

SPORTS

Annual HYSA fall soccer tournament attracts 300 players to Oldenburg Park

Sunshine and bright smiles were plentiful at the recent Headwaters Youth Soccer Association's (HYSA) annual fall recreational soccer tournament at Oldenburg Sports Park in Eagle River.

HYSA, a part of the community for nearly 30 years, hosted approximately 300 players from 10 towns throughout the North Woods and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, including Conover, Eagle River, Land O' Lakes, Minocqua, Phelps, St. Germain, Sugar Camp, Three Lakes and Iron River and Ironwood, Mich.

The program (starting in mid-spring) registers youth players from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade for practice and games starting in early August through the end of September.

Within the last three to four years, program organizers realized that HYSA is moving into a full second generation of players.

"With families like Otto, Healy, Mors, Adamovich, Hicks, Meyer and Favorite (and many others) again involved as a second generation and newer families like Pinski, Duffek, Shenk, Lovas and Maines (and many others) participating, there is a heightened level of enthusiasm and interest in the sport and the program. We look forward to growing together with these families and as a community," said an HYSA board member.

The program is about more than just learning to play soccer, according to John Welsh, HYSA president from Three Lakes.

"It's just a fun activity for kids where we want them to have fun with soccer. But at the same time we want them to be stretched too, from the

standpoint of just personally growing in character and that's what the whole goal of the program is," said Welsh. "As organizers, we hope this program encourages the kids to focus on learning skills but most importantly, having fun," said Welsh.

Rod Sternhagen of Eagle River agreed with Welsh.

"Playing sports, especially soccer, is a great way to teach children how to work with others. It also teaches them how to juggle school, after-school work and the rest of life," said Sternhagen. "As a high school coach, it is great to watch all the kids, seeing how they improve year after year. The end-of-the-season tournament weekend shows how the dedication of coaches, athletes and parents is paying off, especially when you see smile after smile!"

The soccer program is also very important to the youth in a small community such as Phelps, according to Patti Darr of Phelps.

"It provides an opportunity for young kids to be active while making friends, learning respect toward teammates and coaches, and teaching the important life skill of working together," said Darr. "The residents of Phelps have always supported this program and value the sense of community it creates in children who, because of our small class sizes, will be working together for the rest of their school careers."

The program is now attracting teams from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

"It is inspiring for the younger kids to be able to see and feel the excitement from having all age groups and games played at one location. The kids love the opportunity



Hundreds of youths participated in the annual Headwaters Youth Soccer Association (HYSA) tournament at Oldenburg Sports Park

on Highway G in Eagle River. Players from 10 communities participated in the event. —Contributed Photos

to be able to play against a different local community each week," said Christy Makuck of Iron River, Mich. "The players have really grown throughout the season, both individually and as a team."

Ryan Glembin the town coordinator for Sugar Camp soccer program, said the HYSA youth club is dedicated to bringing a quality soccer program to local communities.

"Soccer is generally the first sport every youth starts out playing at a young age. For many kids, the value of teamwork and commitment is instilled in them throughout these times," said Glembin. "The joy on kids' and even the parents' faces from practices to the games is the reason our youth club soccer program is committed to bringing the very best program to our communities."

While HYSA welcomes in a second generation of youth players, the club also recognizes the families who have been growing together with the organization, such as Cox and Smith from St. Germain, and Snedden of Eagle River (and many, many others). These families have had three or more children start with and participate in the program year after year.

"Families like these have provided continuity and framework in keeping the program functioning. These families continue to participate year after year after year for good reason," said an HYSA board member.

"Being involved with HYSA recreational soccer is great opportunity for having youth involved in sports. Recreational soccer allows for an economical and family friendly way to get exposure to play and to spend time



The Tony Duffek family, toting soccer balls and other gear, strolled across the Oldenburg Sports Park lawn during the recent HYSA tournament at the park.



Young referees are very important to the success of the youth soccer program in this area.

with friends and to interact with others for surrounding towns," said one long-time HYSA family member.

Because the fall recreation program is short (six to eight weeks, including the main tournament) and since the centralized game location at Oldenburg Sports Park was decided on a few years ago, games times are relatively the same from week to week. The games are played each Saturday morning starting in August through the end of September.

"This consistency in loca-

tion and times each week makes family scheduling much easier," said another HYSA family member.

Another family member said the simple schedule allows players with other interests to work additional activities into their calendar.

"This introduction into soccer allows players to grow and participate in the Northern Lights winter indoor league, the HYSA United spring competitive league, high school and college programs," added another family member.

Contacts for the HYSA fall

recreation program include John Welsh at 3lakesyouthsoccer@gmail.com and David Chamberlain at noddled1864@gmail.com. The contact for HYSA United is hysaunited@gmail.com. The contact for the Northern Lights indoor winter league is Brad Camp at bradley.j.camp@gmail.com.

"The HYSA board and program participants say thanks to everyone who was a part of making the season and the tournament a success," said Chamberlain, HYSA vice president.