

Spring blossoms special 'rain

Soccer players pass along good times, special friendships

By GEOFFREY MOCK

CREATE a play world in which Irises and Heffalumps of all ages spend their time playing games and you would think that you were dreaming.

Create a play world in which there were no losers, only winners who tried to outdo the opposition only in cheering for them and you would think that it was not real.

But you would be wrong, for you are describing the imaginative, but not imaginary, world of Rainbow Soccer where teams with names like Ajax and Iris battle without keeping any won-lost records or crowning any champions.

Such a philosophy seems almost subversive to the mainstream ideal of little leagues as being hotbeds of competition. Indeed, league organizer Kip Ward said that some people see Rainbow Soccer as being too far removed from reality.

"There has been some criticism because people say the real world is nasty," Ward said. "That's true, but it's also true that the world is what you make it. So many people experience in other ways a winning at all costs attitude. You get a heavy dose of that in this country. I'm not putting that down, but I can't begin to describe the positive attitudes we get from organized group play."

The league had its genesis back in 1971 when Ward and other members of the UNC soccer team noticed a growing enthusiasm for the sport by area youth. After leaving college, Ward covered Chapel Hill with posters in the Spring of 1972 that advertised the first Rainbow Soccer clinic. Fifty people came out the first weekend, 150 the next and the popularity and the style of Rainbow Soccer was set.

"We wanted to capture the imagination of the area," Ward said. "We came on with our own style of promotion to make it unique. Rainbow Soccer doesn't cater to the male jock type. We wanted to appeal to those who didn't have organized sports and to this day it staggers me to see the phenomenal interest in Rainbow Soccer."

From the start Rainbow Soccer was a community sport open to both sexes and all ages. This, Ward said, is the essence of the league.

"Rainbow Soccer is everybody," he said. "We have a three year old and an 80 year old playing. Somebody even brought their pet rabbit down one Saturday."



The success of the Rainbow Soccer League and its offshoot the Rainbow Soccer Camp, the third largest soccer camp in the nation, is in part responsible, Ward said, to the nature of the sport. "Soccer is such a simple sport to play," he said. "You can do things you can't do in a lot of other games. In a game situation a pass is a cherished communication. People can feel togetherness through the soccer ball."

As with any little league, parents pose some problems, but Ward said Rainbow Soccer finds a positive role for the parent to play.

"We give the parents a responsibility to help maintain the harmony in the game. One day some parents had been yelling at the kids playing and this infuriated the referee, so at intermission he had the parents come out and play a game. When the kids saw their parents playing, then they started laughing and this shut up all the negative stuff that was coming from the parents."

"Parents who scream at kids are maybe the biggest reason why kids are driven out of athletics. Having fun and developing team skills are the key words in recreational athletics. If the kids aren't having fun, they should stop playing the game." W

Geoffrey Mock is assistant sports editor for *The Daily Tar Heel*

Rainbows and Chestnuts

Soccer can be a competitive sport. Yet, in Rainbow Soccer, the main goal is fun. Players move down the field during an afternoon game (top and bottom). UNC freshman Jennie Grainger coach of Chestnuts looks on (left). Photos by Scott Sharpe.



Mystical names

League teams prefer Iris to Tigers

AT some point in the development of youth sport leagues an unwritten rule was created that the names of the teams should inspire fear and awe in the opposition. What little league doesn't have Tigers or Lions or even Wildcats fighting for victory?

But not the Rainbow Soccer League. There the names may speak to old Greek myths or Oriental philosophies. The only fears a Heffalump will inspire is in Winnie the Pooh's head. Nobody gets psyched up to beat the Kufa or the Iris.

Other names such as Sunrise express the magical tone of the league. "Teams will institutionalize the names," league organizer Kip Ward said. "Some of the names have been used for 19 seasons. We like the names. We don't want to be known as the Bombers or the Chargers or the usual stuff."

The imagination in names is equalled only in the post game cheers. Nobody gives the standard "Two-Four-Six-Eight" cheer. Usually it goes more like "Rah Iris, Rah Iris, bloom, bloom, bloom."

"The team cheer at the end of the game is a big Rainbow Soccer tradition," Ward said. "A team will say

'well, we might have lost the game but we won the cheer.'

"The cheer is a nice aspect of Rainbow soccer. It gives people the chance to think why they're out there. People will spend a lot of time on them. The teams will stay out there for a while and throw some out until they get one they really like."

The most symbolic name of all is perhaps that of the league's. Ward said Rainbow Soccer was derived for a combination of reasons.

"For one there is a very complex move in soccer called a rainbow," he said. "Also we have brightly colored uniforms and the idea of a lot of people moving fluidly with different colors is representative of the rainbow. It is also tied in with the mystical tone of the program. We didn't want to repeat the standard cliché of athletic programs. It represents a unique tone of our own."

Rainbow Soccer, LTD. is an independent non-profit corporation located at 500 W. Rosemary St. Practice and games are held at Muirhead Soccer Stadium. Those wishing additional information should call 967-8797. W

—Geoffrey Mock