

SPORTS

Sports club kicks off rugby in Chesterfield



Swift Creek Sports Club

Local youth play rugby during an exhibition game in December. The Swift Creek Sports Club is introducing the sport to kids in Chesterfield for the first time.

By Shariq Torres
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

A sport known in the United States for its fashionable shirts will come to Chesterfield this summer when the Swift Creek Sports Club adds rugby to its lengthy list of leagues.

Registration is in March with the six-week season starting in June.

"We first thought about the idea 2-3 years ago," said Brad Powell, executive director of Swift Creek Sports Club, "but we were just starting field hockey and lacrosse at the time."

"There are a lot of adults playing rugby but no outlet for children," he continued. "We've had a pretty good response by putting it out there."

The sport originated in England at Rugby School in 1823. Teams consist of 15 players who run toward their opponent's goal to make a try, similar to a touchdown in football. Teams can also score points by kicking the ball into an upright post, again similar to football, for two or three points. When the running player is tackled, they must throw the ball backward or laterally to a team member who then takes up the stride.

Rugby allows very little protection. Players typically wear only a thin headguard and a mouthpiece. Otherwise, players rely on their dexterity and speed to avoid contact.

There is a variation on the rules for younger players.

"Any[one] under 19 will play something like flag or touch football," explained Powell.

The Richmond Lions and the Virginia Rugby Union are helping the Swift Creek Sports Club form the league by supplying coaches and referees.

"We want to train the parents to be coaches and referees. The more they are involved, the more the kids will be," said Steve Parker, a member of the Richmond Lions, who also coaches Virginia Commonwealth University's

men's rugby team.

The sports club also plans to team up with a program in Maryland that has a summer rugby league. Powell foresees the teams traveling between states to play games.

Girls are encouraged to join the new league.

"We want boys and girls to come. Obviously in the younger ages, the teams will be co-ed, but as they get older we'll put them in separate teams," said Parker.



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Registration for the sports club's new rugby league will begin in March. Game play will start in June.

And in case any girls are hesitant to join, it appears that women actually outperform men at the sport's highest level. The U.S. men's rugby team is currently 15th in the world. Compare that to the national women's team who recently finished 5th at the Rugby World Cup in Canada.

"This is just not a girl's sport or a boy's sport," stressed Parker.

For more information about the rugby league, call 763-0400 or visit www.swiftcreeksportsclub.com.

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