

Football Media Day held

BREC, Coaches Alliance join forces for sake of players

By DAMIANE RICKS
dricks@theadvocate.com
Advocate staff writer

As part of BREC's strategic plan to improve its parks and recreation programs, the commission kicked off its partnership with the Louisiana Youth Coaches Alliance on Saturday with the first Youth Football Media Day.

Nearly 1,000 football players, from ages 7 to 12, gathered at Memorial Stadium to take team pictures and make identification badges before the season opener Sept. 10.

Marc Palmer, sports manager for the East Baton Rouge Parish Recreation and Park Commission, said BREC has begun partnering with outside organizations to get help running its various youth sports programs and to give coaches and parents more of a say in how the leagues are run. "With Leroy's (Hollins) help we've turned a league from 28 teams last year to nearly 40 teams this season," Palmer said. "We're real excited."

Louisiana Youth Coaches Alliance director Leroy Hollins II said his organization has given BREC's football program a makeover by modernizing it and making the league more professional.

BREC officials wanted to involve community organizations in running sports programs as cities such as Austin, Texas, and Nashville, Tenn., have done, Hollins said.

Hollins, who also is the director of the Scotlandville Sports Academy, said he volunteered to manage the youth football program and organize coaches to run the league. With the input of nearly 200 coaches, Hollins recommended changes to how to run the league.

Some of those changes include using the stadiums' scoreboards and game clocks and implementing a playoff system at the end of the regular season. "If they're going to play football we're going to make it as real as possible," Hollins said.

Hollins said he wants to be an early influence in the lives of as many children as possible. "I want to catch them before they go to Parish Prison, Dixon Correctional and Angola," Hollins said.

One of the biggest changes, Hollins said, was implementing a new rule that allows players who do not meet their division's weight requirement to play. "We were excluding a lot of kids we could have touched," Hollins said. Palmer said that, although heavier players cannot play certain skilled positions, such as quarterback or running back, now they can play on the offensive or defensive lines. League rules say these players, referred to as "X-men," also can punt or kick, but cannot advance the ball.

James Lane, head coach of the 10-to-11-year-old Cowboys team from the Shenandoah subdivision, said the change is good because it allows more children to get involved in something positive. "It doesn't matter how big you are or how much you weigh; it's about letting them play and getting involved," Lane said. "If you break these kids' spirit at this early age, they'll never try later."

Claude Williams, the Cowboys offensive coordinator, said children benefit in many ways by participating in youth football, such as learning how to work together as a team and how to do well in school. "We don't just emphasize football," Williams said. "We emphasize education as well." Children who want to be on a team will be accepted. However, if they don't do well in school, they can practice but cannot play, Williams said.

That is a comfort to parents like Paul Brumfield, of Baton Rouge, whose 9-year-old son will begin his first season in BREC football with the Baton Rouge Saints. Brumfield said he wants to make sure football does not stop his son from continuing to be a straight-A student at Twin Oaks Elementary. "They can take football away, but they can't take (education) away," Brumfield said.

Hollins said players who maintain a 3.0 grade point average during the first nine weeks of school will be recognized as Academic All Americans during halftime at the league bowl championship series in November.

While teams waited for their turn in front of the camera Saturday, some coaches brought their teams on the field to stretch and practice offensive and defensive drills.

"I've been doing this for eight years," Saints coach Daniel Mitchell said. "I love teaching kids."

Cowboys head coach James Lane said he got involved in coaching in order to give children an outlet other than television and video games. "It's all about the kids and getting it done for them," he said.



Advocate staff photo by JOE OUBRE

Baton Rouge Panthers coach Ronald Wade shows his players formations Saturday while they wait to take team pictures during the Louisiana Youth Football Media Day at Memorial Stadium.