

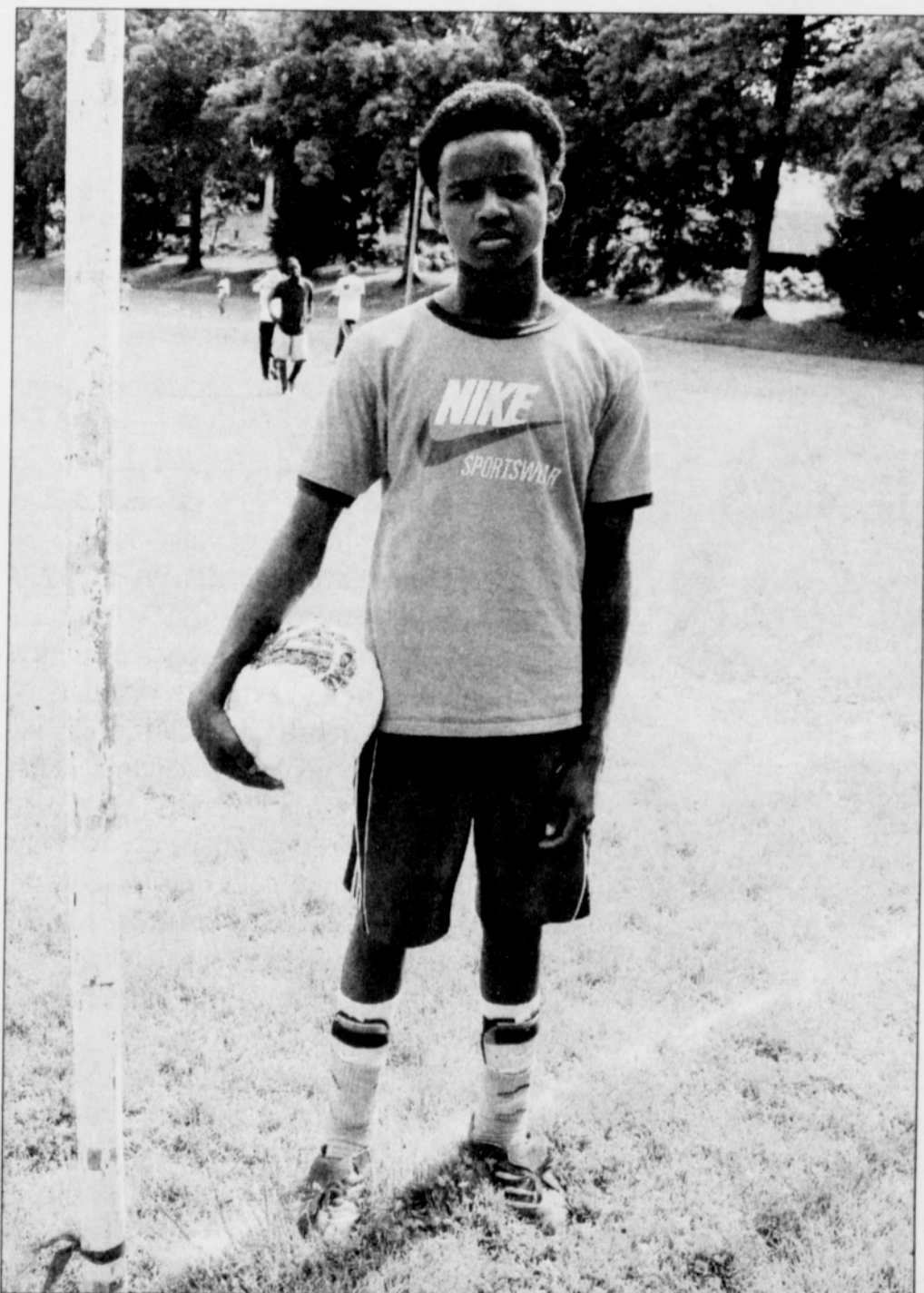
Mississippi
 Alberta
 North Portland

MIETRO

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Immigrant and refugee youth soccer players and volunteer coaches, mostly from Somalia, prepare for a World Cup tournament this weekend.



Ibrahim Kassin, 15, has lived with his family in Portland for five years. He grew up playing soccer in a refugee camp in Kenya and enjoys the fact that he can play here.

Soccer, a Universal Language for Youth

Refugees from civil war adapt to life in Portland

BY CARI HACHMANN
 THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

From the dry heat and dusty sand fields of refugee camps in Kenya to the breezy, lush banks of the Willamette River, Somalian youth refugees and the Portland community are united in preparations for the city's second annual Immigrant and Refugee Soccer World Cup.

The players are adapting to a new life in Portland and find cultural relief through the sport of soccer.

In 1991, the central government of Somalia collapsed and civil war broke out with widespread violence and instability.

Portland, a beautiful, green and diverse city with a temperate climate akin to the wet and dry seasons of east Africa, would eventually make an ideal place for some of these refugees to call a home away from home.

Originating from Somalia and other African countries, in this case of Muslim majority nations, including Jordan, Yemen, Sudan, Kenya, and others, the families left behind their belongings and often dismal life conditions, and brought their children to America, seeking better opportunities for education and their

future.

Upon arrival in a strange new society, immigrants and refugees are faced with cultural and language barriers that can hinder healthy adaptation into the community, leaving them particularly vulnerable.

Helping to smooth the landing, was a group of volunteers lead by Jamal Dar, whose community organization formally became the nonprofit, African Youth and Community Organization (AYCO).

Teaming up with Portland's Park and Recreation, AYOC will bring Somalian refugee youth together for the 2nd annual World Cup Soccer Tournament and Cultural Celebration at Delta Park on Friday, July and Saturday, July 2.

Youth living in the Portland area from Somalia, Kenya, Nepal, Bhutan, Burmese, Iraq, Turkey, Russia, Mexico, Central America, USA, and various Asian countries will represent teams in the tournament.

Dar also grew up in Kenya after being displaced from his native Somalia. He moved with his family to California at the age of 16, attended high school and college. Now a U.S. citizen and Nike employee in Portland, Dar combines his passion for working with kids and community outreach.

Encouraging higher education, positive activities,

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