



Photo by Eric Hendricksen

Few athletes in the ASPIRE program share a common language.

The international language of soccer

By Eric Hendricksen

Cross-field banter is somewhat constrained among the players taking part in the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization's (IRCO) after-school soccer program. They don't seem to mind.

Players on the team come from as far as Russia, Mexico, China,

Pakistan, Ukraine and Moldova, some as recently as a month ago, and few share a common language.

All of the 45 players, however, are fluent in the international language of soccer.

"It always surprises me how a simple activity like soccer can do so

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Photo by Eric Hendricksen

Program organizers hope to form a league team.

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much for these students," said Oscar Arana, an instructor program. "The kids are learning responsibility, teamwork and leadership."

The team was coordinated through IRCO's After School Program for Immigrant and Refugee Education (ASPIRE) at Lent Elementary and Binnsmead Middle schools. It was

developed as an incentive to motivate students to do well in school and assimilate into American society. The program was funded through the Portland Children's Investment Fund.

Students involved with the ASPIRE program are required to take part in school tutoring and, apart from the soccer team, a second academic extra-curricular program like literacy classes or leadership teams.

"The kids are doing much better academically just so they can participate on the soccer team," Arana said.

Arana, along with four volunteers, has been preparing the students for the

program's culmination - an indoor soccer tournament at Portland Futsal, the largest indoor soccer complex in Oregon from 1 to 2:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 19. Portland Futsal donated time at its facility at no cost to the ASPIRE program.

Although all the players on the ASPIRE team are familiar with soccer,

many have never played indoor soccer before. That combined with the inherent cultural and language barriers has made for some "interesting" practices.

"Some of the volunteers speak Spanish," said Arana, who is himself bilingual. "Some kids speak both Russian and English, and are able to translate. Mostly though, the kids are learning through

demonstration. It's amazing how fast they get it."

According to Arana, ASPIRE is building toward the next academic quarter, when the best players of the program will form an actual league team and compete on a wider level.

**SUPPORT
MULTICULTURALISM
AT THE ASPIRE
SOCCER
TOURNAMENT**

**Tuesday, Dec. 19
from 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.**

Immigrant, refugee and U.S.-born public school students from outer East Portland are finishing their season with an indoor soccer tournament.

From 1 to 2:30 p.m.
Tuesday, Dec. 19: Portland
Futsal complex, 3401 S.E.
17th Ave., Portland.