

other year, we will have those players that will play on a D-1 college team," he says, "or on a D-2 or D-3 depending on where they are academically and athletically."

Ruckaberle says that in the last 10 years, competition has improved drastically, so it is no wonder soccer supporters are making an effort to find the sport a bigger stage.

THE WORLD'S GAME AT CIVIC

That stage could be the vacant Civic Stadium, formerly the home of the Eugene Emeralds. Ruckaberle and Smith hope this possibility turns into reality.

"If someone puts the resources into that stadium and makes it a soccer place, it will be one of the biggest stadiums in the Pacific Northwest," Ruckaberle says. "There is no doubt about it. It is beautiful. It feels like a soccer stadium. That's the kind of stadium I played in when I grew up."

"It's really a huge place in my heart," Smith adds. "As a kid I worked at the Ems' stadium. I love that stadium, and so the idea of having soccer at that stadium is just the best of all pieces for me."

Friends of Civic Stadium would love to see soccer there, too, but that's not all they want. Dennis Hebert, chairman of the nonprofit group, is behind a proposal that would turn it into what he called "a field sports and community venue."

The proposed venue, Hebert says, is favored by the EMFC, which wants the opportunity to play at that site. It would seat 4,500 and could be home to high school football playoffs and soccer tournaments, Hebert says, among other sporting events. Hebert thinks now is the time to act and put this proposal into action. "It's a place that has a need right now," he says, "and the community just needs to wake up and see it and grab hold of it now while it is still available."

However, it's not that simple. Among the obstacles standing in their way is whether 4J, which currently owns the land, will sell. And then, if 4J does, the city would enter the fray. "The city is going to have to sign off on this [proposal] because right now it is designated as PL, public land," Hebert says, "so for any development to happen it's going to have to go before the planning commission and the city. It is going to have to be compatible with the area and the neighborhood and the schools and everything else."

The proposed "field sports and community venue" wouldn't solely be the home to soccer; a little bit of everything can be played there — rugby, lacrosse, kickball and more.

"Those types of people have contacted us, and they would love to be able to utilize Civic," Hebert says. In addition, other people who want to hold concerts, hot rod shows and "a smaller-scale Art and the Vineyard" have contacted Friends of Civic Stadium. "We have a lot of impetus from the community about what they would like to see and have," he adds, "and it's all pretty much local-oriented stuff."

Hebert hopes that if built, the field sports and community venue would promote diversity. A smörgåsbord of sports, yes, but it all comes back to soccer.

"Saturday afternoon, you got a spot?" Hebert says. "Let's have a Kidsports game, what the heck! Let's have some 10-year-olds kicking the ball around and having a good time."

Whether it is Kidsports or EMFC holding court on the turf, soccer is soccer. Italy has invaded the Northwest, more and more kids are lacing up their cleats and a historic stadium's supporters can't get the game off their minds. Oregon is now part of the international game, and thousands with a passion for the sport are doing their part to keep local soccer flourishing. ■

SOCCER CUPS IN EUGENE

The Eugene Metro Football Club's 3v3 Challenge Cup will take place at Roosevelt Middle School from 8 am to 6 pm Saturday, June 1. Participation is up from the usual 100 teams — 120 boys' and girls' teams aged 6 to 18 from throughout Oregon are expected to play this year. The teams, made up of three to five players, hail from the Eugene-Springfield area, Bend, Portland, Salem, Corvallis, Brookings, Sherwood and Roseburg.

Come July 12-14, the Eugene Metro Football Club welcomes boys' and girls' teams aged 10 to 19 from across the U.S. to participate in the inaugural 11v11 EMFC Adidas Premier Cup Soccer Tournament. At press time, 50 teams were registered to compete, and 120 to 150 teams are expected. The teams will come from clubs throughout Oregon, Washington and Northern California. Three teams from Hawaii are also registered. Multiple venues throughout the Eugene-Springfield area will be home to the tournament, including at Lane Community College, Willamalane Sports Center, Spencer Butte Middle School, South Eugene High School and Churchill High School. The tournament takes place from 8 am to 8 pm July 12 and 13, and 8 am to noon July 14.

More info at www.emfc.org

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