

Southfield soccer grows

Youth league started with 150 players in 2003 and now has 300 participants

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Southfield has never been known as a soccer hotbed. It could not be mistaken on the soccer field for Troy, Gull Lake, Novi and Rochester.

James Luckey and DeVon Jackson, president and vice president, respectively, of the Southfield Youth Soccer League, want to change that.

By expanding the youth soccer program formerly offered by Southfield Parks and Recreation, they hope to offer more budding athletes a chance to develop into skilled high school and college players.

"After players got to be 12 years old, there was no place for them to play in the Parks and Recreation league," Luckey said. "They would go outside the city to Royal Oak or somewhere else. When we took over the program in 2003, we expanded it to go from age 3 up to age 14. We are hoping to give some continuity between youth soccer and high school so that we don't lose kids during those middle school years."

In 2003, the Southfield Youth Soccer League had 150 participants. This spring, more than 300 players signed up to play. The league has 28 teams.

Southfield Public Schools does not have a middle school program or an elementary school program, so Luckey and Jackson believe their association is filling a void.

"The whole community benefits from something like this," Jackson said. "We know that football, basketball and baseball are the big sports in this area. But I figure that there are somewhere in the area of 10,000 kids in Southfield and probably 2,000 are playing those sports. That still leaves 8,000 kids who we want to give an opportunity to play."

Luckey said some of the young athletes who play in the Southfield Youth Soccer League use soccer as a way to train for their main sport. He has several girls who run track and see soccer as a great workout, as well as baseball, softball and basketball players who know that soccer is a great way to increase endurance.

The youth league hopes to serve kids who just want to stay active and have fun as well as those who truly strive to advance to another level. The league has instituted a player development program that focuses on rigorous skill training that is specifically for the athlete who aspires to play in high school, college or even the professional leagues.

"We want to instill in the youth that there is something to play besides basketball and football," Luckey said. "We have not had any Olympic development players come out of our league or anything like that yet, but we are really in our



Players compete in a Southfield Youth Soccer League game. There are 28 teams in the league, which was expanded in 2003.

Learn about SYSL

For more information about Southfield Youth Soccer League, visit its Web site:

www.southfieldsoccer.org.

infancy and I think that is in the future. We want to get the players in Southfield and surrounding areas to progress toward high school soccer and beyond."

Neither Luckey nor Jackson played soccer when growing up. Both were drawn into the sport by their kids, and both see the benefits their own children have received from playing the sport.

"We don't expect anyone to come out and be the next superstar right away," Luckey said. "We see a need to get kids off the couch, to get them to go outside and actually move. That is more important than anything. And although it sounds cliché, it is true that soccer does teach teamwork and respect for each other."

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