

Old game of soccer growing faster every year in Austin

Soccer! An old game that is fairly new to Austin, soccer will become the primary sport of some 5,000 Austin-area youth this fall.

Youth soccer began in Austin about four years ago through the efforts of the Town and Country Optimist Club of Jollyville and the Downtown YMCA. Town and Country now services over 1,000 boys and girls in their competition program in the Northwest Austin suburbs along Highway 183. The Downtown YMCA, with less emphasis on competition and organized teams, hopes to provide activity for another 300 youth this year.

This past winter a major, new soccer program was formed in North Austin. University Hills Optimists (UHO) decided to launch an organized soccer program for youth north of the river. The Northwest YMCA had, and still has, an informal soccer program as the only offering at the time for youth north of the central city.

The program began in January with some 550 boys and girls registered on 32 teams in separate boys and girls leagues. The number is expected to double this fall.

To keep pace with the growing demand, the UHO told of their success the Boys Club in South Austin, the East Austin Optimist Club and other organizations which were soon persuaded to form their own leagues for the fall season starting this month. Still, UHO's soccer enrollment is expected to double when league play begins Sept. 30.

UHO has set registration for the fall league for Saturday from 9 a.m. until 6 p.m. at Reznicek

Field, located on West St. John's Ave. at the intersection of Northcrest, which is about halfway between III-35 and Guadalupe St. Registration fee, covering issuance of a uniform which the player keeps, insurance, team balls and equipment, is \$15 per player.

"Separate boys and girls leagues were formed," said league president Ed Reznicek, "because most parents prefer that their daughters play on girls only teams. The girls are very competitive."

Playing divisions in the UHO program are formed along two-year age spans. Players from age six to age 18 are accommodated, with six and seven year old boys playing in a league to themselves, a separate eight and nine year old league, and so on. *The same is true for the girls league.*

"Over half of our players were ages six or seven this past season," said league secretary Curtis Dickson. "And over three-fourths of all players were nine years of age and under. It looks like soccer is going to mushroom in Austin as these kids grow into the upper age brackets."

This year, University Hills Optimist Soccer Association will be operating four different fields of various sizes for the different age groups of youth. League play will be on Saturdays starting Sept. 30. There will be a 10-week season, with time off for the Thanksgiving holidays.

For more information on youth soccer, call Ed Reznicek, 837-0591; Curtis Dickson, 451-2511; Richard Pilon, 454-3417; or Roger Guile, 258-6096.