

Summer of golf and Tae Kwan Do

More than 600 kids signed up for the Youth Foundation's summer camp

By Matt Terrell
Vail, CO Colorado,

EAGLE COUNTY, Colorado — A dozen children are lined up at the Eagle-Vail driving range smacking golf balls.

Their shaky beginner swings don't have much power yet, but a couple kids are knocking balls 50 and 60 yards out— not bad. One kid claims he made it to 150 yards — another boasts he'll be playing in a tournament in no time.

The best thing about the whole scene is that it's 80 degrees outside, cloudless, blue and sunny, and the kids aren't inside watching television and playing video games, says Katie Bruen, marketing director for the Youth Foundation.

They're just a few out of more than 600 students signed up for the Sports and Fitness For Life First Tee Summer Camp this year, which is run by the Youth Foundation. The camp is being held in Eagle-Vail, Eagle Ranch and Cotton Ranch.

The idea is to give parents an alternative to leaving kids locked in the house all day when they're at work during the summer. Youth Foundation programs usually target "at-risk" children, but this is a camp that students from all backgrounds are joining, Bruen said.

"It kind of bridges those socio-economic divides that exist in this community," Bruen said.

While learning golf is a big part of the program, students also get to learn things like martial arts, soccer, yoga and the increasingly popular sport of cupstacking. During the first year of the camp, students actually spent too much time playing golf and grew tired of it. Now, they seem to like the variety.

"I like all the soccer games they have and all the martial arts," said Franklin Reilly. "When we go to the driving range I always get a new tip and it helps me."

In the shady front lawn at Meadow Mountain Elementary, counselor John Brendza is teaching students the basics of Tae-Kwon-Do. They begin with five minutes of stretching, then they start with the punches.

"Tae-Kwon-Do!" the kids shout out in unison in succession with a combo of three punches.

Inside Battle Mountain High School, students are doing cup stacking relays, where a kid will stack and then unstack four different sets of cups, then race back so their teammates can do the same.



- Dominique Taylor/Vail Daily



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Counselor Nita Kirwan said a few students had asked what cupstacking had to do with fitness.

“Fitness isn’t just about running a mile – it’s about your whole body and keeping your brain fit. Hand-eye coordination is a big piece of that,” Kirwan tells the kids.

Another group of kids are playing “golf baseball,” where, instead of hitting a baseball with a bat, they’re hitting a tennis ball with a oversized plastic golf club.

A big goal of the camp is to teach students values like sportsmanship, Bruen said. Golf instructor David Thompson says the first things he teaches the students are safety and respect. Showing them how to take care of their clubs, how to be polite on the golf course, and how to enjoy the game rather than take it too seriously are important.

“They need to have fun with it. It’s just a game,” Thompson said.

Cameron Moore said he’s learning that you should strive to be good at what you do, but to always enjoy yourself.

“Be skilled, but have fun,” Moore says.

Staff Writer Matt Terrell can be reached at 970-748-2955 or mterrell@vaily.com.

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