

Courting young volleyball success

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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- **New club aims to develop players' skills at early age**

With the name I AM Volleyball Club, there's no mistaking the mission of one of Ozaukee County's newest sports organizations.



Founded in 2012, the club provides volleyball instruction and competition for players in third through seventh grades.

Having already established a Select program for girls with advanced skills, club directors Todd Lyon and Jarrod Luedtke are taking the next step — offering a grass-roots program that introduces boys as well as girls to the sport.

“We saw the need for a junior-level program that would get kids interested in volleyball and develop their skills,” Lyon said.

“Our goal is to create a sustainable program for third through seventh-graders that’s instruction-based, is fun and gives kids a chance to learn in game settings.”

Lyon and Luedtke both played volleyball in high school and college and coach local girls’ teams. Lyon is the junior-varsity coach at Port Washington High School, and Luedtke runs the varsity program at Grafton High School.

Although there are camps and other off-season training options for area players, the I AM Volleyball Club is trying to fill a void, Lyon noted.

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“We want to get players involved at a younger age and develop a feeder program for our local high-school programs,” he said.

Ultimately, Lyon and Luedtke want to help establish a boys’ volleyball program at a local high school. The only school in Ozaukee County with a male version of the sport is Homestead High School in Mequon.

The club’s new 12-week instructional program will be held Saturdays, Jan. 5 through March 23, at Grafton High School. Open to all area boys and girls in grades three through seven, the sessions will emphasize volleyball rules and concepts; teach hand-eye coordination, footwork and other skills; and provide drills and games.

In March, participants will put their skills to the test in a tournament.

The program fee is \$125 per player for grades three and four, which will meet from 4 to 5 p.m. Saturdays. Players in grades five through seven will pay \$145 and meet from 5:15 to 6:45 p.m.

Each player receives a T-shirt and volleyball.

Advance registration is requested. More information is available at www.eteamz.com/iamvolleyballclub.

As of last week, Lyon said, more than 30 players had registered for the program, which has room for several dozen more.

“We plan to have coed instruction, but based on the interest level, we could have a separate boys section,” he added.

In December, the club began its Select program for girls at U11 and U12 levels. The program has two U11 teams and one U12 squad, which will participate in tournaments from January through March.

There are still two openings for U11 players. Anyone interested in trying out can call Lyon at (262) 483-8066.

Lyon said he and Luedtke were both driven by a longtime passion for volleyball in establishing the club. They agreed that there is a need for a program in northern Ozaukee County to instill a similar love of the sport in young players and prepare them for higher levels of competition.

“The interest is definitely there,” Lyon said of early response to the I AM Volleyball approach. “We want to put programs out there for a few years and see how it goes.”

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Additional information on the club is available through its website.

Image Information: ADDISON LYON was a picture of concentration as she participated in a drill during a recent I AM Volleyball Club practice. She and several other dozen girls are receiving instruction in a Select program for players with advanced skills. The club is also offering an introductory program for boys and girls that will start Saturday, Jan. 5. Photo by Sam Arendt