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Mack Kelly cuts his teeth on the game of football playing for the Minnesota Panthers flag football team. Photo by David Pierini



FLAG FOOTBALL

The joys of summer!

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Tatum Lewis, 4, successfully runs past defenders during a recent practice at Shingle Creek Park.

The Northside's youngest football players chase flags for summer fun

Photos and text by David Pierini, Staff Reporter

Coach Gino Eagle isn't trying to teach his football team X's and O's. He's got one play.

"If you're not running with the ball, what are you doing?" Eagle asks his team with his hand cupped by his ear to indicate he is insisting the correct answer be said aloud. "Blocking!"

The Minnesota Panthers' youngest players, ages 4 to 6, have a blast getting a taste for the game with flag football. The

Northside program, which has a popular tackle football program for youth, added flag football last summer. Word spread of the fun kids were having and this season's roster is twice as big.

Practices are at Shingle Creek Park and the Panthers play weekly games in a flag league with teams from Minneapolis and Brooklyn Center.

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DeMarcus Howell, 5, right, and Gion Eagle high-five to start the second half of play during a recent game.



Jaylen Ruffin smiles as he gets close to the end zone in practice.



"Down! Set..." is the command that gets the Panthers ready for play.



Coach Gino Eagle prepares Amari Evans, 4, for his blocking assignment in practice.



Gion Eagle runs across the field at Fairview Park with the team flag.



Panther parents get excited as the team runs for a touchdown.