

Sports

Editorial enquiries?
Please contact The Richmond News
5731 No.3 Road V6X 2C9
Phone: 604-998-3615 (ext: 3615)
Fax: 604-270-2248
Email: mbooth@richmond-news.com

India looks for rare repeat at 32nd annual Nations Cup

Popular summer soccer tourney kicks off on Friday

By MARK BOOTH
mbooth@richmond-news.com

With participation interest at an all-time, there are no plans to expand the Nations Cup. At least, not for now.

The 32nd annual summer soccer event officially kicks off this weekend, but it actually started back in May when four countries battled for one berth into the 16-team Open Division. It took a goal in the 90th minute for Africa to slip past Saudi Arabia. Also left on the outside looking in were France and Japan, while some other countries weren't fortunate enough to even be part of the wild card tournament.

"That game was a real eye opener for us," admitted longtime tournament executive member Jeff Wilson. "In my opinion, both of those teams can very easily compete in the Open Division. "We kept the (qualifying) tournament at four teams from an administrative standpoint but it could have been eight. We didn't want to be suddenly running an entirely different tournament in May. The entries were on a first come first serve basis, although we also get a 'feel' on how serious the applications are too.

"The plan is for (the Open Division) to stay at 16-teams which will defi-

nately keep the quality of soccer at a very high level. The teams that perform very poorly now know they're not guaranteed to be part of it every year and

might have to play off (in the wild card tournament) to keep their spot. I do admit it was a sad to see a quality team like Saudi Arabia not be a part of it."

Parity has been the theme of the Open Division with no repeat winner since Germany pulled off the feat a decade (2001-02) ago. It's a far cry from the tournament's infant years when Germany opened with back-to-back titles and Scotland followed with a record eight in a row.

India build its line-up around youth and speed in 2010, resulting in its first championship in six years. That also serves notice to others of what ingredients are required to win it all.

"The bar seems to be raised higher every year," added Wilson. "This tournament started off being about dynasties but it has since become very difficult to do. There is a lot of ethnic pride at stake and with that comes pressure to win this tournament. Teams are always looking to improve, especially if they didn't do well the previous year."

There is also plenty of interest in the men's older (over 30, over 40, over 45) divisions and there has been some thought of eventually launching a over 50 division which would allow many of the tournament's original participants to keep playing.

Officials, however, are

32nd annual Nations Cup July 15-17

Participating teams:

Men's Open Division

India	Fuji
Canada	Croatia
England	China
Germany	First Nations
Ireland	Greece
Iran	Scotland
Portugal	Italy
Caribbean	Africa

Defending champion: India

Women's Open

Canada	Ireland
First Nations	England
Italy	India

Defending champion: Canada

Men's Over 30

Scotland	China
Italy	England
Germany	Ireland
India	Portugal

Defending champion: Scotland

Men's Over 38

China	Romania
Fiji	Canada
India	Ireland
Scotland	Germany

Defending champion: China

Men's Over 45

Scotland	Poland
First Nations	Fiji
England	India
China	Ireland

Defending champion: Scotland



CHUNG CHOW/RICHMOND NEWS

India will be attempting to be the first country to repeat as Open Division champion since 2002 when the 32nd annual Nations Cup takes place this weekend at Hugh Boyd.

concerned about the lack of growth in the women's division which has shrunk from six to eight teams this year after Scotland and Portugal dropped out. There could be a number of reasons behind the declining interest, including the dominance of one team with Canada having won each year since the division was launched.

"It is disappointing seeing it drop to six teams as we really envisioned it would take off with women's soccer being on such a springboard right now," added Wilson.

"Some of the responsibility falls on our shoulders. We are not well connected with the women's soccer community and next

year we will be making a concerted effort to bring someone in to manage the women's division.

Once again, Hugh Boyd will showcase the tournament's featured games, with the Open Division final slated for 5:45 p.m. on Sunday.

The other four finals are set for 4 p.m.