

Position Statement by the American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) to the Ad Hoc Fields Committee of the Town of Los Altos Hills, City of Los Altos, and the Los Altos School District.

Monday, 28th March, 2005

Statement to be verbally summarized at the meeting.

About the Speaker:

Good Evening, my name is Randy Harr and I am here representing the AYSO regions that support kids in the City of Los Altos, Town of Los Altos Hills, and the Los Altos School District. This comprises region 43 solely, half of region 45, and a portion of region 26. Personally, I am also a soccer referee who works all levels of youth games all around the state. Most importantly though, I am a parent in the public school system, 15 year resident of the cities represented, and 20 year resident of the Bay Area. My statement here today is based on my knowledge as the elected regional commissioner of AYSO Region 43 and my regular contact with past (and current) parent volunteers who have been helping AYSO over the last 30 years or more and keeping me apprised of how things were done as far back as 1973 here in the Los Altos area.

About AYSO and AYSO in Los Altos:

AYSO is an all volunteer, parent run organization that promotes character development through the sport of soccer. It was founded in 1964 in southern California and was the earliest, nation wide, youth sports organization and continues to be the first in promoting many ideals that eventually get adopted into other groups. Ideals like everyone plays®, balanced teams, open registration, positive coaching, and good sportsmanship. AYSO is very popular with city recreation departments and school districts and run as their intramural sport program in most cities (although not here). Each AYSO region (roughly a city) is a “department” in the National corporation with the locally elected regional commissioner a share holder and executive member that votes on and controls all activities of the organization. More information is available at <http://soccer.org/>.

AYSO has been serving the Los Altos area directly since 1969 with Regions 43 and 45 formed in 1973 to directly service just the Los Altos School District, City of Los Altos, and Town of Los Altos Hills. AYSO has no boundaries – this is one of its philosophies as well. But to make it easier on parents to select an initial region and in management of field use, in our area we promote a region based on school district boundaries. A region identifies what schools or city they primarily draw players and utilize fields from. But parents are free to join and participate in any region they prefer.

AYSO Los Altos has had a pretty constant participation rate over the past thirty years. Roughly 2/5 to 1/2 of every Los Altos School District elementary school child participates in the soccer program. The numbers drop off in middle to high school as other sports and activities kick in. But it is still a popular, recreational, “intramural” sport activity for the kids of all ages in our area. There are over 1500 kids in our AYSO Fall program from the 94022 and 94024 zip codes alone; with around 200 from Los Altos Hills. There are 1800

kids in our program from Los Altos School District schools. We have an equal number of girls and boys, except in Spring where the girl ratio climbs to 60%. When combined with MVLA and other local CYSA soccer clubs, we estimate 2000 children playing soccer from these zip codes. AYSO has at any one time, over 500 parent volunteers trained in child safety and job specific skills to help develop and manage the program. These volunteers are from all walks of life and usually are active in their child's other activities at school such as PTA, girl/boy scouts, and even other sports.

AYSO actually has the highest utilization of field time and field area use per player that we know of. Our needs on average are one to 1.5 hours of field time per season per player. We generally have 20 players per hour per field. We can usually fit two fields in the same area as one baseball field and two games in a 3 hour slot. So we are getting 120 players through per 3 hour slot per area of a baseball field. And all are on the grass chasing the ball $\frac{3}{4}$ of that time. So yes, soccer does seem to provide more wear and tear onto the fields. But this is because of a 4x to 8x greater utilization by participants of the same area of grass. This greater utilization, ease of participating at any skill level, and guaranteed playing time is likely why the program is so popular.

AYSO is the first introduction for most kids into an organized, team sport. Especially a sport with officials overseeing the play. We take that role seriously in trying to guarantee positive life lessons being learned by all.

As a result of our balanced teams philosophy, we create a real community building service. Parents from different schools are intermixed for a season. As a result, by time kids get merged into the junior high or high school, there is a high likelihood they already know each other and are even friends. This is an oft overlooked benefit of our program in the community.

Additionally, we train and have on our volunteer rosters many youth who participate as coaches or referees and earn valuable community service hours and life lessons helping out their siblings or others. This program, along with our not-yet-existent VIP program for special needs kids in Regions 43 and 45, could be further exploited to enrich our community further.

