

## SEWICKLEY

# Riverhounds soccer pros put on clinic for young local talent

By Darlene White Natale

On the day before Easter, more than 130 children went to the SporTrak in Sewickley, not to hunt for eggs or see the bunny, but rather to strut their stuff and meet Pittsburgh's newest professional athletes.

The Pittsburgh Riverhounds professional soccer team hosted a clinic for 11-year-old soccer players at SporTrak. The clinic was used to showcase the talent of children hoping to play classic league soccer and to introduce them to the various clubs and coaches in the area.

Classic league soccer is a more challenging level of play than the local recreational leagues.

"There is some good little talent out there," said Paul Child, assistant coach of the Riverhounds and director of youth development.

"The biggest thing we are going to do today is have fun. You are not going to do any good if you're not having fun," Child told the children doing warm-ups.

"I just want to play soccer," said Stephen Wagner, of Baldwin, when he came off the field between shifts. He reiterated the mantra of all the junior stars — playing the game

was the reason they came out. Wagner said he definitely wanted to play on a classic team.

The children's comments closely echoed what Child and Bill Piper, owner of the SporTrak and commissioner of the classic league for PAWest said, "The game is the best teacher."

Piper brainstormed the showcase so the families could find out about the classic teams in a neutral environment. Piper said classic teams involved more expenses, travel and commitment than recreational teams. He said they also gave the coaches a chance to see players together and recruit them. Piper pointed out that no team could officially sign players until after the Explosion Cup June 22.

"The problem is there are so many classic league teams forming, that there is a lot of wheeling and dealing going on," said Child. He said the families have to take their children to many locations for try-outs and often sign with the first team.

The Riverhounds staff and players acted as neutral parties demonstrating skills and working with the youngsters. Each child paid \$15 to attend the showcase and for that fee received professional instruction and two tickets to see the Riverhounds play.

Mike Krynski, a Seneca Valley U-11 goalkeeper, was tickled that a professional soccer player, Paul Child, had told him how to properly distribute the ball. Krynski said he had been throwing it in the air "baseball style," but Child explained how the player would have to bring it down to his feet.

"Now I know it's better to roll it



Annie O'Neill

Riverhounds soccer player Edward Child, center, helps teach a clinic for young players at SporTrak Soccer Stadium in Sewickely.

out to them so they can get it under control," said Krynski. He said that besides learning, he met the No. 1 keeper from another school.

"I loved the scrimmage, and I am absolutely going to their [Riverhounds] games," Vinnie Damiani, of Seneca Valley said breathlessly after exiting the field.

Payom Dousti of Wexford said he really liked the chance to compete with so many new players.

"It was great meeting players

from other teams and nice to meet the Riverhounds," Dousti said. "I'm going to see the Riverhounds play."

"A lot of professional players had a terrible start," said Child, emphasizing that many youths might not make a classic team their first attempt. He said this could be the driving force for some to go out and practice twice as hard. He said it could show the children what skills they need to work on to become better players.

"I went through my trial and errors, but there is no teacher like the game," Child added.

The Riverhounds will kick off their season at home May 1 against Cincinnati. The Riverhounds, of the Northeast Division of the A League, will play their inaugural season home games at Bethel Park High School.

*Darlene White Natale is a freelance writer.*