



roll with it

Roller Hockey is the wave of the future

The exciting game of roller hockey is growing rapidly in popularity, and the ultimate place to discover the game firsthand is at 949 Roller Hockey Center. Located in the former Wayne Gretzky Hockey Center in Irvine, the Center offers three rinks, a variety of learning programs, and leagues for in-line hockey players of all skill levels—from beginners to aspiring pros.

Although deeply rooted in the United States and Canada, roller hockey is very popular in Europe and is played in virtually every country in the world. According to the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association (SGMA), the number of roller hockey players in 1998 reached 3,876,000 in the United States.

Players wear in-line roller skates and strike the puck with wooden hockey sticks. It is a fast-moving alternative to soccer and other mainstream sports, according to Jay Piz, independent marketing consultant and president of the Interscholastic Hockey Federation (IHF). As in ice hockey, teamwork and skill are needed to be successful.

Membership at 949 Roller Hockey Center ranges from kids (6 and under) to senior adults (30+). The largest group is made up of 18 to 30-year-old adults followed closely by 17-and-under youth leagues consisting of both boys and girls.

The Center's high school program in the fall draws teams from 30 high schools across three counties and nearly 700 student athletes. The adult leagues (18-30) include former

collegiate players and semi-pros as well as divisions for the recreational-level skater. Saturday youth recreation leagues (ages 4-12) are growing and have risen nearly 200% since 2007.

Beginners can get started in the sport with a Head to Toe Package for \$199, which includes skates, knee and elbow pads and classes. Hockey kids must wear a helmet with a face shield, elbow pads, knee/shin guards, gloves, stick and skates.

The 949 Roller Hockey Center has helped nurture some well-known hockey players over the years, many now in the collegiate ranks, and some who have gone on to play professionally. 949 programs are available year round, and leagues typically run quarterly and start in January, April, July, and October.

Youth and adult pick-up games are also scheduled throughout the week, so members can get extra rink time when the mood strikes.

Eddie Limbaga, 949 president, says there is no other game more exciting to play or watch. It's a game of tactics that improves fitness, strength and agility, and it's growing more popular every day. ○

By Renne Gardner

Location: 3150 Barranca Pkwy., Irvine

Cost: Fees vary. One-time training class \$55.

Information: 949.559.9948 or 949rollerhockey.com