Spring Use Expansion:

Most AYSO regions run two programs -- a Fall and a Spring one. Some run 3 to 4 (Winter and Summer; sometimes Winter indoor). Historically, Region 43 has done only one Fall season and Regions 45 and 26 only do a "select" activity in Spring. Many parents from all three regions have been voicing strong concerns and showing an interest to help out with a regular, recreational league play in Spring as well. There are just no other options of interest, especially for girls, during this time period. Hence, we started a Spring program last year in Region 43. That initial program drew 400 kids with just 3 weeks notice. We played on fields in Cupertino, West San Jose and Saratoga because nothing could be obtained locally. It was almost equally balanced between boys and girls. The participation distribution (by age) matched our Fall program. We "squatted" in parks and reserved but unutilized field for local, during-the-week practice times as

nothing could be reserved. This year, due to the difficulties, the parent board decided against doing the Spring program in this way. But no local fields could be obtained even though interest appeared for 500 or greater players. We finally, with great effort, arranged some limited gym time and are playing Futsal (indoor soccer, sanctioned by FIFA also) this Spring. We are oversubscribed for the 210 slots we could arrange gym time for. But most did not sign up as they really wanted outdoor. More details are available at <http://ayso43.org/> on the Spring Message Board.

About the Local Field Situation:

The first priority and issue is existing field maintenance. As a referee, I have worked in most cities and school districts in the peninsula. I regularly work the artificial turf fields at many of the high schools up and down the peninsula. Fellow referees around the bay area as well as team players and parents all know Los Altos for one thing. Poor quality fields. Nobody wants to come play here. Maintenance of our existing, accessible fields needs to be the highest priority, in our view.

Second of importance is in accessibility to the facilities that are already here. In my opinion, we do not have a shortage of fields but a mindset of not making available the ones we have. There needs to be a change away from “historical use” and other unwritten, unworkable practices of field allocation to one based on local resident needs and interest. Specific suggestions and details are available on our website at <http://ayso43.org/Main/Spring2005Fields.html> and below as an appendix.

We need to work to make fields that kids get to use for public school PE available to them for after school and weekend intramural sport activity. The biggest local “violators” of this concept are the public high schools. They, like some of the principals of other schools, can be adamant about declining use for non-school activities. This is especially true once they put some money into the facility. High school kids should have access to high school fields. Middle school kids on middle school fields. Generally, school field condition and size is related to the age of the school kids. Lets focus on reserving and making available the best fields for the kids who need them.

It is only when a field decays into a barely useable form through lack of maintenance that the school is willing to readily make a field accessible. They continue to not maintain the field for the increased use they now get, and then complain that more money is needed to improve or maintain the property. Like in other cities, we would urge the identification of the public fields supported by tax dollars as a community property that should be maintained and made available to the community. Many of our local neighbors have developed similar cooperation between the cities and school districts in this regard. It is time the Los Altos area recognized this and fell into line as they had planned to in 1990.

We would like to further point out that a major disruption to the field availability came from the reconstruction of all the LASD facilities. With this coming to a close, and the camp schools slowly getting restored to fields, the shortage should decrease. True, some land was taken away by the city gyms. But not enough to impact the situation so greatly. We simply need the previous fields restored as much as possible.

There is a more immediate item, not covered in our published statement, that could help for this coming fall. We seek a normalization of field rental fees and policies applied to resident youth sports groups. AYSO is charged by the Los Altos School District per player participating. Other groups are charged per hour. The city also charges per hour. As a result of the charge per player from the school district, we get charged 2 to 3 times more for their field use. This causes us to seek abnormal requests and do different things when planning our season. The Los Altos area has the poorest quality fields and yet charges the most for their use of any city or school district on the peninsula, that we are aware of. If at least this could be normalized between the city and school district, then AYSO could be much more proactive in working with other youth groups on field access in the Fall.

A final note. The City of Los Altos Recreation Department actually goes to great effort to maintain their fields and make them accessible to all. We appreciate and applaud their efforts to assist. But they too are following some of the outmoded field allocation methods that the school district utilizes. And these need to change. The School District is a great partner to our program as well. In addition to fields in the Fall, they provide over 100 hours of classroom facility use for the training of parents as coaches and referees every year. As most of the parents running AYSO are also active in the schools, they provide an understanding and cooperation that we appreciate for our working, volunteer parents. But maintenance and allocation policies at the district level need to be updated as well. When you have close to 400 kids in the 94022 zip code alone that cannot get access to a single hour of field time, something is wrong.

We are simply a parent group trying to extend the positive educational experience that our kids already get in the school. Our goal is to work with the faculty and staff of the school system to provide a quality, enriching program that is coherent with what they already provide. To the extent that the support and cooperation we get from the principals and school staff could be extended to the district office and its policies, that would be a great step forward.

Current field use:

Fall – every Los Altos School District field and Rosita; Monday through Saturday, with very limited Sunday use (some gaps that allow other smaller program fill ins)
Spring – none made available although any provided could be utilized

Critical needs, in priority order, as discussed and determined by the Region 43 board are:

- 1) Field condition -- broken sprinklers, lack of turf (weeds, dirt), holes filled with sand or rocks or worse yet long grass, gophers and tree roots at Covington, lack of restroom facilities (or access to them) now that schools are renovated, and so on.
- 2) Lack of weekday field space – just not enough field time during the week to support practices.
- 3) Accessibility to high school, private school, and college fields -- especially where the students are participants in the program.

