

SPOCCER

By the numbers

Spoccer facts

- ▶ 402 current spoccer members in Charleston
- ▶ 100 are female
- ▶ 29 is the average age
- ▶ 8 percent are beginners
- ▶ 51 percent are intermediate
- ▶ 60 percent also play in soccer leagues
- ▶ www.spoccer.com



Game uses Web to pick up players

BY DAVID QUICK
The Post and Courier

So you have a soccer addiction but don't have the time or energy to join one of the many leagues in Charleston. How do you get your fix?

No problem. Spoccer could be the answer.

Spoccer, hatched right here in Charleston nearly five years ago, is basically a Web-based organization of pickup soccer. It's free, flexible and fun.

Skill levels range from ex-pros to beginners. Last year, the spoccer community branched out across the nation with people gathering in Boston; Honolulu; Richmond, Va.; and Monterey, Calif.

The idea was the brainchild of

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Spoccer provides a little more organization to pickup soccer. Above (from left), Stephen Khouri, Jeff Teneyck, Damon Hansen and George Carter vie for the ball during a game at Ansonborough Field. Below, Kathleen Donnelly dribbles the ball toward the goal. Nearly one-fourth of those registered to play spoccer, which is free, are women.



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Irishman Dave McKillen, who moved from Dublin to Charleston in the summer of 2000. He noticed people would gather in pockets around town to play soccer and thought a little organization could help bring soccer aficionados together.

"The only inspiration was the game itself," says McKillen, who now lives in Richmond. "It all boils down to the passion for soccer. We don't make money off it (spoccer). We just want to build soccer as a sport."

Though spoccer is free, McKillen and others involved with it ask for participants to register online, which gives them an idea of who actually plays.

Of the 402 current "members" in Charleston, nearly 60 percent of spoccer players also play in leagues, 25 percent are women, and 51 percent consider themselves intermediate players.

Only 8 percent say they are beginners.

"The unwritten spoccer rule is that everyone is welcome," says McKillen. "We've all grown up, and at some point, felt left out. We don't want that to happen here."

He adds that spoccer also has a social element. Last summer, some gathered at lunch to take in parts of a few World Cup soccer games, and some get together to watch European games. Spoc-



TYRONE WALKER/STAFF

While George Carter (left) and Julian Ramirez look fairly competitive during a recent game, 59 percent of participants in spoccer describe themselves as either beginners or intermediate level players.

cer can take credit for bringing together a few couples who have gone on to tie the knot.

Now with McKillen in Rich-

mond, local spoccer player Ivan Torres acts as one of the local "administrators" (there are really no leaders). Participation varies

throughout the year, usually depending on when the leagues are playing. In the late winter and early spring, 40 to 45 will show up. Now, participation is down to about 30.

Despite those numbers and the range of skill levels, organization comes organically. Nobody picks and chooses sides. Players, most of whom know to bring a white or light shirt and a colored shirt to put on, gravitate to one side or the other. Advanced players may break off into another game.

"It works itself out," says Torres.

Spoccer also works, in part, because it gives a home to soccer players with commitment issues.

"There are a lot of people who don't like the structure of a league. If you don't show up for a game, you let the team down," says Torres. "For others, the cost of playing in a league may be an issue."

But like any sport requiring a field in Charleston, spoccer has faced its fair share of challenges. Organizers steer clear of fields that are used by leagues and try not to wear out a particular field, but still want to choose a field convenient for most people to get to after work.

"We're not looking to create any problems with fields," says Torres.

Reach **David Quick** at 937-5516 or dquick@postandcourier.com.