Refereeing has always been a passion for me since I acquired my license back in 2011. However, if I knew back then, that my new hobby would make it possible for me to meet so many fantastic people and all kinds of different places all over Europe, I would have probably started years earlier.
One of these places is Manchester, where I was lucky to officiate in the International Super Cup in July 2015. But how come, a German guy, who has never been to England before, attends a tournament with other British referees?

In fact, back in 2014 at another international youth tournament near Barcelona, I met an English team of referees consisting of Andy McEvoy, Paul Craven, Joe Goodwin and Ian Smellie. We got along quite well and it we all had a fantastic time, but I was a little disappointed that we did not get the opportunity to work together in a finals match, since only the finals were planned with assistant referees. However, I always liked speaking English and wanted to visit Great Britain even once in my life. I must have told Ian I guess, because months after our time in Spain, he texted me about this big tournament in Manchester they were having and that they might make it possible for me to attend. Of course I couldn’t say no to this offer. Beforehand Ian and John Key – someone I did not know at that time – send a lot of E-Mails to me and the other referees of the Barkston Ash RA for an adequate preparation. I was really impressed about the effort they put in the teamwork and a proper presentation during the tournament. Their code of conduct, for instance, is taken very seriously. It is a short but clear guide on how to behave in a professional manner everyone has to follow – including me.
With that impression, I took the plane to Manchester, where Ian fetched me from the airport and gave me accommodation for one night, which I am still very thankful for. I got to see at least a little of Leeds and the area around it, until we went to our Hotel accommodation in Manchester together with Rob Cornforth and Lucy Haskell, two very friendly and young BARA referees, who immediately treated me like I was one of them.

The tournament itself was really interesting since we had different referee teams together each day and we always got to officiate with assistant referees, which makes our jobs both easier and more professional in my opinion. Of course there were some differences between the “German Style” of refereeing and the English one, but I am sure the people who were in my team during the matches realized that we were doing fine combining both. At the end of each day we had a meeting with all the BARA members, where we would discuss each other’s performance and reflect on our own as well. Indeed, this was a good way to work on ourselves and improve on the next tournament day. It was nice to see that even the young referees improved on the things we talked about in the progress of the tournament.

Finally, I was sad when I had to leave for the airport during the day of the finals in the middle of the pouring rain. It was a unique experience officiating with all Barkston Ash referees and I think I can speak for every single one of us when I am saying that we had a lot of fun. I am really hoping to come back to England soon.

I would like to thank John Key for the great organization and especially Ian Smellie, without whom this all would not have been possible for me.