



Los Alamos Youth Soccer League

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To All Interested Parties;

The board met this week and made decisions on some aspects of the competitive league administration for U14 and below. There will be some changes to the U15 and above, just have not worked out the details. The changes include a rate bundling, the probable end of the Blast Off Tournament, a standardized uniform, and a commitment letter that needs to be signed before the league will process player's registrations. We are also going to look into how we form the teams in the competitive league. Let me discuss why we were forced to make these changes.

We have about 150 kids in the competitive program in the Fall and around 200 in the Spring because of the high school age groups. LAYSL sponsors a competitive league for these kids for two reasons. The first is that we have a lot of talented kids playing soccer in this town and they want to try and take their skills to the next level. Duke City soccer is the premier league in New Mexico and that is where we can find the best mix of quality of competition, quality of fields, and quality officiating (yes, it is worse in other leagues). The second aspect is that kids can learn different things in a more pressure filled, demanding environment as opposed to our recreational league. Having to attend practice more often, pay closer attention to coaches during practice, become a member of a team over a multi year period and the pride and sense of belonging that comes with that are some of the skills kids can get. The last two years has really shown me we are failing in providing all the tools for the coaches to meet these goals.

When we send teams down to Albuquerque, I care very little if we win or lose. I care more about how Los Alamos is represented. This is the area where I get comments from our coaches, our parents, and parents from the OTHER team's kids. When we field a reasonable size team, the comments I hear range from how tough we play, to how surprised they are we can win tournaments from such a small town, to the sportsmanship our players display - how our parent's cheer - and coaches coach (my personal favorite). When we don't field a full team, I get a lot of negative comments, and rightfully so. Comments are founded in that the other teams pay just as much as we do to participate in Duke City. Often, these teams are getting ready for tournaments. If we fail to appear with a full team, or fail to appear period, how can the other team prepare? How do they feel they are getting their money's worth? I have actually heard from a coach that prays he does not have to play LAYSL in the spring. Not because he is afraid to lose, but he is afraid of being cheated out of a game that season. It is really disheartening for me to hear these comments when all we have to do to fix them is show up.

We have talked to Duke City about getting one week off during our spring break for a number of years. I finally agree with Bill Nordin (Duke City President) that he cannot make changes just for us. Because of all the leagues that play Duke City (Farmington, Durango, Santa Fe, Clovis, and Albuquerque) spring break covers a 5-week period in the Spring. If he made allowances for all the requests, scheduling would be a nightmare and there would be no spring season.

We also are going to ask all parents to sign a "commitment letter". This will lay out what the expectations

are for inclusion into the competitive program. This is in lieu of the commitment fee we mentioned in the earlier email. The commitment we want to impress on those involved is to help out with the team in one of the positions that help the team succeed. For example, snack, tournament, and uniform coordinators, someone to bring a tent to every game to keep the kids out of the sun, someone to handle the refereeing duties in Duke City, etc. We need parents to step up and take these activities off the coach's shoulders. We also expect the commitment level to field a full team for every game, especially during the week of spring break. I understand we all have other kids, activities, and emergencies, but I expect that every team to have at least enough kids to field a full squad at every game. If this letter is not enough to get parent involvement up, we will have to revisit the idea of a commitment fee.

The decision about whether to continue the Blast Off Tournament was a hard one. We put this tournament on primarily for our teams so that they can get some home games for once. We also hold it in the beginning of the season so all teams attending can have their paperwork checked over and ensure everything is in order for the rest of their season. There is a lot of work that goes on before the weekend, and a lot more during the weekend. Application paperwork, Lining 5 or 6 fields, ordering trophies, lining up food and merchandise vendors, putting together welcome packages, registering teams, checking in teams, picking up trash during and after the event, marshalling fields, manning the help desk, refereeing matches, updating scores, the list goes on and on. We have not had enough volunteers to spread out the work load and the handful of people that have been running the tournament are just plain worn out. This past year, I had 4 parents volunteer and then not show up.

Other reasons we are canceling this years tournament is Los Alamos is rapidly losing the infrastructure to hold a tournament and the lack of returning teams is reflecting this. Los Alamos does not have a large number of quality hotels and thus some of the visiting teams have been forced to stay a long distance away or in sub-par hotels. There are few restaurants in town that can handle a team and all the associated coaches and parents and there are few to no restaurants open in the White Rock area on weekends. Getting food services to the field has been difficult at best. These are the most common reasons I get from the other coaches as to why they are not coming back. We also hear about lack of referees which have to officiate back to back games.

So, on to the changes. The rate is increasing that you end up paying the league, but we hope you find that the rates are really not increasing, just who and when you pay are different. The rate will be \$250 next year. We are doing away with the half-year option (except for the U15 and above). If you are going to play competitive soccer, you will need to commit the full year; whether you play the entire year is still up to you. This is what we will provide for that fee:

- \$85 LAYSL fee that has been in place for years
- \$975 team fee for Duke City (this is the 2010-2011 rate)
- \$500 or less fee to one early Fall tournament
- One uniform kit (two shirts, one short, and socks)

All teams had to pay the Duke City fees on their own before and we actually had some problems where Bill Nordin would automatically re-register teams for us without getting a formal application because he did not want us to lose a spot in the rankings. I would not think to check all the age groups, just the ones we registered. We forfeited 2 games this year because we were put on a schedule and other teams showed up. Nobody's fault but it reflects badly on the league. By having the league office handle these registrations, it will prevent these cases.

Since we are no longer having the Blast Off, which all teams still had to register and pay the league for, a portion of the increased rates will go to covering the loss in income from sponsoring the Blast Off and

cover the registration fee for one preseason tournament. We are making it a preseason tournament because we don't want to get into the business of managing who goes where and do we owe someone a tournament still. There are a number of tournaments in Albuquerque the following weeks after the Blast Off has been scheduled and will provide a great soccer venue, with better competition than we can provide here. We are also going to work with other leagues to see if we can get either friendlies here in Los Alamos or reschedule league games here to make up for the lack of a home weekend.

By moving to the single uniform across all teams, it will help find LAYSL teams at Duke City (I know, a minor issue), but will also start to build a sense of team and belonging for all the kids in the competitive program. Kids notice when a team scores down at the complex on the neighboring fields and it really does help the kids playing if they see their club get one in. We understand that teams just purchased new kits last year in many cases. So we are going to implement the uniforms over a 2-year period. If you have enough left over kits and don't need new ones next year, you can use them again in the 2010-2011 season. 2011-2012 will have all LAYSL teams in the same kit. We are not sure about the details, but we hope we can find a way to contract with an outside outfitter and give all players a \$50 credit with their store. If you need a new uniform, then use it toward that. If your kid is like mine and never grows, then spend the credit on fan wear or a new bag. We also hope that CB Fox can be used to go in and try the uniforms on before ordering, that way everyone gets a good fit and returns are not an issue.

We are still going to leave a lot of decisions up to the individual teams. We feel strongly that this is part of this club's strength. These changes really are just who you are paying and at what time. We understand the loss of the Blast Off may be a big disappointment to some and hope by providing a way to still get the preseason tune up is an adequate replacement. It was just getting to be too great of a burden to those that put it on in a difficult location like Los Alamos with poor infrastructure.

Unhappy with the new changes? We are still looking for board members. We will be holding elections at the end of the month and you can affect how the league is run. We hope these changes are for the better and we get a higher level of commitment. The positions that are up for election are the Recreational League Coordinators for each town, the Field Coordinator, Referee Coordinator, and my position, the President.