

# DAILY NEWS

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## Soccer effort finally scores

### GOAL!

#### Waylaid gifts arrive in Cambodia

BY ELIZABETH HAYS

**Goal!** The international soccer jersey incident is now officially over.

A shipment of donated soccer goods from a Boerum Hill school finally reached a group of Cambodian orphans last week after being held up for 16 months by allegedly corrupt port officials demanding hundreds of dollars in “fees.”

“I feel happy because we were able to help a poor country,” said Eli Shirk, 11, whose mother, Paula, founded the nonprofit behind the shipment as a way to help the birth village of Eli’s adopted brother, Rudi, 6.

“It was unfair they wouldn’t give them everything,” said Eli. “It didn’t seem right they didn’t want to help their own country.”

The delivery brings to an end a frustrating 18 months for the students of Public School 261, who gathered the used goods and shipped them off in August 2006. The equipment arrived in Phnom Penh just two months later - but the mission stalled when Cambodian port officials demanded “fees” from \$650 to \$1,560 to release the goods to the Palm Tree Institute orphanage.

Members of the group, Brooklyn Bridge to Cambodia, then tried everything they could to release the donations, from writing to Cambodian and U.S. government officials to printing an Op-Ed in the Cambodia Daily newspaper. But nothing worked until the group turned to the Daily News in December and to Sens. Chuck Schumer and Hillary Clinton, who pressured government officials in both countries to intervene.

“I am very delighted to have the gift from students in New York,” Srim, a young girl at the orphanage who is also Rudi’s sister, said to a local volunteer when the youngsters were finally able to try on the colorful soccer jerseys to pose for a photo.

“Even though we have never met each other, we feel that we are very close friends ... knowing that they care for us so much,” Srim said.

The donations were to be released to the orphanage just



*Children at Cambodian orphanage with soccer jerseys and balls donated by Brooklyn students.*

before Christmas. But unexpected delays held up the shipment again, until it finally arrived in large cardboard boxes last Wednesday.

“This is a game-changer for the Cambodian orphans who have for too long had too little in their lives,” said Schumer.

“Thanks to the unfailing generosity of the kids of Brooklyn, a dedicated embassy, and a helpful ambassador, the orphans of the Palm Tree Institute will now be able to bend it like Beckham to their hearts’ content.”

Paula Shirk, who has raised thousands of dollars to help Rudi’s birth family, said the group is already planning its next project, sending food to Rudi’s impoverished birth village.



*As the kids at the Palm Tree Orphanage received their long lost uniforms, the most delightful soccer game on the planet erupted, sans shoes and soccer balls.*