

SPORTS

BETWEEN THE LINES

Del Vecchio's baby ready for first World Championships

The world is coming to Virginia Beach this week. Make that the World Coed Beach Flag Football Championships.

Forgive the hyperbole; there were only six teams entered as of last Wednesday. But when two big events – The East Coast Surfing Championships and the Neptune

Festival – want to include your fledgling tournament among their festivities it's OK to brag a bit.

"This sport is starting to get legs," said Jay Del Vecchio,

president of the U.S. Beach Flag Football Association, formerly known as the Tidewater Coed Flag Football Association. "It's getting noticed up and down the East Coast."

Flag football has filled a cozy niche at the Oceanfront for two decades. But last year somebody realized that America's favorite vacation spot – the beach – and favorite sport – football – go together like surf and turf.

It started when Parks and Recreation took over league play from Del Vecchio, who had been commissioner, coach and quarterback for 20 years.

Next the North American Sand Soccer Championships added coed beach flag football to its burgeoning repertoire. The ECSC and Neptune Festival then fell in line.

"The Neptune Festival is putting us right between volleyball and the sand castle competition," Del Vecchio said. "That's tremendous visibility for the sport."

A group from Chicago is visiting this week to explore staging an event there next year.

Also, Beach Tennis USA has invited the U.S. Beach Flag Football Association to piggyback on its events in Miami, Los Angeles and Long Island.

"Very exciting. Very cool," Del Vecchio said.

Del Vecchio, 48, ran a health club for 13 years and is president of operations for World Instructor Training Schools. He and his wife, Lisa, run the company, which certifies personal trainers, out of their 76th St. home.

That makes it convenient to promote the U.S. Beach Flag Football Association.

"I've received calls from all over the country asking about rules and how to get started," he said. "Some people are intimidated about running in the soft sand.

"The other side of that is if you're getting older, like myself, you can go full tilt and lay out and not dislocate a shoulder."

The Tidewater Coed Flag Football Association grew out of a Thanksgiving Day pickup game.

"It was such a blast we said 'let's keep playing,'" Del Vecchio said.

They formed a league that played in the fall for 15 years, and then added a spring league. Del Vecchio antici-

pates greater growth under the auspices of Parks and Rec, but retains ownership of the tournaments.

That could prove to be shrewd. The U.S. Beach Flag Football Association has its own Web site, and has been featured on flagmag.com, another popular flag football site.

Del Vecchio has seven sponsors for the World Championships, and would love to sell the naming rights.

"I want Virginia Beach to be the permanent hub," he said.

■ *The World Coed Beach Flag Football Championships are Friday and Saturday at 5th Street. Admission is free.*

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ROBIN BRINKLEY

SURFING

Focus, daring separate Goold from other junior surfers

BY JULIE GAREL
CORRESPONDENT

Despite the sharp bite of



willingness to travel at 6 a.m. to find the best break: weekends in Hatteras; weekdays in Virginia Beach.