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### Officials hope soccer event kick-starts local interest

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Sports Reporter

While the significance of Saturday's final three matches of the 2007 Futbol Internacional soccer tournament at Baker High School might have been lost on some in the Mobile area, that wasn't true of Baker soccer player Josefine Jacobsen, an exchange student from Denmark.

As she told her teammates and friends, the matches -- that included the United States under-21 team against Canada in the championship game -- were something special.

Jacobsen, a sophomore who has been in Mobile for nine months and returns to her native Denmark in June, said it's tough for soccer -- football in her country -- to compete against American football and baseball, but added she has noticed soccer has gained some interest here.

"People watching football here is a lot like people watching soccer, which we call football, in Denmark," she said.

Many of those interviewed Saturday at Baker agreed the biggest roadblock in gaining more interest and support for soccer is getting those who haven't seen the sport played live to do so.

It is hoped the tournament -- which also featured national teams from Mexico, Trinidad-Tobago, Argentina and China -- and its presence in six cities in the state will help draw attention to soccer.

"It's been a spectacular week," said Alabama Youth Soccer Association director Scott Spencer, whose organization put together the event, which featured games in Birmingham, Decatur, Huntsville, Montgomery and Tuscaloosa before coming to Mobile.

"To have national teams from all over the world come to our state is special. We hope to be able to do more things of this nature in the future."

Spencer pointed out there was a sellout crowd of more than 2,500 in Decatur two nights prior to the matches at Baker.

Baker girls' soccer coach Susan Brown said she wished people would take advantage of the opportunity presented Saturday night.

"This should be a huge step forward for the soccer community in south Alabama," Brown said. "Hopefully, it will spark more interest for the game in this country and especially in Mobile and this entire area. Hopefully, more young people will become interested and want to start playing soccer."

"The growth (in soccer) locally has been slow, but I think it's building. This (event) is big for girls' and boys' soccer. We all want to build the game."

Baker sophomore Kathleen Killebrew, who has been playing soccer since the fourth grade, said Saturday's tournament "will help bring people to soccer. ... It's not really big in Mobile or the South and hopefully this will bring some attention to soccer."

Baker junior Jenny Pearce said soccer faces a massive challenge competing with American football for attention.

"I think it would be hard (for the sport to gain a huge following) because the roots of American football are so deep," she said. Spencer said it's too early to gauge the affect the tournament has had in the state, but he has a wish.

"Hopefully, we'll see an increase in registration for soccer all over the state and we'll have more people paying attention," he said.

In the championship game, the Canadian team beat the U.S. 1-0 after winning a shootout 5-3. Scoring shootout goals for Canada were Amy Vermulen, Jodie Ann Robinson, Taryn Boudreau, Kaylyn Kyle and Paige Adams. The United States had shootout goals by Angie Woznuk, Manya Makoski and Amanda Poach.

Argentina defeated Trinidad-Tobago 2-0 for fifth place, and Mexico edged China 1-0 to take third place.

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