

SPORTS

Get lucky

They're here, they're queer, and they play soccer

BY KAREN KUDEJ



Supposedly they play soccer, too: Portland plays host to Festival of the Babes on Aug. 30 and 31 at Fernhill Park

On Labor Day weekend, Portland will play host to the 13th annual Festival of the Babes, a two-day tournament celebrating lesbians and soccer. A total of 24 teams and 250 babes will converge on Fernhill Park for games played with a backdrop of music that inspires impromptu dancing on the sidelines.

Unlike regulation soccer with 11 players on a side, this tournament favors a more intimate seven vs. seven format with 25-minute halves. And while shin guards are required, players trade their uniforms for costumes that may range from formal (as in prom dresses) to grungy (as in flannel shirts and suspenders).

"If you take the Dyke March and mix it with Halloween and Women's World Cup Soccer, what you get is Festival of the Babes," says Myra LaVenue, one of this year's organizers.

Everyone associated with the tournament is referred to as a "babe," and players may be heard yelling "babe-on" instead of "man-on." Fun and flirtation on the field appears to be much more important than who wins or loses. In fact, some teams favor losing, and losing big, because rules state that a winning team must take off an article of clothing (cleats, socks and shin guards not included) each time it is ahead by five or more goals.

Babe-ly behavior may include flashing the goalkeeper before taking a penalty shot, hugging an opponent in the middle of a game or letting a player who has never scored have a free shot at the goal. Why isn't professional football more like this?

Festival of the Babes began in San Francisco in 1991 after a team called the Follies attended the 1990 Gay Games in Vancouver, British Columbia, and got a taste of an all-queer tournament.

The next summer the Follies attended a Seattle tournament that lacked that celebratory atmosphere. "We thought we could do way better," says Helen Whitaker, a founding member of the festival. "We also wanted an excuse to get the really cute Vancouver babes down to San Francisco."

Chris Mock, another founder, explains: "I think that the Vancouver Gay Games just blew us all away with the idea that you could have a soccer tournament going on as well as a full-

blown Gay Pride celebration. Games and parties? Why the hell not?"

San Francisco babe Jane White has attended the festival every year. "There were eight teams in the first [festival], played on a very foggy Saturday morning, and the games were started and ended by the honking of a car horn. Not one player could wipe the smile off because the idea of a soccer festival for dykes was so amazing that it didn't seem real."

The San Francisco squad continued organizing the tournament and parties for nine years in a row before passing the baton to the Vancouver teams, who played host to the 10th and 11th tournaments in Canada. The festival then returned to San Francisco for a "homecoming" last year.

For the past three years, Portland teams such as Bite Me Bait (every player is a good catch),

Artemis (toga, no bra) and the Babeticians (free breast exams) have traveled to Festival of the Babes. With the encouragement of the other cities, Portland decided to take a turn hosting.

As described in the program, the theme of this year's tournament is "Get Lucky," as in "Good luck in your game! Be lucky in love. There's no such thing as tough luck at FOB."

While most of the teams come from the West Coast,

this year's tournament also includes the Colorado Trojans and the mild-mannered Boston lesbians who change into Superdykes on the field. Portland will be represented by the Angels, Artemis, the Babeticians and Beaver Believers.

Games take place at Fernhill Park, Northeast 37th Avenue and Ainsworth Street, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Aug. 30 with an hour break at noon for the opening ceremonies, which will include an introduction of the teams and a special performance that promises to be hot, hot, hot. Games begin again at 9 a.m. Aug. 31 with the finals taking place at 1 p.m.

Festival organizers encourage fans to come out and cheer because, hey, the more babes the better. **JM**

Find FESTIVAL OF THE BABES players off the field from 9 p.m. Aug. 31 at the Egyptian Club, 3701 S.E. Division St. To volunteer or learn more, visit www.festivalofthebabes.com.

KAREN KUDEJ is a free-lance writer and soccer babe.



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