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Flag Football the Way to Play MOL Celebrates 40 Years

By Lou Fancher



MOL 3rd graders with their youth coaches at the Mini Camp held at JM field Photo Ohlen Alexander

Parents volunteer for coaching positions. Many played in the league themselves, meaning dads and grandpas fill the staff roster. This year, there is even an energetic sports mom coach and a few girls signed up, breaking the mold and setting a precedent for the future.

The draw of flag football is the emphasis on speed, deception, and fun, instead of violence. "You can teach kids about football without having them colliding all day long," says Fraser.

Finding a league without the bangs and brawls was a relief to parent Peter Zolantakis, who recalls succumbing to peer pressure and playing tackle football, "All my friends joined, and I was worried about being left out," he admits. Pop Warner and high school football left him with one clear memory: "I was terrified," he says.

Free from the obligation to overpower each other, kids can relax and concentrate on developing the basic skills and confidence of well-rounded athletes. Relying on a broader range of skills allows all players to stand out, not just the taller, bigger guys. "For everyone who's not the star, it's more enjoyable," says Zolantakis.

Andrew Zolantakis, age 13, has participated in MOL for five years. He's played wide receiver, running back, and quarterback - living proof of the league's equal opportunity profile. "My brother was playing and he seemed to like it," Andrew says of his starting days, "And it wasn't too intense, it was just fun." Still, winning is on his mind, especially because "it gives me certain bragging rights at school." But losing is also a part of competition and when disappointed, he tells himself, "You can come back next week," and his team mates, "You'll get it next time." This is the last year Andrew is eligible to play. He already helps with the mini-camp and plans to referee during the 2010 season.

Due to the efforts of Bill Fraser and others like him the league is booming, with coaches lining up, the player roster full and a waiting list established. Fraser hopes to celebrate MOL's long history with a 40th anniversary celebration on October 10th. Past players, coaches, referees and fans are welcome. Information and registration is on the website at <http://www.molfootball.org/>.

Fall brings football and while the sport is fun to watch, the intensity of tackling is not for everyone. The alternative is flag football, where fans can become players without the violence. The opening weekend of the Moraga-Orinda-Lafayette (MOL) flag football program starts September 19th, filling the fields at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School with 570 Lamorinda kids. "It's a sea of jerseys on Saturday mornings," says League Commissioner Bill Fraser. The local league, established in 1969 by a group of guys who loved the game, has grown tremendously. Each year, players in third-eighth grade from Moraga, Orinda, Lafayette and Canyon pack the fields with talent and the sidelines with volunteers from all four communities. Make no mistake: this is not a backyard-type operation. Despite its grassroots origin, the league runs with efficiency, starting with online registration. There is a mini-camp for first-time third graders, an evaluation day, draft days and preseason games. "The kids love it because they have one practice a week, games on Saturday, and it's real football to them," Fraser explains.



MOL 3rd graders in action Photo Ohlen Alexander

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