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Spring soccer league a hit

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The interest in soccer has grown so much that some are playing it year-round.

The East Tennessee Soccer Federation hosts an indoor league during the winter months and noticed a need from youngsters who don't play other spring sports, but are interested in continuing to play soccer. Now in its fourth season, Recreational Spring Soccer has about 150 co-ed participants on 13 teams. Local soccer enthusiasts ages eight to 15 gathered at Civitan Park on Saturday for some friendly competition.

"I've found Johnson City to be a seasonal sports city, in my opinion," said Randy Kind, director of the East Tennessee Soccer Federation. "You play every sport. Baseball one season, football the next, then basketball. And we've seen over the past couple of years that soccer has been thrown into the mix and getting to be more popular to where we are seeing a boom in it now, where larger cities started to see that several years ago."

Perhaps the soccer craze comes from the fact that it incorporates skills from many other sports.

"Soccer is a multi-athletic sport because you have all the facets of all the other sports — you have to be in shape, have to be able to handle the ball and you have a little bit of all the sports into one it seems like. Once you know the game, you see that. The overall thing that is good about it is the athleticism that the sport takes. You don't see a lot of out-of-shape people playing soccer."

Staying in shape is one reason Nick Erwin and his buddies from the JC 1 Orange team play soccer. They also attribute the game to building character and giving them the opportunity to make new friends.

The league is open to all area children, despite where they live or go to school. The ETSF also looks to keep the cost down by not requiring uniforms. Most teams are simply identified by color, plus the time commitment for players and parents isn't much more than two days a week.

"Nights are so precious to a family, so they don't want to spend it practicing," Kind said.

The Recreational Spring Soccer League gets together on Thursday evenings for practice with assistance from the ~~Morgan~~ Morgan College Soccer team and games are held on Saturdays.

"I think it's a great league," said James Kyte, coach of the JC 1 Orange whose son has been playing for eight years. "I think it's great for the children because they learn



Amanda Marsh/Johnson City Press

Nick Erwin of the JC 1 Orange Team keeps the ball from a member of the Red Warriors during a Recreational Spring Soccer game at Civitan Park on Saturday. The league is sponsored by the East Tennessee Soccer Federation.

some skills about soccer like learning how to play in a group."

Not all players pick up an interest for soccer at a young age, such as 15-year-old Curtis Barrett, who participated in the ETSF's indoor league, and decided to continue playing in the spring.

"I think this league gives them extra practice and it seems like the coaches have more one-on-one time with them," said Karen

Brewer, Curtis' mom.

Recreational Spring Soccer also feeds some of its players into ETSF's competitive club program that consists of a traveling team and trained coaches. The group will also be hosting a soccer camp June 20 through 24 for ages 8 to 18.

For more information about the upcoming camp and other programs offered by the ETSF, visit www.etsfsoccer.com.