

**World Cup Legend Inaugurates Futsal Field in LA**

Wednesday, 25 February 2009 18:25



San Fernando Valley Sun World Cup Legend Inaugurates Futsal Field at Pacoima Park San Fernando Valley Sun, ca Youngsters play in the newly inaugurate futsal field at Hubert Humphrey Park in Pacoima. The field has a surfaced made of Nike Grind, a material made of recyled Nike Shoes. For two years, Salvador Barragan and his friends practiced futsal

Source sanfernandosun.com

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For two years, Salvador Barragan and his friends practiced futsal (indoor soccer) on the handball courts in front of the gymnasium at Hubert Humphrey Park in Pacoima.

But all that changed Saturday when Nike and its famous ambassador, former Mexican national team goalkeeper Jorge Campos, along with City of Los Angeles officials inaugurated a new futsal field at the park, only the second of its kind in the city and the first in the San Fernando Valley. The only other field of its type is located in South Los Angeles.

"This is nice", said Barragan looking at the field. "Now we don't have to worry about other people already playing here". Barragan, 15, is part of Futbolito Pacoima, a futsal league in existence since 2006 that includes about 100 13 to 18- year-olds from the Northeast San Fernando Valley. The sport has been around since the 1930s and arrived in the U.S. around the 1980s. It is played in colleges and Boys and Girls Club throughout the country. Futsal is a 5-on-5 game of fast soccer played in an enclosed area. "It's harder than regular soccer. The ball is heavier and you run a lot more. You get more ball touch and you learn to control the ball better", said Barragan.

The league, organized by the nonprofit agency Youth Speak Collective, plays at four sites (Maclay Middle School, Fernangeles Park and San Fernando Gardens) and holds tournaments twice a month where all the teams play each other.

Rafael Campos, another youngsters, who said "soccer has always had a great impact on my life", recalled how he grew up as an only child and the "soccer ball became my friend".

But his parents wanted him to practice martial arts instead of soccer and it wasn't until he moved from North Hollywood to Pacoima that he heeded the soccer call. "We used to play on the basketball courts at Maclay Middle School, but they didn't have soccer there", he recalled. "We used to rush before school and during lunch and we made goal posts with our backpacks".

Since then he has part of Futbolito Pacoima for the past three years indulging in the sport he loves.

Mayra Esparza, coordinator with Youth Speak Collective, said Futbolito Pacoima is meant to keep kids busy, doing something healthy and fun.

"We're trying to keep the kids active and off the street. The coaches we have are positive role models and we try to provide something other than what is on the street", she said.

Marcos Canales, 27, is one of these coaches.

"In the other sites you play on the pavement. But this field allows for different moves you can't do there and you can control the ball better", said Canales.

The field, built at a cost of \$250,000, is enclosed by walls measuring some three feet tall to prevent the ball from leaving the area. The field is purposely painted green, since the surface incorporates Nike Grind, made from discarded Nike shoes, said Alicia Procello, spokeswoman for the sports gear manufacturer.

The field is part of Nike's "Let Me Play" program, a community effort by the company to promote sports and physical fitness. Apart from building surfaces for play, this program also provides grants and product donations to support sporting activities.

Futsal can be a good alternative for the practice of soccer, since the regular game requires large fields. Here in Los Angeles, where park space is often limited, fields such as this one can allow more youngsters to play the sport.



Former Mexican National Team Goalkeeper Jorge Campos plays with the ball during the inauguration of a futsal field at Hubert Humphrey Park in Pacoima, the only field of its kind in the San Fernando Valley.

Part of the money for the construction of the field also comes from the LA84 Foundation that uses money from profits obtained by the City of Los Angeles during the 1984 Olympic Games.

Anita DeFrantz, president of the LA84 Foundation, said the new field is part of a partnership with Nike to build and or refurbish 84 playgrounds throughout Los Angeles.

"We're trying to make it easier for kids to play their favorite sports in adequate places, where they get more out of them", she said.

Jon Kirk Mukri, general manager for the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Park, and a Pacoima-native, said the field "is going to bring the community together".

"This should be a crossroads in the community", he said.