

YOUTH SOCCER

Spring is upon us, and this season almost 300 kids are anxiously waiting for the snow to melt and the soccer fields to dry. For many residents, it is a familiar sight to see kids in brightly colored shirts running around chasing a soccer ball after school each spring. Family and friends line the fields rain or shine. Snacks are provided, successes cheered, and scraped knees are bandaged.

With participation rates consistently high for many years, youth soccer is by far the biggest sport for kids in town. This year, there will be 36 local children and youth soccer teams, including U6 (ages 4 & 5), U8 (ages 6 & 7), U10 (ages 8 & 9), U12 (ages 10 & 11), and U13 (age 12).



Alan Mason

Although for the most part, the soccer season runs from mid-April to the third week of June, rep teams (U11, U12 and U13) start practicing indoors in school gyms in March and have a longer season, playing every Sunday out of town in Penticton, Kelowna, Vernon, Kamloops & Salmon arm starting mid April and ending in June/July.

Before the season begins, the kids need to be registered and sorted fairly into teams. Coaches, assistant coaches, and team managers need to be found, assigned and brought up to speed. The fields need to be lined, equipment sorted and handled, and scheduling for practices and games completed. Uniforms need to be purchased and distributed. At other times during the year, grant applications need to be done, book keeping kept up to speed, business support for uniforms to be solicited, and the gear swap and year-end party to plan. Although there is a core group of about 4 or 5 people who do much of the organizational work, these activities are supported by up to 120 volunteers. In September, the association hosts the Little Bear Soccer Tournament, which brings in hundreds of kids and their families from throughout the region.

And for 5 years running, Alan Mason, President of the Revelstoke Youth Soccer Association, has been at the helm. Both Mason and wife Janet played and coached soccer for years. As well, Mason personally coaches up to 3 or 4 teams a season. Mason sees soccer not only as a rewarding physical activity and relatively inexpensive team sport for kids, but a great way for kids to make friends. It is very important to him that Revelstoke continues to support this opportunity for children. "Youth soccer has been really well supported by the community," he says. "The support from local business has been tremendous." Local businesses like MacDonald's, RMR, and The Modern Bake Shop sponsor team uniforms each year. For years, MacDonald's has sponsored all the uniforms in the U6 category – which is the largest age group involved. The younger kids keep their shirts at the season's end and enjoy showing them off to the local business sponsors.

Each year, a gaming grant is obtained that helps support purchasing and maintenance of equipment. As well, the playing fields at all the schools and Centennial Park have been upgraded, improving both the quality and safety of the fields. This benefits other activities like track and field, as well as outdoor gym and recess time for the school kids. In particular, soccer fields at Centennial Park are being developed to provide a more central, guaranteed location for the kids' games. Older youth are recruited, trained and paid to referee the games. Every cent earned is reinvested back into youth soccer.

Youth soccer is always on the look out for new volunteers. Mason admits the ideal strategy would be to work with someone for a couple of years before passing on the leadership torch. Despite all the volunteer work involved, Mason is still enthusiastic. It's very apparent that he truly loves the game, "It's stuff like this that contributes to the spirit of the community," he says, "I'm in this for the kids!"

For more information about volunteering for Youth Soccer in any capacity, contact, volunteer coordinator: Brenda Jones at bdjones@telus.net. For more information about volunteering in Revelstoke, contact the Community Centre at 250-837-9351 or visit <http://www.revelstokecf.com/volunteers>

Submitted by Jill Zacharias, Photo courtesy of Cathy Burke, CFDC Volunteer Committee members