



- Post Independent/Kara K. Pearson

Tickled pink

Sixth-graders revive interest in girls softball

PHIL SANDOVAL
POST INDEPENDENT STAFF,

RIFLE - Wins and losses are not the major focus for the Pink Panthers softball team. It's being able to play that's most important to this group of 17 middle schoolers.

"I always wanted to play softball," said team member Connor Adams after Wednesday's league game at Rifle's Deerfield Park. "But they never had a team in Glenwood before."

Instead of wishing, Adams' father, Robert, put a plan in action to form a team.

"I got a bunch of flyers out to the middle school and I had an overwhelming response," he explained. "There were about 20 girls interested in playing softball - that was just from the sixth-grade class. We have 17 girls that have played on the team this season, and they're having a blast."

With a nucleus to build from, Robert sought guidance to pull the rest of the pieces together. He found that support from the Rifle Recreation Department staff and one of its veteran coaches - Diana Gore - to get the program off the ground.

"She really wanted me to get a team together because Rifle's had a team for years," Adams said of Gore.

Gore also got the Panthers' coach up to speed on the league rules and regulations. Then, Adams got further assistance from the Glenwood Parks and Recreation Department to secure field time for team practice. With a place to play and a league to compete in covered, Robert turned his attention to equipping the team.

Assistance came in the form of a \$1,500 contribution from the Orthopedic Associates of Aspen and Glenwood to purchase uniforms and equipment. As all the pieces came together, the next task for Robert and assistant coaches Dan Kellogg and Paul Turley, was to draw the girls' enthusiasm toward learning rudiments of the sport. The transformation, said Robert, came quicker than he and the other coaches expected.

"Only three of the girls have ever played softball before," he explained. "So basically, I started teaching the girls the fundamentals from the first practice on. It was absolutely amazing to see how fast they've picked it up."

"These girls are all 12 years old or going to be 12 years old. They had to learn (softball) from scratch, but there are so many good athletes in this class, it was pretty easy for them to pick it up."

After going through some first-game jitters and growing pains, the Panthers improved. Playing in a league against experienced players, most of whom had played at younger levels, Glenwood won two of its seven league games. The regular season concluded Wednesday. Before wrapping up their first year of action, the Pink Panthers will play in the league's post-season tournament this weekend in Basalt.

According to Adams, the number of girls playing softball in Glenwood will increase rapidly.

"I truly believe there's a lot of girls who would like to play softball and there's a huge interest," he said. "Once they see that Glenwood's has teams, there will be more interest. And once they realize the girls are having a blast, it will



spread like wildfire."

Casey Fleming, one of the Panthers infielders, echoed how most of her teammates feel about the experience.

"I thought it was everything that it was going to be. We all have a good time, we all hang out and we laugh and have fun," she said. "We're all good friends and we all get along really well."

On being asked about continuing with the Panthers next year, Fleming answered quickly with a resounding "Yes," unable and unwilling to hide the of joy on her face.

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