

## Minnesota discovering futsal taste

Written by Patrick Johnson

---

Fut-what?

Area brings relatively unknown sport of futsal into fold

It definitely looks a lot like soccer, but it isn't.

(And, no, it's not a typo.)

By: Patrick Johnson Courtesy: South Washington County Bulletin

Futsal — a mostly unknown, but deep-rooted sport with a wide fan base — hit East Ridge High School last week for Minnesota's first-ever Futsal State Championship.

Futsal, which is derived from the Spanish "futbol de salon" or "half football" in English, was first played in Uruguay and was developed on the streets of San Paulo, Brazil.

Futsal is played between two teams of five players, including one goalkeeper on each side. Futsal is played with a smaller ball that is heavier and bounces less than a regulation soccer ball and in a space much smaller than an outdoor soccer field — or even an indoor soccer field. Like indoor soccer, futsal is played on a hard surface. However, unlike indoor soccer, walls or boards are not used.

In general, the rules of futsal are intended to employ improvisation, creativity and technique as well as utilizing the skills of ball control and passing in small spaces.

At the Minnesota Futsal (MNF) State Championships, 26 boys and girls teams from across the

## Minnesota discovering futsal taste

Written by Patrick Johnson

---

metro competed in four age groups, with four teams taking home MNF state titles.

Mark Abboud, head coach of the East Ridge girls varsity team and the head coach for Minnesota Thunder Academy, owns and operates the brand-new Minnesota Futsal state championship tournament. Abboud hopes to begin youth and adult futsal leagues along with the Woodbury, East Ridge and Cottage Grove soccer clubs in the future, possibly as soon as next year.

According to Abboud, the main benefits of futsal are that it can be played in gymnasiums — which are generally much less expensive to use than domes or indoor soccer centers over the course of the winter — there are a lot more touches during games for the players and it's a faster brand of soccer with more scoring.

"It's a training method and an activity that's starting to catch hold here in Minnesota," Abboud said. "There are a lot of shots and a lot of scoring. Kids just have a great time with it."

Abboud said futsal highlights technical deficiencies within individuals or teams and forces players to rely on their brains and their techniques rather than their physical prowess, which he said may be the reason he has gravitated toward the sport.

In addition to graduating as Macalester College's all-time leading scorer, Abboud played professionally in the U.S. for nine years.

"I was always one of the smaller people on my pro teams and had to rely on quickness, technique, vision and intelligence and always have had an affinity for those types of players as well," Abboud said. "It was just a fun event for the kids. I'm looking forward to being able to offer that type of developmental environment for kids in the south Washington County area in the future. I had a lot of fun putting in on as well."

According to the most recent world rankings, the top futsal teams worldwide are Brazil, Spain and Italy, respectively, with the United States coming in 19th. Dating back to 1989, Brazil has won four of the first six FIFA World Cups — which, like soccer, are held every four years. FIFA

## Minnesota discovering futsal taste

Written by Patrick Johnson

---

or Fédération Internationale de Football Association (International Federation of Association Football), is the international governing body of association soccer.

Other differences between futsal and traditional soccer are smaller nets, there are no throw-ins (it's a free kick if the ball goes out of bounds), the goalies can't drop kick the ball and teams can substitute players "on the fly" like hockey — things that help make futsal fast.

"Soccer is, technically, supposed to be a fast-paced, passing game," said Courtney Meyer, Cottage Grove U13 boys team assistant coach. "This kind of brings back the fundamentals of it and with not much stopping. There's time to think, but not much."

Cottage Grove U13 team member John Cullinan enjoyed the speed of futsal.

"If you can stand futsal, you can play soccer," he said. "It'll make you faster and will help your endurance. It helps your ball control a lot too. Soccer is a level slower."

At the tournament the Woodbury Athletic Association had one representative — the Woodbury U12 girls . The Cottage Grove Athletic Association had two teams take part — the Cottage Grove U13 and U16 boys. Additionally, a number of Woodbury and East Ridge soccer players filled the rosters of the Minnesota Thunder Academy East teams that took part.

The Minnesota Thunder Academy U12 and U14 girls won the state championships as did the Cottage Grove U16 boys, which is coached by Evan Fuhs. The Thunder U12 team has four players from Woodbury on the roster — Erin Cheatum, Hayden Johnson, Caroline Stacy and Taylor Turner. The Thunder U14 girls team has five players from Woodbury — Sophia Beinlich, Sarah Quick, Emily Heslin, Mallory Fenske and Payton Goulding.

Goulding, 13, who will attend East Ridge when she is a freshman, said she likes futsal and that it helps her train for the summer season.

## Minnesota discovering futsal taste

Written by Patrick Johnson

---

“It’s really fun, the intensity is high and you get healthy at the same time,” Goulding said. “It’s a lot faster on the gym floors and with the smaller field so you have to be on your toes at all times. You have to be ready. It helps you always know what’s going to happen and keeps your intensity up for the season.”

Pierre Rabbia, head coach of the Cottage Grove U13 boys, said sometimes teams suffer because there aren’t enough options in the winter forcing soccer to become a seasonal sport, adding that some teams don’t even practice in the winter.

“With futsal being available in our community, it’s just going to improve the game,” Rabbia said. “This is an option for teams to stay bonded together and to have fun together. It’s really great. The boys had a lot of fun. It was our first experience and not the last. We learned some of the tactics, that are different from the large field and the boys definitely want to do it again.”