In 2007, the Icelandic Youth Association (UMFI) could celebrate its 100 anniversary. As part of the centenary celebrations, UMFI invited Play the Game to Iceland, and the country made many contributions to the conference experience.

FACTS about UMFI

- UMFI was founded in 1907 as a national association for local youth associations in Iceland.

- UMFI’s objective is to cultivate the people and the country. In addition to cultivating the best in every individual, the organisation aims to promote Icelandic language and culture and protect the country’s natural environment.

- UMFI’s slogan is “Everything for Iceland”, and historically the organisation’s members have cultivated forests, built swimming pools and meeting halls, constructed sports facilities and secondary schools and built a culture of public debate.

- UMFI covers a total of 263 associations with approximately 81,000 members.

- Today, member associations include sports clubs, amateur theatre clubs, environmental programmes and youth associations.

- From 1992 UMFI has organised National Youth Sports Meetings that are now held every year.

“And I did get the chance to walk on ice, under falling snow and howling wind and get thoroughly wet in a way only a Viking could understand”.

Charles Nyende, Journalist at Nation Media Group, Kenya.

Visit at LazyTown Studios (see article page 27)

The Blue Lagoon close to Keflavik is founded on a unique source of geothermal seawater that originates in Iceland’s extreme environment.

Socialising in the lobby of Grand Hotel Reykjavik

Freezing packed lunch at Thingvellir

Delegates relaxing in the Blue Lagoon
The geyser Strokkur erupts very reliably every 5-10 minutes, hurling boiling water to heights of up to 20 metres (70ft).

Delegates visit Alpingi at Thingvellir where the Icelanders founded a parliamentary institution in the year 930.

The Gulfoss waterfall is one of Iceland’s biggest attractions. Photo: Maria Suurballe.

Impression from downtown Reykjavik.

Smiles at the opening session.

The only true Icelandic national sport, Glima, has now become a competitive sport with official tournaments. Courtesy of the Icelandic Glima Association.

The one truly Icelandic national sport is a type of wrestling known as gíma. After decades of neglect, gíma has been enjoying a major revival in popularity, and on the opening day of the conference, Play the Game delegates were given an introduction to the fascinating sport.

Gíma wrestlers keep a firm grasp on a harness which is fastened around each contestant’s waist and thighs. No other grips are permitted. Tricks are then applied with the body and feet and together with bends, jerks and swings, the aim is to upset the opponent’s balance and knock him to the ground. A fall is the end of the contest.

There are eight basic tricks in Gíma which can be executed in many different ways. Considerable skill is also required. It is not enough to be big and strong and it is not uncommon to see small but skilful wrestlers throwing much heavier adversaries by the use of cleverly performed tricks.

During the last few centuries, gíma was practised in schools, at fishing camps and as recreation on festive occasions such as wedding parties. People also used to enjoy a match or two after church.

In the beginning of the 20th century, gíma changed from being a popular pastime to becoming a competitive sport with regulations and official tournaments. The first Icelandic gíma championship was held in 1906.

In 1990’s, the age of gíma contestants was lowered and women were permitted to take part. Teenagers were allowed to wrestle but had to do it on mattresses to avoid injury.

During the same period, the Gíma Association re-introduced gíma to elementary schools all over the country. The campaign was a success and led to more contestants in wrestling competitions, especially amongst young people.

Source: Jon M. Ivarsson: Traditional Icelandic wrestling enjoys a revival in popularity, Icelandic Review.

“It was an honour to be there and a pleasure to meet so many interesting and pleasant people.”

George Springborg, Streetfootball World, Germany.