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online edition **Sports**

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- HOME PAGE
- NEWS
- SPORTS
- LIVING TODAY
- CLASSIFIEDS
- OBITUARIES
- WEATHER
- HEALTH
- BOOKS
- BUSINESS
- COLUMNISTS
- CURRENT
- DIVERSIONS
- FOOD
- HAPPENINGS
- OPINION
- RELIGION
- ARCHIVES
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- TV LISTINGS
- WEDDING, ANNIVERSARY & ENGAGEMENT FORMS
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Daily photo by Gary Cosby Jr.
Argentina goal keeper Vanina Correa dives to block a shot during Wednesday's practice at the Jack Allen Recreation Complex in Southwest Decatur. Argentina plays Mexico in a soccer match at 7:30 p.m. Thursday.

Sunday in PARADE

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An international friendly

Mexico women, Argentina meet in soccer

By Bradley Handwerger
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Argentina's women's soccer game against Mexico on Thursday won't have any bearing on September's Women's FIFA World Cup.

But don't think for one minute that either team doesn't want to win the match.

It may be a friendly, as the soccer folks like to call it, but both teams will take the 7:30 p.m. match at The Jack seriously.

The game is part of a one-week tournament throughout Alabama in a competition going by the name of 2007 Futbol Internacional.

And it's one of the last tournament-style competitions before the World Cup begins Sept. 10 in China.

"For the federations, it's a vital opportunity for them to get international competition in a tournament format before the World Cup," said Scott Spencer, director of coaching for the Alabama Youth Soccer Association and organizer of the tournament.

"From our standpoint, it's an opportunity to bring international soccer to communities in the state of Alabama. That exposure is great for them. It gives them a chance to dream."

The U-21 teams from the United States and China are competing, as well as Trinidad and Tobago and Canada.

Argentina coach Carlos Borrello practiced his team on championship field No. 1 Wednesday afternoon, getting a first glimpse at the first-class facility. He's relishing the opportunity to play the Mexican women's side, more so than his team's previous match against Canada, which ended tied 1-1.

"It's a good match for us because they play the same style of play," Borrello said through an interpreter. "It's different than playing Canada the other night, who was more physical. It'll be a good show for the fans to watch."

None of this is new to Decatur, of course.

A year ago, Duke University beat a Mexican squad made up of nearly the same players 1-0 at The Jack.

Local soccer guru Ken Gamble said that if Spencer can make this an annual event, it would put Decatur on the map, even more than it is now.

"Because the popularity is growing so much for women's soccer, this is the sort of event that 10, 15 years from now, Alabama would never have a shot at," Gamble said. "This is the type of event that could bring in big bucks."

Last year's success helped put Decatur in the mix for Thursday's match. The Duke-Mexico match drew more than 3,000 fans. Spencer said even more could show up to Mexico-Argentina.

"Mexico got great support last year," Spencer said. "Coach was raving about the field. He wanted to return. I wanted to do that, wanted to have Mexico back here."

Gamble and Spencer both said the match could be the best of the nine-match tournament.

"This may be the flashiest of the bunch," Gamble said.

Tickets cost \$16 and can be purchased at the complex. Gates open at 4 p.m.

Mexico vs. Argentina

What: 2007 Futbol Internacional

Who: Argentina women vs. Mexico women

Where: Jack Allen Recreation Complex, Southwest Decatur

When: Thursday, 7:30 p.m.; gates open at 4 p.m.

Cost: \$16

- *Bradley Handwerker*

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