

## Summer Youth Basketball in Full Swing

By Chris Lavin

Summer does not mean time for lazy days for more than 350 young basketball players in the Lafayette Moraga Youth Association's basketball league, because 40 teams have been fielded to play weekly at school gyms throughout the area. Their season is now well under way.

Director Judy McNeil has lived in Lafayette for 36 years, and spends much of her summer coordinating the league.

"It gives some structure to the summer for the kids," McNeil said. While swimming is a popular sport in the area, "not all kids swim," McNeil said, and basketball offers an alternative. Weekly practices and games are scheduled so they do not conflict with local swim teams, as well.

All basketball coaches are volunteer parents whose boys and girls play in the league. Organizers have no way of lowering the baskets, so the second grade league uses smaller balls, and is co-ed. Starting in the third grade and all the way up to ninth, teams are gender-specific and use age-specific balls.

Besides second graders, divisions include third and fourth, fifth and sixth, and seventh to ninth graders.

"We go for balance and parity," McNeil said. "We still have competitive games on the floor, but we try to create teams that strike a balance with player ability."

And indeed, the players work hard. All foreheads are sweaty by half-time, and water bottles are well used. Statistics are painstaking but ensure that all players get equal time on the floor, and the players work hard to make sure all players score at least a few points.

As in all youth sports, there is an occasional coach who can take things "too far," McNeil said, and focus on winning instead of fair play and equal time. Some coaches will also try to play better players consistently to raise their scores. McNeil has ways of keeping those coaches in check, however. In a list of game rules and regulations she sends out each season, McNeil includes the following Rule No. 18, "The Have Fun Rule... It is in the interest of all players, coaches and spectators to see that all players on the court are having fun and are not discouraged or embarrassed by a blow-out.

Unfortunately almost every year we must impose a slaughter rule on coaches that either don't, or don't know how, to control a game. If your team takes a significant lead over the opposing team please take control of the flow of the game. Hold back on defense and let the other team attempt clear shots; take out a dominant player—or at least tell he/she that they must have a certain number of assists before attempting a basket; or make sure that every player on your team scores a basket before any player on the floor may make two.



Coach Rob Middleton of Lafayette debriefs the Jaguars after their recent game



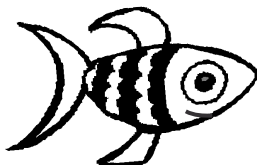
A Jaguar player in the third- to fourth-grade LMYA basketball division attempts to block Ben Fish of the Warriors as he tries to take a shot  
Photos by Chris Lavin

The have fun rule is the most important rule we have. However, if this rule is not enforced we do have Draconian methods of imposing it, including Big Bruno the Enforcer."

Sign-ups for the league come shortly before school lets out for the summer. For more information call Judy McNeil at 925-284-5692.

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