

Local coaches find sports fields inadequate, unsafe

By Andy Laughlin, Village Life staff writer

(12.13.06) Two coaches of El Dorado Hills youth sports teams feel that local playing fields are inadequate and may be hazardous for kids playing soccer, football, baseball and other turf-related sports.

Coaches Tony Rogozinski and Dan Ross agree that El Dorado Hills' sports fields aren't up to the standards of an affluent community. Many fields lack restrooms and seating for spectators, they said, and turf is often uneven and pitted. Only one park, Promontory, has plans for lighted facilities and is slated for completion in 2007.

CSD board member-elect Rogozinski is a central figure of the problem with youth sports in El Dorado Hills. Aside from making the issue the focus of his campaign, he's dealt with the issue first-hand as a coach of local baseball, soccer and basketball teams.

Rogozinski pointed out problems with the fields themselves, identifying poor turf conditions that he says sometimes cause otherwise preventable injuries to young players. Potholes, uneven ground, exposed sprinkler heads and large, muddy patches often result in sprained ankles or even broken bones for athletes, he said. He also noted that most parks in El Dorado Hills lack amenities like lights for night use, snack bars and restrooms.

Rogozinski said he'd like the CSD to focus on improving existing facilities, evening out rough turf and improving drainage at sports fields. He also hopes to see restrooms and snack bars added to parks.

"We've got to have ample facilities that allow our kids to participate in the sports that are important to their experience in this community," he said. "Not only to meet today's requirements, but to be ahead of the curve for the future."

Dan Ross has coached his twin 12-year old boys in soccer, baseball, basketball and flag football at various times during the past seven years. He says the CSD does an excellent job with the fields they maintain. His problem, he said, is the lack of usable facilities in town.

"I think the biggest issue is the lack of usable fields," he said. "We've identified some that aren't being used, like the baseball field at Silva Valley. Fields at schools aren't very well kept up."

Ross said he and Rogozinski would like to see the CSD work with local school districts in establishing joint-use agreements, allowing for the CSD to help improve the conditions of fields currently unusable by sports teams.

Both coaches related experiences in bringing their teams to play in other communities. They referred to sports fields in Granite Bay, an unincorporated community similar to El Dorado Hills. Located in Placer County, Granite Bay currently has five parks with sports fields, including baseball and softball diamonds, soccer fields and basketball courts. All of the parks have restrooms and two of them have snack bars and barbecue areas.

Unlike El Dorado Hills, Granite Bay has no local authority to maintain its parks. They are designed, built, and maintained by Placer County Parks Services, which manages parks in all unincorporated areas of Placer County. While Granite Bay has a voter-approved assessment district that allows local tax dollars to pay for local parks and recreational services, there is no local overseer.

But what works for Granite Bay might not work for El Dorado Hills. El Dorado County parks department is considerably smaller. It currently manages only three parks; Shingle Springs' Bradford Park, Pioneer Park in southern El Dorado County, and Henningsen Lotus Park in Coloma. County Parks Project Coordinator Dan Bolster said the county has plans to build additional parks, but funding problems have delayed the process.

"There's more on the drawing board," he said, "But we need more funding. Were totally dependent on what

we can get from the general fund and from private contributions and grants.”

Bolster referred to the proposed Bass Lake Regional Park in El Dorado Hills, which included plans for multiple sports fields, basketball and tennis courts. Despite strong community interest, problems with funding and environmental assessment have indefinitely delayed the park’s construction.

Last week, the CSD responded to the problem with sports facilities with its approval of the Master Plan, proposing \$65 million toward parks construction and improvements.

CSD board members agree that parks and sports fields in El Dorado Hills do not meet the standard of an otherwise prosperous community. During the Master Plan approval meeting, several spoke in support of the plan, which passed unanimously.

“Community parks are not the backbone of the community,” Director Larry Brilliant said. “They’re the heart and soul. The biggest tragedy we have is the fact that we have to send our children from this community to another community to play.”

Board President Justin Masters also spoke at the meeting. He focused on the impact parks have on property values.

“People coming here want the good parks, they want the facilities,” he said. “The prices of homes increase substantially when you have parks nearby. It’s a benefit for the community.”

Whether the CSD will be able to raise the money to follow through with all of the identified improvements will depend on the rate of growth over the next several years. While construction of new homes has decreased in the past year, CSD board members remain optimistic about raising enough funds to construct and make improvements to community parks and playing fields.

alaughlin@villagelife.com