



(photo by Brandon Hansen/HTS)

One of the premier youth sports academies in North America thrives just north of Spokane

BY DARREN SHIMP/collegiate sports editor

With summer hitting its stride and options for youth activity sometimes minimal during the overused term “staycation,” one common concern for parents and their youth leaving home is safety.

Fortunately, for Spokane parents, one organization provides a safe, fun and everlasting camp experience, right down the road.

Meet the Skyhawks.

No, they are not a team. They are a youth camp organization, which prides itself on the safety of youth athletes, teaches life lessons through athletics, and considers themselves the nation’s leading sports program provider.

Founded in 1979 and having mentored over 1.2 million children and youth through soccer, basketball, football, roller hockey and baseball, the world headquarters are not too far from Spokane: a stone's throw away in Mead.

Phil Champlin, Skyhawks Vice President of Operations, has been with the Skyhawks for 10 years and works out of the Skyhawks World Headquarters, next to Mt. Spokane High School. He has overseen the organization expand to nearly 70 franchises throughout North America, a majority of them corporately owned.

Consisting of primarily summer camps, the Skyhawks grounded their roots in Washington, Montana and Idaho. Today, the Skyhawks cover 24 U.S. states, Canada and possibly even China down the line.

The traditional audience for Skyhawks participation is generally 4 to 14, but the 4-to-6-year-olds are mainly limited to Mini Hawk camps, where they learn basic skills in soccer, basketball and baseball, and gain confidence to learn how to play the sports with respect and teamwork.

"At that age, they don't necessarily need to focus on one sport," Champlin said. "This gives them the opportunity to try three major sports, see what they like, learn some of the basic skills and hopefully develop a passion for one or all of them; and have the confidence to know how to play.

"Once they graduate from the Mini Hawk class, there are all-day soccer, all-day basketball, all-day baseball programs they can get into to deepen their skill development."

The camps in Spokane run sporadically throughout the community, such as South Hill, the north side and in the Valley, but they also hold some events in a warehouse near Gonzaga University, which are comprised of indoor soccer, football and the hottest sport the Skyhawks provide: lacrosse.

"The last three to five years, the sport [lacrosse] has really progressed out west," Champlin said.

The learning and growth extends beyond the children, as the Skyhawks also teach life skills in their trainers, which are often student-athletes in high school or college. This is a prime example of a great first job opportunity for the youth of Spokane as well.

The camps mostly run Monday through Friday, and information for camps or franchising can be found at their Web site,

www.skyhawks.com.