

## PLAYING

# Stateline Family YMCA

## Continuing to see growth into 2023

**JIMMY OSWALD**  
Staff Writer

**B**ELOIT—It's been a year of positivity for the Stateline Family YMCA.

Numbers at the Y continue to grow, new programs are taking off and the staff members continue to make the community a better place for the youth.

"All of our programs and our numbers are pretty healthy," Director of Youth Sports and

Recreation LaRon Lofton said. "Overall, we had a good year. We hope to continue that and continue to grow even more."

Many of the participation numbers have gotten back to pre-pandemic levels and, in some cases, even exceeded those figures.

Baseball, softball and T-ball had over 750 members and soccer had 506 participants. Flag football, one of the more recent programs at the Y, had over 300 kids involved.



JIM FRANZ/BELOIT DAILY NEWS

Jace Ribarich of the Phillies connects with a pitch during the 9 and 10-year-old Mustang Baseball action at the Stateline YMCA Youth Sports Complex.

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"We picked up right where we left off after COVID," Lofton said. "People were itching to get the kids back into doing something. We've been fortunate that way. It's definitely important to keep kids active. Sports can keep them physically fit, but there's also a lot of life lessons they can learn."

Basketball was the most popular with around 890 members taking part, up around 80 kids from last season.

The Stateline YMCA runs two separate programs, one hosted in Beloit and the other in Roscoe. And area schools, such as Beloit Memorial, Turner and the Roscoe School District, along with the Boys and Girls Club, are quick to help lend gyms for events and practices.

"There's a huge collaboration between everybody in the area to make that program work," Lofton said. "There's almost 900 kids. So, in order to service all of them, it is very important

for us to build those relationships with other organizations and institutions."

The Y also revamped their girls fastpitch league two summers ago, and that program continues to be a great option for parents to get their kids involved on a local level.

"We used to partner with other organizations in the surrounding areas to make one big league," Lofton said. "And that was fine, but there was travel involved. We brought it back as an in-house program, and all of our games are played at our sports complex. This last summer we gained 60 girls in one year. So, I'm hoping this summer we can build on that."

The Beloit Senior Legion Bandits won a state title last summer, and many of those players started out playing with the YMCA's baseball program.

## YMCA E-Sports program helping kids find new opportunities

JIMMY OSWALD/BELOIT DAILY NEWS

The Stateline Family YMCA has added an E-Sports program to help bring new experiences in for the youth. Super Smash Bros. Ultimate is the game of choice for the program's first season.



### JIMMY OSWALD

Staff Writer

BELOIT—Video games can help build teamwork in young adults along with increasing their concentration and creativity.

That's why the Stateline Family YMCA, an organization that usually promotes physical activity and exercise, has decided to dive head first into the virtual world with its new E-Sports program.

E-Sports is, at its core, competitive video gaming. Groups of people can play several different games, such as Super Smash Bros. or League of Legends, and compete against other teams in their game of choice.

"It's never something we thought we'd be delving into," Director of Youth Sports and Recreation LaRon Lofton said. "But it is getting bigger around the world. Other YMCAs across the country are doing it as well. And we realized that there are benefits of doing E-Sports."

The program's first season started in February of 2023 and went on through March in the HangOut room of the Ironworks Branch.

"Some kids just don't like the traditional sports," Lofton said. "We want to make sure we're inclusive to everybody. It was another opportunity for us to offer something different."

There are a variety of good reasons to incorporate this up and coming activity into more organizations around the USA, and those parents that are thinking "I signed my kid up for the YMCA to get away from the video games!" may want to rethink that.

"A lot of colleges have clubs or programs for it now," Lofton said. "Some even have scholarships for it. It's becoming a very big thing. It helps develop social skills among kids and it can help with your critical thinking and problem solving skills. It also gives kids another opportunity to meet new friends."

Lofton admitted that the older generations may not fully understand the world of E-Sports, but with the ever-changing world and evolving technology it is important for the Y to adapt.

"We use this as another safe space for kids to come and meet," he said. "And then we are working on building a YMCA curriculum into it. We didn't do that with our

first session right now, but we are looking into that. We just want to develop the kids in multiple ways and have different outlets for them to be able to express themselves."

With the rise of injuries in all sports, contact or not, many local parents have expressed a desire to keep kids socially active in a safe environment.

"We'll continue looking into different opportunities for those types of activities," Lofton said. "Because injuries are a part of them. It's always good to have some new programming and different opportunities for the kids to try new things."

The program started with Super Smash Bros. Ultimate, and Lofton says it has been a success thus far.

"We have 18 total participants," he added. "We have ages 8 to 10 in one division and 11 to 13 in another. We bring them in and provide them with all the equipment, snacks and a t-shirt. Then, we match them up and they play a couple of games each night. At the end of the season, we'll seed them by their standings and then we'll have an end of season tournament."

## YMCA/ from 44

"Some of the coaches in Legion also coached in our programs for years, and many continue to do so," Lofton said. "It's important to get the kids started early and introduce them to the game and teach them the fundamentals. And once they get to those

higher levels, they already have a grasp of the game and build some relationships with teammates along the way."

With the rise of injuries in contact sports, flag football became a popular program at the Y. It is a way to keep kids physically active without having to stress about any trauma to the bones or head.

"Parents are looking a little

deeper into flag football as an option as opposed to just tackle football," Lofton said. "We run it through sixth grade right now, but we get quite a few calls about expanding it to seventh and eighth grade. It is definitely on the rise."

While physical activity and building strong relationships is always a strong mission for the YMCA, Lofton wants to make

sure that people know that money is no issue if one wishes to join.

"We never want to turn any kid that wants to play because of financial barriers," he said. "We have financial assistance and do everything we can to make sure that they can play. We're willing to work with anybody if they want to participate in our program."