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## A sporting tradition in Natick

Photos

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Michael Davidson and Mike Maichen gear up at Davidson's Natick home on Wednesday afternoon as they prepare for the 29th Annual Natick Soccer Club Columbus Day Tournament. Forty teams from Natick, comprised of more than 500 Natick children from the ages of 9 to 14, will join 235 additional clubs from across New England at seven different sites in town for the three-day tournament. Davidson and Maichen have been co-directors of the event for five years.



By **Ian B. Murphy**

**GateHouse News Service**

Posted Oct 08, 2010 @ 05:40 AM

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Soccer is the world's game, played on each continent by millions of children. This weekend Natick will become the game's epicenter in New England, hosting the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Columbus Day Tournament featuring 275 youth teams and more than 4,000 players from across the region.

The tournament, hosted by the Natick Soccer Club, will have games at seven different locations around town, and feature appearances from Boston Breakers and New England Revolution players and coaches.

Michael Davidson, who has been a tournament director for the last five years, said Natick's Columbus Day tourney had a waiting list of more than 20 teams this year.

"We could have gone even further, but there is just only so much field space available," Davidson said. "Every year we've increased (the number of applicants) by making the experience of the players and the coaches enjoyable, so they put it down on the calendar every year. We do get a lot of repeat business."

The tournament is restricted to town teams, where each player is from one town only, no all-star or select teams. Recreational and town travel teams are split into four divisions, with U-9 through U-14 teams participating.

"We're a grassroots tournament," said Davidson. "(Coaches and parents) know they're going to get good and comparable competition."

Mike Maichen has been co-director with Davidson for the last five years, and has overseen the tournament for the last eight years. Maichen estimates the tournament draws approximately 12,000 people to the seven locations and 27 fields. Each location has concessions, merchandise, and tournament staff - to keep the experience at it's best, a lot of people work together.

"It's about having people in your house, making it all work smoothly, and having a good experience," Maichen said. "If you look at the group of volunteers we have, over the weekend it reaches 300 Natick people. We have a very loyal following, because we have a fundamental principle in offering a tournament atmosphere for all ages."

Davidson said the town's employees in the recreation and public works departments also do great service, lining the fields, moving goals, emptying trash cans, and helping out wherever needed.

"There is no way we could do it if it weren't for them," Davidson said. "It is amazing that it all comes together."

The tournament kicks off Friday night, with Natick teams competing under the lights at Natick High School. Saturday and Sunday, play starts at 8 a.m. and runs through 6 p.m. Monday there are playoff games to determine division winners. Overall, there will be 550 soccer games played in Natick

over the weekend.

"Win or lose, that's ultimately what the coaches want to have, to have the kids enjoy themselves and to have good competition," Davidson said.

For more information, visit [www.naticksoccer.org](http://www.naticksoccer.org)

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