**Our problem identification and recommendations about the
Field Allocation Problem
in (North) Los Altos, Los Altos Hills**

Originally posted December 31, 2005. Last Updated: March 3, 2005

In our opinion, the field allocation system in place by the City of Los Altos and the Los Altos School district is not workable. Although it appears we have more actual participants from the 94022 zip code than any other youth sports group, we are not able to obtain access to any field in this zip code area for Spring. As a result of working this issue to date, we now offer the following observations and recommendations:

[1] Historical use field allocation should be abandoned:

We propose that the unwritten practice of allocating fields and priority of fields based on historical use be abandoned. Field allocation by the city and school district is similar in this regard. Recreation Department or School use takes priority, then youth sports groups, than other youth groups, followed by other community groups and finally adult groups with no affiliation. The problem is that there are too many youth groups vying for the few fields in our immediate area (roughly 94022 zip code). Currently, the spring fields are locked up by Los Altos Little League, Mountain View Los Altos Pony Baseball, and MVLA (CYSA) soccer club. Even so, other groups get in like BAWSL and Lacrosse when it is clear we have the most participants. It is for this same reason that Pop Warner and Flag football have been locked out of field use in the fall in this area.

An additional problem is AYSO Region 43 is the smallest land area group of all the local organizations using the fields. Therefore, without access to the few fields in the immediate area (roughly 94022 zip code area), we are locked out even though fields in Mountain View or South Los Altos may go underutilized. These are areas available to the other groups in addition to the local fields we compete for.

[2] Field allocation should be based on local participant draw:

We propose that organizations with the largest absolute number of local residents (and/or the highest percentage of local participants) have first priority access to the local fields. We further propose that no group with a large percentage (over 50%) of local resident participation be locked out of field access completely. The idea is the percentage of total participants from a geographic area that are in an organization should reflect the relative percentage of fields made available to that organization. So if soccer and baseball attract the same number of youth players in a season, they should equally share the fields -- whether it be Spring or Fall. Or if a group has 700 players from the 94022 zip code (like AYSO Region 43 does) and no other group has near that many from such a concentrated area, that group should have priority for a certain percentage of the 94022 zip code area fields.

There are some possible minor adjustments that may be needed as organization, school district, city, and zip-code boundaries do not line up. But in general, this should be workable using some system to priority allocate local fields for local users.

Additionally, new sports should not be locked out just because they are new and cannot make a definitive draw from the local area for their first use. Some minimal field space should be allocated to all sports --even if just one field for a few hours each week.

[3] Field Penalties for over-booking:

We propose that penalties and loss of field-use rights be instituted for groups that block reserve field time slots and then do not use them. While field fees from LASD and the City of Los Altos are the highest in the Bay Area, they are not high enough to cause groups to allocate their field use more judiciously. Therefore, youth groups tend to over-reserve just to hold onto the fields for potential use. We have witnessed 20% to 100% over-booking of field time slots. A mechanism to prevent over-booking and non-use of a reserved field needs to be instituted. Some other cities have a policy that if a field is reserved for a specific hour on a weekly basis and goes unused twice, you then lose your reservation for that field during that time period forever. Such a mechanism, while possibly difficult to police and enforce, would free up some field times and locations as over-reserving would be reduced.

[4] Youth Sports Field User Group:

We call for the development of a youth sports user group for the city of Los Altos, similar to what existed in the late 1980's, to address the shortage and condition of local playing facilities. This group would open the dialogue and understanding to allow fair and equitable field allocation among the youth sports groups. Parent run, local youth sports activities really need this common ground group to address issues on a continuing basis, as well as to have a lobby with the field owners on common issues. Such a group can be used to provide a general mechanism for dialog on issues revolving around use of fields and other facilities by youth sports groups. Such a group would be instrumental in developing and administrating the field allocation mechanism (points 1-3 above) . Other issues that could be addressed in a common way are:

- Access and use of private school fields
- Access and use of public high school fields
- Access and use of community college fields
- Address the field condition and maintenance issues in a prioritized, constructive way
- Focusing and organizing field repair and maintenance activities
- Share facilities that everyone needs (but not needed full time) to administer their groups
(for example, maybe get a permanent room that can be used for meetings and training at Hillview)
- Develop an online system for members and the field owners that can manage the reservation, billing, etc. so overbooking is not needed, available field slots can be determined, reservations can be monitored, etc.

Contact rc@ayso43.org for more information.

Signed,

[Board of Parents](#) running [AYSO Region 43](#), North Los Altos / Los Altos Hills