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## West Kendall Dolphins are all for one

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West Kendall Today



Photo courtesy of Optimist Club of West Kendall

During their first game of the season against the Doral Broncos, a West Kendall Dolphins player sprints past a defender.

One park, one family.

It's a phrase that has united all involved with the West Kendall Dolphins' Optimist Club.

The recreational league, which has been serving the community for more than 30 years, offers a wide variety of sports and activities to children ages 5-15, including baseball, soccer, cheerleading, flag and tackle football.

This aqua and orange family calls McMillan Park, at 6125 SW 133rd Ave., its home.

"Our goal is to try to create a positive environment here where parents can feel safe leaving their kids," said Carlos Gomez, who is currently in his

third year as football commissioner of the West Kendall Dolphins. "We also try to teach the kids good character, responsibility and accountability. Winning is important but it's not our number one focus."

The Dolphins' parents and coaches dedicate much of their time to ensure that the kids are learning, not only about sports, but life lessons as well.

The Optimist Club of West Kendall is a non-profit organization, meaning that those who devote this time do so as volunteers. Sponsorship and fundraising, along with the \$160 registration fee needed to join the Dolphins, are the only sources of income used to purchase uniforms and equipment.

All coaches must pass safety courses as well as state-mandated background checks before they are approved to interact with the kids.

The league sees many returning players and coaches year after year, and many who are involved with the club have come back to repay loyalty to the Dolphins, the organization they once participated in as kids.

Commissioner Gomez is one such returning member.

"I'm a West Kendall boy," Gomez said. "I'll never go to another park. That's just the kind of loyalty I have and everyone who knows me knows what I'm about, I bleed Dolphins' colors."

Having played football for the West Kendall Optimist Club from the age of 11 to 14 before playing for Braddock Senior High School, Gomez came back to coach for the Dolphins in 2004 to help fill in as a father figure for his nephew.

The main purpose of the West Kendall Dolphins is to provide a safe haven where kids can come and participate in sports, rather than be exposed to the negative aspects of being out on the street.

“They run a great program here,” said team dad Nelson Mariscal. “They’re very cautious with the kids and it’s a good, positive atmosphere.”

The park and league both have “no boundaries,” which means they are open to all who want to join, not only West Kendall residents, but also those from other areas who are looking for somewhere to play. No tryouts are necessary and teams are filled on a first-come, first-served basis with boys and girls alike having an equal opportunity to become a part of the teams.

The West Kendall Dolphins are presently in football season, which lasts from July until November and is made up of ten games. Five games are played at home and the remaining five are played at other parks throughout the county against various leagues such as the Boys and Girls Club, the Kendall Hammocks Warriors, and the Tamiami Colts, among others.

According to Commissioner Gomez, there has been a dramatic increase in registration this year and the West Kendall Dolphins now have approximately 200 football players and 175 cheerleaders, making the Optimist Club one of the biggest in Miami-Dade County.

“The word is getting out and it’s huge,” agreed Tati Rosa, president of the Optimist Club and West Kendall Dolphins cheerleading commissioner. “We want the community to know we’re here for them.”

Not only are the West Kendall Dolphins here for the community, but they are also supportive of one another.

Their most difficult loss comes off the field with the passing of a beloved football coach, Anthony Cordero, 46.

“I have no words. He was just simply an incredible man,” Rosa said.

The coach suffered a heart attack on July 1, 2010 after leaving the practice field that evening. Having been such a strong presence at McMillan Park for six years, his absence has been greatly felt.

“Coach Tony was a huge part of our program and we’re still trying to deal with it,” Gomez said. “It’s been a big loss for us and our club, but I think it’s brought us together as a family; we’ve all come together in his memory.”

Cordero, who had more than 20 years of coaching experience, joined the West Kendall staff in 2005 and brought his 5-year-old son with him. He leaves behind a wife, two children, and a community touched by his leadership.

The West Kendall Dolphins’ 2010 football season will be dedicated to Coach Tony. (So far, they’ve played one season game against the Doral Broncos. Of the eight weight divisions, seven beat Doral and only one lost. This weekend, they’ll tackle the North Miami Beach Sun Devils.)

“We’re not dedicating the season to him just because we lost him, but also because of the type of person he was,” Gomez said. “He was a positive guy, he was humble, and he was committed to this neighborhood and park. He was a winner. He deserves to have his legacy preserved.”

Although the West Kendall Dolphins have lost a father figure and mentor, they continue their motto: One park, one family.

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