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Local soccer club kicks from new game

BRIAN SWANE
Examiner Staff

It's a sport played in gymnasiums and fieldhouses, with a small heavy ball and five players a side. It isn't exactly indoor soccer, not quite European football. It's futsal, and it's a game the Southwest United Sports Club is proving to be very good at.

The local minor soccer organization will be sending both a boys and girls team to the first ever under-14 Canadian futsal championships, taking place this weekend at Capilano College in North Vancouver.

"It's kind of a feather in the cap for the club, because... both teams from the club are going to nationals, it's kind of exciting," said John Stadnyk, head coach of the SW United girls team.

Last month, the two teams earned a trip west with first-place finishes in their respective provincial championships. The boys capped an undefeated regular season by winning all three of their games and giving up just one goal in the process, while the girls entered provincials only after another team dropped out and ended up compiling a tournament-best record of two wins and one tie.

"I think we were pretty determined," says Meredith Stadnyk, noting that she and her teammates on the girls squad knocked off opponents they had lost to earlier this year. "We just knew we could do it."

The success come despite the fact that futsal is practically brand new to SW United. The girls are 12-year-olds but play against 13-year-olds because there is no division for their age group and are in just their second year of futsal. The boys, who in seasons past played only indoor soccer during the winter, are completely new to the game.

"The size of the ball is a lot different so it was hard to get used to," says SW United



The Southwest United under-14 boys futsal team went undefeated this season to earn a spot in the Canadian championships.

boys player Tim Hickson, whose team also went unbeaten in their indoor schedule this season. "But once you kind of got into it, it was like a flow."

All of the players have backgrounds in the outdoor game. That skill set translates well, says boys assistant coach Clive Hickson, adding that when compared to indoor soccer, futsal is much closer to traditional football.

"You need to be very precise in your tackling," the coach says. "You need to be very precise in your passing, you have quick shots at goal. It's an extremely fast game. Lots of twisting and turning."

Teams from British Columbia and Ontario will also be at the national competition, which features four teams in both the girls and boys divisions. The teams will play a round-robin schedule, with the top two finishers then playing to decide the gold and silver-medal winners, while third- and fourth-place square off for bronze.

The games will be contested on a hardwood floor, the standard playing surface for futsal, which presents a new challenge for the SW United squads, who play their local games on turf. Yet, after everything they've accomplished this season, the upstart SW United clubs feel they can have a strong showing on the coast.

"What's happening is you've got four obviously excellent teams there," says Clive Hickson. "They're going to be extremely tough teams without a doubt, because some of them have greater experience than us at playing. However we have every faith in our (team)... We'd like to medal, and we think that we can cause a few surprise, too."

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