

Soccer growing in Andros
By Renaldo Smith
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NEW PROVIDENCE, BAHAMAS - In recent months, the sport of soccer has been making headlines as it continues to become increasingly popular here in New Providence.

Now thanks to Ricardo Johnson, Founder and Head Coach of the Central Andros Iguanas Football Club, the sport is growing on the island of Andros also.

The club which started just six months ago in October of last year, is focused on both teaching the game of soccer and educating Bahamians on the value of the Iguana as an endangered species.

"Presently the club is open to all students between the ages of 5-10, but that is just a starting age group. By September we plan to branch out up to age 13, and within the next year be able to offer it to all youth," said Johnson. "The goal of the club is to teach students to enjoy the game of soccer and marries the need of conservation of the iguana. We are concentrating our efforts on just one age group for now so that we can build a foundation. The club already has 40 members and the reputation of the club as a well structured organization is growing, so more and more persons are flocking to join the club," he added.

Johnson, who teaches Biology at the Central Andros High School, said he believes the club was a long time coming for the island, and it now provides the youth with a constructive extra curricular activity to participate in.

Assisting him in the training of the youngsters is his wife Michele' Helene Johnson, and Assistant Coaches Shantol Coakley, and Darvin Brown.

Johnson has always been involved in the sport of soccer and first dealt with youths as an assistant coach with the Dynamos Football Club under the watch full eye of Head Coach Carl Lynch.

Johnson and the Iguanas, will get their first real test when they travel here to New Providence to face the Dynamos from the 7-9 of April.

"I think that he is doing a fantastic job and I am just glad that myself and the other coaches had a chance to mentor him and help him out along the way. We continue to mentor him as far as putting him onto contacts locally or in the states and will continue to provide any assistance that we can," said Lynch. "We are always excited about teams coming here to play and with the kids in the off-season it would be good for them. The club will increase the awareness of the sport on the island and shine some positive light on the work that Johnson and his wife are doing. We are looking forward to them coming and right now my roster has about 130 kids so it should be exciting," he added.

Despite the fact that the club is the first ever of its kind on the island, Johnson says he has big plans for the near future.

"We hope to be able to diversify what is happening with soccer on the island. We want to encourage multiple teams in Andros that will play amongst them, and then we can eventually host invitational here. It has just begun and the future looks promising for Andros and for the youth with some wholesome activity. High school students have bombarded me with request to join the organization, so there is a strong interest from the older groups on the island," said Johnson.

Thus far, the Iguanas have received a great amount of support from international organizations such as the Chicago Shed Aquarium, the Iguana Specialist Group, and the International Reptile Conservation Foundation.

While the Andros Nature Conservancy, and the Bahamas National Trust has supported the up and coming club on the local scene.

