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Adaptive Sports & Recreation

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Stephen Michael Kerr, Publisher

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From The Publisher

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Last weekend here in Austin, Tx, I had the opportunity to emcee the 12th annual bowlathon to benefit SportsVision 2020, a nonprofit group helping to promote sports for the blind, particularly Beep Baseball, a modified form of baseball played by the blind. Each year, the bowlathon raises funds to help send the Austin Blackhawks to the annual Beep Baseball World Series.

As always, it was a wonderful time. As soon as I walked into Highland Lanes, site of the event for the past several years, I could tell right away that there were more bowlers than we've had in quite a while. There were plenty of door prizes, and a good time was had by all. I just want to thank all the volunteers, corporate sponsors, and bowlers who once again made this annual event a smashing success.

Talk to you soon.

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Spotlight

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Amputees Get Their Kicks With Soccer
by Stephen Michael Kerr

Legend has it that the game of amputee soccer came about by accident, thanks to a runaway basketball.

About 25 years ago, amputee Don Bennett of Seattle was walking to his car one day when he noticed a basketball rolling toward him from the garage. Instinctively, he raised up on his crutches and kicked the ball back.

That incident planted the seed for what would slowly evolve into an international sport. Bennett, an avid skier, began experimenting with

various forms of amputee soccer as a recreational way to keep in shape for ski season.

Two years after the experience with the basketball, Bennett, along with former pro soccer player Bill Barry, helped form Amputee Soccer International. It was through this group that the sport began to take shape internationally, with teams in the U.S., Europe, and the former Soviet Union.

It wasn't until 1997, however, that the game began to spread across the U.S. Following a workshop in Philadelphia, the American Amputee Soccer Association (AASA), was established to promote the sport.

"At its root, amputee soccer is little more than kicking a ball on crutches," explains AASA Executive Director Rick Hofmann. "But the implication is that the individual can play an active sport, and can sweat, and can compete, even on the international level. This game is very powerful stuff."

Except for some minor modifications to the rules, amputee soccer is virtually the same as the two-legged version. Metal crutches are used by the players, with forearm crutches as the international standard. Wooden crutches are prohibited to eliminate the danger of breaking or splintering. Players are allowed to make incidental contact between their crutch and the ball, but blocking, trapping, or advancing the ball with a crutch is considered the same as a hand pass in regular soccer.

Players may not use their crutch like a hockey stick for cross-checking or high sticking. Otherwise, the offending player is ejected from the game, and a penalty kick is awarded to the opposing team.

The playing surface, or pitch, can be either indoors or outdoors, and is usually smaller than a regulation arena or field. The goal is also smaller, measuring two meters high, three meters wide, , and one meter deep. A standard FIFA ball is used, appropriate to each age group. Teams consist of three players a side, plus a goalkeeper, and games are played in two 10-minute periods, with a five-minute intermission.

In some cases, teams are allowed to use able-bodied players, as long as amputees make up the majority of the roster. The able-bodied player may be substituted for an amputee, but must use a crutch, may not wear a shoe on the non-kicking foot, and may not run or touch down with the non-kicking foot during play. Any non-amputee who acts as goalkeeper must keep one arm tucked inside their jersey.

"We've found that in some communities there are too few amputee players to develop a competitive team or league," Hofmann says. "Able-bodied players can fill in on an under-strength team."

One obstacle in promoting the game to potential players is the HIPPA Privacy Act. Prosthetists, therapists, and rehabilitation hospitals are no longer allowed to provide organizations like AASA mailing lists or other information about their clients. Many have been reluctant to take the time to spread the word themselves. However, Hofmann says, once a person tries the game for the first time, they're hooked.

"They discover, very quickly, that this is a game they can play and be

competitive in," he explains. "(It's) a game where they can compete with people just like themselves on a level playing field."

As competitive as amputee soccer is, there is still a "come one, come all" approach to the game. Players of all ages, male and female, are welcome. Exceptions in the rules are made for able-bodied friends and family members to play.

"Our goal is to make amputee soccer available to anyone who wants to play," Hofmann says. "We'd love to have more local and regional teams for expanded competitions."

If you'd like to become involved in this growing sport, visit the AASA website:

www.ampsoccer.org

To check out photos of the game, go to:
http://www.ampsoccer.org/best/baction_1.cfm

** If you have an idea for a spotlight on a particular adaptive sport or organization, send it to:
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