



As in 1989, wheelchair basketball will be great fun during this year's Sister Cities Week.

Sports, handicap exchanges exciting

By Jeff Blaylock

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Despite being from different countries, some visitors to Sister Cities Week, Sept. 16 through 22, will be speaking the same language: the international language of sports.

An under-19 boy's soccer team from Reggio Emilia, Italy, will play in the first-ever Mayor's Cup Tournament against four of North Texas' best youth soccer teams. Also, a professional wheelchair basketball team from Nagaoka, Japan, will play a game against the University of Texas-Arlington Movin' Mavericks.

Joggers from Fort Worth's Sister Cities will be able to run in the Stockyard Stampede Sept. 21, the next-to-last day of the week-long cultural exchange.

While fellow visitors will be seeing the city's sights and enjoying several receptions, members of the team will be practicing hard for their upcoming competitions.

Reggio Emilia is not only appearing for area youth teams but also for an Italian national championship, said Pat Hawkins, co-chairman of Fort Worth Sister Cities International (FWSCI) sports committee.

"They're coming here for polishing," he said. "Their focus is going to be playing soccer while they're here."

That's not to say Reggio Emilia won't be involved with the rest of the week's activities. Players will be able to take part in other programs as well, Hawkins said. In addition, the players will be housed by local families who have children on local youth soccer teams.

"These young men from Italy are going to walk into some of the best youth soccer in the world," he said.

The Italian team's first practice in Fort Worth will be on Monday, Sept. 16. The squad will scrimmage against the Texas Wesleyan soccer team the afternoon of

Wednesday, Sept. 18, and will play its first contest against an area youth team Friday, Sept. 20, at 7 p.m.

Three games are scheduled for Sept. 21 starting at 9 a.m., noon and 6 p.m. All soccer games will be played at Gateway Park, Hawkins said.

The Paschal High School gymnasium will be the site of Wednesday's basketball game between UTA and the Nagaoka Wheelchair Basketball Team Club. Tipoff will be at 7:30 p.m.

Nagaoka is a professional team whose players range in age from 19 to 41, said Scott Haynes, chairman of the disability exchange sub-committee. The Movin' Mavericks are the national collegiate wheelchair basketball champions.

The Nagaoka group will bring 14 people to Fort Worth as part of the city's second such exchange. More than 20 members of an Italian wheelchair basketball team and six others from Trier, Germany, visited Fort Worth in 1989.

As recognition for that week, Haynes was presented an award by then-mayor Bob Bolen for being an "ambassador of good will."