

When Dogs and Soccer Collide

By Sophie Braccini

Bringing your dog to run freely at Rancho Laguna Park has been a Moraga tradition for years. And for years, dogs have been allowed to play off-leash before 9 a.m. in the morning and after 7 p.m. in the evening. So to the “dog community,” the news that a half an hour would be removed from their window of dog frolicking in the morning sounded like an intolerable infringement upon their rights, if not the first step in the direction of total eviction from the park. Park, kids, balls and dogs... a bad combination?

The reason for the ½ hour loss is a Euro Soccer kids’ camp that uses the Park’s field starting at 8:30 a.m. during the summer. “We wanted the camp to start at that time so if people have to leave town before the 9:00 a.m. Moraga road closure they can still do so,” says Jay Ingram, Parks and Recreation Di-

rector. A dog owner himself, he insists there is no malignant intent, he just has an eye on the bottom line. “This park is the only flat field available to us, outside of the school district’s property,” he explains, “our department needs to generate revenue and summer camps are a great opportunity for us.”

On the first morning of the overlap, it was clear that the dog owners were not going to leave the field before 9:00 a.m.

One of them had brought a copy of the municipal code that she claims guarantees their grandfathering on the field. “You can stay in the back and side area,” agreed Ingram. He has no desire for confrontation; his motto, “Creating community through people, parks and programs,” encompasses all members of the community, from dog groups to kids playing soccer. To prove his good intentions, In-

gram offered the dog owners access to the park ½ hour earlier in the evening, at 6:30 p.m. instead of 7 p.m.

The Euro Soccer coaches did not seem too concerned with the issue and took it in stride when a small, playful dog ran among the kids and stole a ball. The dog was quickly controlled by his owner and kept away from the children.

“This is only for the summer,” says Ingram, “and I have no intention of moving the ‘so-called’ dog park elsewhere.” However, he would like to start a dialog with the dog community and find a place where they could have access twenty four hours a day. The group is not optimistic. “Where are we going to find such a large place, with water and decent flat grounds?” asks one of them.



Dogs take the sidelines while kids use the field at Rancho Laguna

Photo Andy Scheck