

In Brief

Weston FC girls secure bronze medals in Danone Nations Cup



TIM MILLER/COURTESY

The Weston Girls FC team earned the bronze medals after defeating France in its final match at the Danone Nations Cup at Red Bull Arena in Harrison, New Jersey.

The Weston FC girls soccer players recently stood on the podium as the bronze medalists representing the United States in the annual Danone Nations Cup at Red Bull Arena in Harrison, New Jersey.

This marked the first year that the tournament, which featured 38 girls and boys teams of ages 10-12, was held in the United States.

The Weston girls defeated France, 2-1, in a penalty kick shootout in their final match to earn the bronze. The Weston boys, meanwhile, finished in the top 20.

The Weston girls opened the competition with a 3-2 loss to Spain, but fought gallantly to a scoreless deadlock with Brazil before gaining revenge on Spain, 3-1, and earning another tie with Brazil, 2-2.

Weston FC's Sophia Brelage, 10, of Pembroke Pines, was the second leading scorer in the tournament with five goals.

The two Weston squads won a qualifier earlier this year at Walt Disney's Wide World of Sports in Orlando. Each match in New York lasted 20-minutes and the top finishers competed on Sept. 24 in the Red Bull Arena.

Members of the Weston FC girls squad are Kyra Tuesta, Isabella Brelage, Melissa Noriega, Sophia Brelage, Yasmine Baki, Madyson Taylor, Fiona Mateo, Reese Klein, Tiffany Murillo, Sage Carey, Serena Schiano, Ashley Fonseca. The head coach is Tim Miller.

Cypress Bay Lightning drops district opener to Plantation

The Cypress Bay High School varsity football team gave a determined effort, but couldn't overcome an offensive surge by Plantation as the Lightning suffered a 34-22 setback in the District 12-8A season opener for both schools.

The Lightning, who won two of their first three games, took a 16-13 lead late in the third quarter on a 5-yard touchdown run by senior quarterback Marlon Serbin.

Serbin provided 250 yards passing and a pair of touchdowns. He connected on two scoring tosses to senior wide-out Ricky Malcom and rushed for a third score. Malcom finished with 133 receiving yards on 11 catches.

Cypress Bay opened the current campaign with a 24-17 victory over Cooper City and a 29-6 win over Coral Springs.

— Gary Curreri

Okapi Wanderers rugby program enjoys jump in growth, popularity

By Emmett Hall
Special correspondent

With over 125,000 registered players, rugby as a team sport is experiencing rapid growth throughout the United States.

Look no further than the Okapi Wanderers Rugby FC organization based in Weston as a case in point. Formed in 2014, the Wanderers includes youth and high school clubs along with its solid adult foundation.

Rugby is making such inroads not only nationally but also internationally that it will once again be an Olympic sport. That hasn't happened since 1924, when surprisingly the United States took the gold medal.

The Okapi Wanderers, who play their home matches and practice at Tequesta Trace Park, have seen their ranks swell to 250 members. The organization includes under-8, under-10, under-12, under-14, junior varsity, varsity, under-20, men's A and Old Boys divisions.

Training sessions are underway and games begin in the middle of January.

There are approximately 50 rugby programs in Florida, and there are more youth teams in South Florida than anywhere else in the state. There are regular-season home and away games and tournament play.

Gavin McLeavy is one of the founders of the Wanderers as well as the varsity coach and a player on the men's A club. The native of England brought over his passion for the sport and is intent on sharing that joy and knowledge of the game with the next generation.

"We're a relatively new organization, but there are some rugby clubs that have been down here since the 60s," McLeavy said. "I copied what a professional team in the UK does, which is to build a base with the youth teams and create a feeder system."

That game plan has been a recipe for success.

"It's been very successful so far," McLeavy said. "We've also been attracting guys who have come home from college, where they played club rugby, and want to continue playing. We are also converting American football players."

Private high schools like Archbishop



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Above, Okapi Wanderers Under-10 Division rugger Johnatan Arteta, 9, of Weston, powers ahead for a big gain. Below, Under-14 Division rugger Trevor Thacker, 14, of Weston, takes possession and advances the ball.



McCarthy, Cardinal Gibbons and St. Thomas Aquinas have active rugby programs. Okapi is sporting over 75 high school players in its program.

The Old Boys division has friendly games about five times a year for players over the age of 35. There are players in their 60s who are still actively playing. At the Old Boys level, the hard tackling is replaced by a safer form of touch rugby.

The Okapi Wanderers is a member

of the Florida Rugby Union and the Florida Youth Rugby Union. USA Rugby is the national governing body.

"We're seeing a lot of rugby players across South Florida come together to create solid teams," McLeavy said. "Parents find the sport very affordable, which is another attractive feature."

For more details, visit www.okapi-wanderersrugby.com.

Futurevest@aol.com