

Orlando-Bound Youth Soccer Athlete Overcomes Tremendous Medical Odds and Competes in Disney Cup International

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. (July 13, 2015) – Like thousands of other youths, Alana Rodriguez, a 14-year-old girl from **Puerto Rico** competed in the **Disney Cup International** soccer tournament at **ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex** this week – a thrill doctors said she'd never experience.

At just nine months old, Rodriguez was diagnosed with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. Doctors said she'd face abnormal growth development, would grow to be less than 4 feet tall, and would probably have a learning disorder as a result. But at eight years old, Alana fought to play, and the results astounded even her doctors.

"If she stops playing for more than three days, her symptoms get the best of her," said Diana Mendez Toledo, Rodriguez's mother. "The doctor is very convinced that without soccer she would deteriorate very quickly."

To receive medical attention unavailable in Puerto Rico, Rodriguez and her family moved to **Orlando, Florida** the same week she and her team competed in the tournament. The team traveled from Puerto Rico to Florida to give Rodriguez a magical sendoff **Disney World**.

Since 1999, the annual Disney Cup International Tournament has attracted teams from more than **20 countries**, giving participants a unique opportunity to compete on the same fields as teams from the English Premier League and Major League Soccer.