partners in Australia and New Zealand. He commended the DSS security team for executing another safe major event overseas.

“DSS personnel did a fantastic job planning for security contingencies and later applying their training when an active shooter attack occurred near the team hotel in Auckland, New Zealand, hours before the opening game,” said Wroblewski.



DSS Special Agent Gabriel Pandya, embedded with the U.S. women’s soccer team as a liaison, witnessed the active shooter incident unfolding while walking near the team hotel. She saw a helicopter hovering overhead as armed law enforcement officers entered a high-rise building under construction. Then she heard gunshots which she reported to fellow agents and to the JOC at ConGen Sydney while recommending the soccer team shelter in place at the hotel.

“That’s one example of why we’re here,” she said in a phone interview with Nazareth University’s communications director from Auckland, New Zealand. “A lot of the job is passing information back and forth between the team security, law enforcement, FIFA security, venue security, and the host nation’s government. It helps to have people like us from the Diplomatic Security Service to try to connect all that information and get it where it needs to go.”

DSS will use the same tested security structure at the Pan American and Parapan American Games in Santiago, Chile, this fall, where providing a safe and secure environment for Americans at the games will remain a top priority.

*Eric Weiner is a public affairs and media relations specialist with the Diplomatic Security Service Office of Public Affairs.*

