



Rudnick gathering jerseys and balls for less fortunate

## 12-year-old striker knows how to assist

Daniel Gaona Arizona Daily Star | Posted: Friday, January 14, 2011 12:00 am

Not many 12-year-old soccer players have business cards.

But then there's Payton Rudnick, the acquisition manager of Give Through Soccer, who hands them out when trying to spread the word about what he does off the field.

The seventh-grader from Esperero Canyon Middle School founded his charity as a project for his bar mitzvah, which he'll celebrate next month.

Rudnick said he wanted to do something to give back to the community combined with his passion for soccer. He began playing soccer when he was 5 and is currently a striker on Tucson Soccer Association 98 Select White.

After researching, he found Peace Passers, a nonprofit organization based in North Carolina. He convinced his parents it was a good charity and contacted director Candace Cooper.

Rudnick started the drive in August and has since collected 93 soccer balls, 214 jerseys and \$1,662.

He's happy with the results so far but wants to gather 250 balls, 250 jerseys and \$2,500 by March 31, when the drive ends.

"We didn't even think it would turn out this big," Rudnick said. "We just set a goal and we're trying to reach it. But I think we'll actually break it."

Rudnick will be looking for a large jump in those figures this weekend at the 21st Tucson Association of Realtors Shootout. He said there will be collection bins at each of the 10 parks hosting games.

"You just drop your stuff in and we'll pick it up," he said.

Festivities kick off today with the Soccer Olympics at Fort Lowell Park at 7 p.m., and Rudnick said there will be a booth there as well.

And it doesn't stop there for collections.

"There's actually a bin at every Peter Piper Pizza and every Play It Again Sports where you can drop things off," Rudnick said.

Once Rudnick gathers everything, he'll send it to Peace Passers, which will distribute the equipment in Africa and South America.

"They'll send everything to less-fortunate kids who need it," he said.

Julia Rudnick, Payton's mother, said the idea had been in the works for about a year before he committed to it.

"We knew he'd be up for the challenge," she said. "It's been a great experience for him."

She also said his teammates and fellow parents have helped out a lot in the drive. As a thank you for donations, they give out shirts and blue rubber bracelets reading, "For the love of soccer."

Payton said he's received e-mails from people around the United States, and even Canada, looking to run a similar program.

As for Give Through Soccer, he is hoping to pass it down to someone looking for a bar mitzvah project in the grade below him.

Rudnick will go to Catalina Foothills High School, where he wants to continue as an athlete.

"I want to be the kicker for the Foothills football team, and I'm also going to keep up with soccer, because it gets your legs strong for football kicking," he said.

#### IF YOU GO

- What: 21st annual Tucson Association of Realtors Shootout
- Who: 306 teams
- When: Today through Sunday
- Where: 10 locations throughout Southern Arizona - Fort Lowell Park, Brandi Fenton Park, Freedom Park, Golf Links Park, Himmel Park, Jacobs Park, Lincoln Park, Ochoa Park, Townsend Middle School and Udall Park