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Soccer tournament to draw more than 17,000

By Eric Robinette

Staff Writer

In its first year under new leadership, the Mid-American Soccer Classic will most likely draw more than 17,000 people to Fairfield this weekend and next, its organizer said.

That's in spite of the fact that registration numbers are actually down somewhat, said Karen Phillips, the director of the tournament. She is in her first full year of that position, having participated in the event for about nine years.

This year's MASC has 484 teams registered, Phillips said — 250 boys teams and 234 girls teams. More than 500 teams played last year.

Phillips attributes the downturn to a scheduling snafu, and the fact that many students are on spring break.

"The ODP (Olympic Development Program) scheduled their college showcase tournament the same weekend as ours. A lot of girls really want to participate in this individual showcase tournament. They got confused because they thought we were the same weekend every year. We always do it the weekend after Easter Sunday," Phillips said.

The College Showcase Tournament is a sought-after event because it gives players a chance to show their individual skills as soccer players rather than always playing in a team, so Phillips understands why players opted for that event instead.

Even with a slightly reduced turnout, the MASC will still draw players from nine states and Canada, as it typically does. Phillips estimates the event generates \$4 million a year in economic impact. Greg Kathman, the economic development manager for the city, has said previously that each team brings in about 10 to 15 kids, which translates into a lot of dollars spent at restaurants and hotels. The tournament is held in Joyce Park.

Two years ago, the MASC hit a snag when one of Hamilton's speed cameras issued more than 900 tickets to drivers entering Joyce Park. That was thought to have impacted last year's attendance, but the speed cameras are no longer an issue, said Phillips.

"That was completely abandoned and the tickets were refunded," Phillips said.

Phillips took over the tournament after longtime director Ann Yungbluth decided to turn the reins over to her. So far, the transition has been smooth.

"I have a great team of people to work with who have been there for many years," said Phillips.

The girls play April 5-7, and the boys play April 12-14. Registration for the tournament has already completed. For more information visit, www.masctournament.com

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