



WANT TO GO?

WHAT: 2008 Pensacola Classic Soccer Tournament

WHO: 103 teams ranging from ages 8-18 from Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia and Tennessee

WHERE: Ashton Brosnaham Park

WHEN: Saturday and Sunday

COST: Free

Published - February, 15, 2008

Soccer tops weekend events

Hundreds of players in town for Pensacola Classic



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Six states. 103 teams.

The Pensacola Futbol Club — the largest club soccer organization in the Pensacola area — is hosting the 2008 Pensacola Classic beginning Saturday at 9 a.m.

One of two annual PFC-hosted events, the tournament is expected to attract more than 1,500 players from ages 8 to 18, along with their coaches and parents, to the Ashton-Brosnaham Sportsplex off Ten Mile Road north of Ensley.

The two-day event will attract approximately 4,000 people to Pensacola during President's Day weekend.

"This is our big tournament," PFC President Steve Willis said. "It's a showcase for our very best soccer kids in the area. It's a nice chance for people to see what the South is all about."

PFC is home to about 500 local soccer players, including recreational players and "select team" members that travel to tournaments regularly. PFC has 19 competitive teams ranging in age from under-10 to under-18. Seventeen teams will be competing this weekend.

The extra training PFC provides has paid off for some — nine girls on the PFC under-18 team signed college scholarships last week.

"If you want to be seen, you really have to get out there and play," said Courtney Jenista, a PFC player and Catholic High School senior who recently signed a scholarship with Stetson University. "You can't really do anything else to be seen by (college) coaches except going to tournaments, practicing regularly and just staying competitive."

A volunteer-based organization, PFC is run mostly by the parents of current soccer players.

Like many PFC parents, Willis, a family physician, has become a jack of all trades, thanks to his volunteer efforts. Getting his start with the organization as a parent and assistant coach, Willis is in his second year as president and also serves as the team doctor for the entire club. The only paid staff are the professional coaches.

"Everything that goes into this tournament is done by volunteers," Willis said. "From the person that empties the garbage can to the person that flips the burger that you bought, all those are people that are doing it because they are trying to help their kids in the sport."

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"We couldn't do it without them."

David Kemp is the head coach of the PFC program. A former midfielder on the University of West Florida soccer team in the 1990s, Kemp headed up a club program in Hawaii before returning to Pensacola.

"With local (soccer) programs, you are going to be exposed to quality coaching and opportunities to progress in the system," said Kemp, one of 10 coaches working with PFC.

Escambia County allows PFC to use the Brosnaham Park facility for free, but the club pays maintenance and utility costs. PFC receives revenue from two annual tournaments, and from dues from an estimated 500 soccer players in the program.

Like many sports programs in the area, Hurricane Ivan took a toll on the PFC and its tournaments.

Before the September 2004 storm, PFC brought in 160 teams to the Pensacola Classic. The 103 this year is the highest total since.

"Before Ivan, this event was huge," Willis said. "And luckily back then, there weren't as many competing events. So that made it even better."

With significant damage to the field, outdoor lighting and local hotels, restarting the tournament was difficult.

"It really knocked us out for a while," Willis said. "After Ivan, we are slowly and steadily building back to where we were before."

The restoration began when Escambia County added the stadium field to Brosnaham Park. The new facility — designed to host NCAA Championships as it did in 2006 — added modern locker rooms and a new clubhouse.

"We've got a complex that you just don't see in the Southeast," Willis said. "With that many fields of that quality grass, and condition in that close proximity ... clubs that come in just can't believe it."

Continuing the growth of its biggest tournament, PFC has contacted the Northwest Florida Arts Council about having artists display their work at the event to give the tournament a festival atmosphere. Eventually the club hopes to entice northern teams to a place where it's warm enough to play in February.

"We're trying to make our (tournament) a little different than everyone else's," PFC tournament director Gerald Praylow said. "Since we bring these type of numbers to town, this should be a community event, not just a PFC event."

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Get more info

Fri Feb 15, 2008 9:49 am

You can get more info about PFC and the tournament at www.pensacolafc.com.

Soccer is a great sport to get your kids involved in. Teaches them teamwork, how to think quick, and they'll get and stay in shape.

Posted by: **overtheedge2****No admission!**

Fri Feb 15, 2008 3:16 pm

The games this weekend are free. 😊

Posted by: **PNSSoccer****Reader Comment**

Fri Feb 15, 2008 3:21 pm

It is a fun tournament to be a part of! But please...be kind to the referees. Some of them are officiating 6-8 games each day! They do it because they love the sport and nobody else wants to. So if you think you can do better, feel free to join them! Ask any referee this weekend how.

Posted by: **area_resident**

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