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**Young fans caught in ticket 'scam' finally end up on the winning side**  
 By **Richard Alleyne in Stuttgart**  
 (Filed: 26/06/2006)

Patience paid off yesterday for 23 schoolchildren who missed out on watching a World Cup match because of an alleged ticket scam.

The 23 classmates from Mayville High School in Portsmouth, Hants, finally got to watch a live game - and to see David Beckham scoring the winning goal for England.

They were in the Gottlieb-Daimler-Stadion in Stuttgart yesterday afternoon to celebrate as the team captain's 59th-minute free kick meant that England advanced into the quarter finals by knocking out Ecuador.



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One of the excited youngsters, Matt Enfield, 12, said: "It has been a life-changing experience. It is absolutely brilliant to be here."

Matt and his friends were among 350 children from 11 schools who were left without tickets after travelling to Germany to see the Czech Republic play Ghana in Cologne on June 17. After they arrived, their excitement turned to despair when they were told that there were no tickets for them.

Their tour operator, Activ4, had, it emerged, been the victim of an alleged scam after it tried to obtain the tickets through an agency on the internet.

But the young soccer fans eventually realised their dream when they watched England play live, thanks to intervention by Tony Blair and others in the Government.

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Richard Scales, 12, said: "We were really upset when we missed the last match but this has been even more brilliant than we thought."

As well as intervention by the Government, Portsmouth Football Club helped to organise the tickets with Fifa and have paid for accommodation and transport.

Martin Castle, the deputy head teacher at Mayville High School, who accompanied the boys, aged between 11 and 16, said: "It is so exciting.

"The children haven't talked about anything else at all. This trip has made up for all the disappointment - and some."

Yesterday the group was also due to meet the minister for sport Richard Caborn and the Fifa president Sepp Blatter at the match.

Alexandre Gaydamak, Portsmouth FC's co-owner, said: "These were unfortunate circumstances. I do believe that it is important for children to be involved in sports and it is great for them to now have the opportunity to go to the World Cup.

"We went to the school and met the boys and it was obvious to all of us how passionate they are about football."

The boys were among 350 youngsters across the country whose families each paid up to £400 for a trip to Germany last weekend, organised by Activ4.

It ended in disappointment when the match tickets failed to materialise as promised from the supplier, Tickets For All, which is now being investigated by police.

The Prime Minister, when he co-hosted a phone-in programme on BBC Radio Five Live earlier this week, promised that the Government would try to improve matters for the disappointed youngsters.

No 10 announced the deal on Wednesday after personal talks were held between Mr Caborn and Mr Blatter.

Downing Street said that the Premier League chairman, Sir Dave Richards, also played a crucial role in the deal.

British Airways has agreed to fly the rest of the youngsters to Germany, where they will see a quarter-final match next week.

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