

Thousand Oaks Acorn

Serving Thousand Oaks, Newbury Park, North Ranch and Westlake

2014-07-03 / Sports

Flag football fun

Conejo Youth Flag Football Association celebrates 45 years teaching the game

By Gilberto Manzano

gmanzano@theacorn.com



HASTA LA VISTA, BABY—Travis Egerer, left, of the senior Ravens runs with the ball while Josh Williams of the Rams attempts to pull his flag in a Conejo Youth Flag Football Association game last season.

Photos courtesy of CYFFA

Football is a rough and occasionally brutal sport.

It's not easy trying to execute a complex play while 11 defenders attempt to bulldoze the guy with the pigskin.

Football is still one of the most-played sports among young athletes.

More would like to join the gridiron fun but prefer not being tackled and risking injury.

The Conejo Youth Flag Football Association (CYFFA) has trained cautious competitors while emphasizing football's fundamentals for all participants since 1970.

"What makes us so popular among families is that we provide the real football experience without the concern of injuries," said Gus

Gougas, who's been a CYFFA board member for the past five years. "We want parents to realize football is a great sport. It's not all about hits."

The Thousand Oaks-based coed 8-on-8 flag football league will celebrate its 45th season this fall. The CYFFA, which plays by CIF-Southern Section high school rules, holds its practices and games at Redwood Middle School.

Many competitors live in the Conejo Valley, but players also come from surrounding communities, including Camarillo, Simi Valley and the San Fernando Valley.

The CYFFA is divided into four divisions; scrim for ages 5 to 7, bantam 8- 9, junior 10 and senior 11-13. Registration is available at CYFFA.com, and fall season tryouts are 9 to 11 a.m. on Aug. 2 at Redwood.



GALLOPING COLT—Freddie Ricketts, center, of the senior Colts rumbles with the ball while senior 49ers Ryan Freilich, left, and Sam Hollander attempt to take him



JUKE AND MOVE—Nick Riggio of the senior Colts gains yards before Ryan Freilich of the senior 49ers, No. 38, pulls his flag.

Flag football isn't just a sport **down during a flag football game.**

played for fun. The CYFFA

teaches youngsters skills at various positions, preparing kids who aspire to compete in tackle football in middle or high school.

"In many cases we have players who just want to play football for fun, but that's not their primary sport," Gougas said. "Their focus is having fun and staying safe. We also have players who want to learn the fundamentals while avoiding the head injuries and then try tackle football when they're older.

"Everyone is different, but we provide a fun experience for all."

Rich Freilich, 53, a former CYFFA assistant coach, had two sons participate in the league.

Freilich's eldest son, Ryan, played for CYFFA seven of the past eight years. He's an incoming freshman at Westlake who wants to play

volleyball for the Warriors.

The youngest Freilich, Sean, left the CYFFA after fifth grade to join Chaminade's middle school tackle football program. Sean is an incoming seventh-grader at Chaminade.

"Our experience with (CYFFA) was great," Rich Freilich said. "I trusted the coaches and board members with my kids. One of the many reasons why they've been around for 45 years is because their philosophy has been consistent.

"I have two sons who wanted two different things from football. The CYFFA made sure they were comfortable and had fun."

Ryan Freilich won't be eligible to participate on the field this upcoming season, but the CYFFA asked him to return as a referee.

"I'm a little nervous to be a ref, but (CYFFA) taught me the rules well when I played," said Ryan, who starred at wide receiver. "I was excited when they asked me to return."

Ryan briefly left flag football during fourth grade to try tackle football. He said he didn't mind the physicality but preferred CYFFA because it distributes plays evenly.

The CYFFA is one of the few flag football leagues that require players to wear cushioned-helmets.

"The helmets played a big role in why I signed my son up with (CYFFA)," said Ken Hanover, whose son Conner played flag football the past three seasons. "There's still contact in flag football. With all the concussion studies coming out, I felt safer as a parent with my son wearing a helmet."

Scott Thompson has been the CYFFA president the past five years, and his priorities haven't changed.

"We haven't changed much. It's still about fundamentals, playing safe and having fun," Thompson said. "The guys who started this league 45 years ago had the same priorities.

“My job is to have the league keep expanding and welcome everyone. We try to make it a fun experience to everyone.”

Thompson’s three sons, Spencer, Owen and Alex, have participated with the CYFFA. Spencer Thompson is an incoming sophomore on the Newbury Park junior varsity football team.

CYFFA practices start on Aug. 25. The 45th season kicks off on Sept. 13.

“Should be another exciting season,” Scott Thompson said. “Hopefully we keep it going for many years to come.”

[Return to top](#)