

## Continued from page 8

victim of its own success. It collapsed a couple of years ago under the weight of its two or three best teams.

Local soccer culture, however, nourished by the Hispanic community, continues to flourish.

At least three distinct, but complementary, mens' soccer leagues have evolved locally since La Liga's demise, each with its own appeal.

Stroll by St. Mary Star of the Sea gym most any Sunday night, and you'll hear gym shoes squeaking on the hardwood floor, punctuated by the frequent muffled concussion of cannon shots on goal. Inside, Alcones have a slim lead over Arnie's Café. Come on in, have a seat. The second half has just begun.

### 'WELCOME TO PLAY'

A few years ago, the parish was exploring ways to make its gym more useful to the community. Someone asked Gustavo Velazquez.

"You're talking to the right person," he said. Velazquez had coached youth soccer at the Lower Columbia Youth Soccer Association and, for 12 years, Astoria High School soccer with legends Boisvert and Bill Patterson. He saw an opportunity to create a local futsal league.

"My son was going clear to Portland each week to play," he said. "Why don't we start a league here?"

Futsal — played, often on a borrowed basketball court, by teams of five, with smaller goals and an appropriately deadened, smaller ball — rewards excellent technique: quick touches, precise passing, frequent shots, agile goalkeeping.

At Star of the Sea, games start at 5 p.m. and continue on the hour until all eight teams have played. After 10 weeks, a short tournament between the top teams follows. Then teams reorganize, and, two weeks later, another season begins.

Velazquez organizes, referees, plays, opens the gym, turns out the lights and builds relationships among folks from a diverse community.

"Everybody is welcome to play," Velazquez said. "This is for the whole community, not just the Spanish speakers."

Futsal players and fans, grateful for the gym's shelter in winter, look forward also to games outdoors. Dave Plechl, a former NCAA player at Portland State and the coach of the youth soccer association's U18 team North Coast United, admits: "Playing outdoors with a full-size ball in springtime air is where people want to be."

So, with the support of the Oregon Adult Soccer Association and the youth soccer association, Plechl has arranged a six-team league that plays Wednesday nights, two games at 6 p.m. and another at 7:30 p.m., through June 14. Teams of seven play on a half-size field, a natural extension of futsal. "Lots of decisions, lots of touches, lots of scoring opportunities," Plechl said. He, like many players, continues to play futsal Sunday evenings.

"Two competitive events a week is about what people want," he said. "It's good for the community. A lot of friends play against each other."

### 'MOMENTS OF BRILLIANCE'

About the time the spring outdoor season ends in Warrenton, another begins in Cannon Beach, where Wednesday evenings families gather to picnic and visit, and watch their friends and neighbors play soccer, eight to a side, on the long, slow grass of the city park field.

Leo Luna, who years ago, at 13, may have been the youngest player ever in the men's league, organizes one of the six Cannon Beach clubs.

"We're not athletes. We don't do this for a living. We laugh with each other. It's something to do besides working. But there are moments of brilliance." He laughs. "I scored a bicycle kick one time."

New fans will find the soccer is satisfying, and the company is pleasant.



PHOTO BY PATRICK WEBB

Team Real played Team Astoria in 2015 at the Warrenton Soccer Complex.



PHOTO BY GARY HENLEY

A young family member plays near the fields during a La Liga game in summer 2010.



PHOTO BY GARY HENLEY

A player reaches back for a kick during a La Liga game in 2010.



PHOTO BY GARY HENLEY

A player celebrates a goal during a soccer match in summer 2010 at the Warrenton Soccer Complex.



PHOTO BY GARY HENLEY

Two players battle for the ball in 2010.