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Dutch Soccer Club to Train Kids Outside Moscow

By Alec Luhn

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The Dutch team Ajax in June will open Russia's first children's football camp run by a foreign club, organizers said at a news conference Friday.

The camp, in the Moscow region city of Istra, will be the first step toward creation of a larger youth soccer training program, said Tom Sauer, director of the Ajax Football Academy in Russia and the CIS. The academy plans to open camps in other cities, and in 2015 a training facility will be set up in a city that has yet to be determined.

"The main idea is to give children fun playing in the way Ajax plays," Sauer said.

Tom Sauer is the son of Derk Sauer, president of the media group RBC and chairman of the supervisory board of Sanoma Independent Media, which owns The Moscow Times. The Sauers' Korsa Media signed a contract with Ajax to run the academy, Tom Sauer said.

Starting in June, six groups of 90 to 100 boys ages 9 to 14 will spend a week each at the Istra camp training twice a day with Ajax coaches and enjoying other activities such as table tennis and video game tournaments.

The camps represent the commercial side of the project, while the training facility will be aimed at developing talented young players, Sauer said.

Tuition for the weeklong camp is 38,000 rubles ($1,200), but 30 percent of participants will attend on scholarship. Organizers are drumming up sponsors to fund the scholarships.

The Dutch football club sees the project in Russia as a way to develop its brand presence, Ajax commercial director Henri van der Aat said. The camp will spread the gospel of Ajax's style of "attractive, attacking football," he added.

Van der Aat also said the market for youth soccer training in Russia is poised to grow.

"You will see more football camps and later more football academies evolving here because there's a big market for it," he said.

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