

Growing up Football



Youth Football Leagues Give Katy Kids a Fun Head Start

Written by Ashley Withers Photography by Marisa Hugonnett and Suzi Issa

Proudly sporting jerseys just like their favorite Katy ISD high school teams, football players in the Houston Youth Football League take to the field during autumn afternoons. It's easy to see their enthusiasm for the sport, and already, these young athletes showcase great sportsmanship.

Football season in Texas is in full swing, and those Friday night lights are not just for varsity teams any more. Katy kids of all ages are getting in on the action and joining Katy Youth Football or the Houston Youth Football League for fun, friends, and the chance to play the sport they love.

The Game Plan

Katy Youth Football was created for boys ranging from 4 years old to those in the sixth grade and is designed to promote a positive playing atmosphere for kids interested in the sport. The benefits of the league are many, and getting your kids involved early is a great way to build character. "[It] teaches teamwork, responsibility, [and determination], and [it] keeps them active," says Don Bassham,

assistant coach for the KYF PeeWee Falcons and a proud football dad.

The Houston Youth Football League utilizes the attendance zones of elementary and junior high schools within Katy ISD to create its teams. Students in grades kindergarten through sixth have the opportunity to participate on school-based squads. HYFL focuses on giving young players a better understanding of the same game they will be playing in junior and senior high school in a fun, less competitive atmosphere. By becoming familiar with the basic formations and patterns at an early age, players will be more skilled and knowledgeable in their upcoming playing years. "I would recommend getting involved," says Tia Meadors, whose son plays for

Houston Youth Football League players (back row, from left) Eddie Guerra, Karson Gabriel, AJ Chuter, Rick Barrick, Jacob Wile, Jordan Meadors, Derick Mourning, (front row, from left) Eric Lottimer, Ian Beek, Cade Trevathan, Quonziah Ford, Christopher Barrick, Jayson Sledge, and Christopher Sills



The HYFL Tigers



The HYFL Mavericks

the HYFL Lions. “The skills learned, sportsmanship, and self-confidence that the kids learn are invaluable.”

Little Players Learning Big Skills

Youth league football players have a variety of reasons why they play. “I like playing with my friends and I want to learn to play like the Katy Tigers,” says Brady Bassham of the KYF PeeWee Falcons. “I like to play, because I get to have fun and knock people over,” says Erik Lattimer, an HYFL sixth-grade Mustangs player. Another Mustangs team member, Ean Beek, says, “I like hitting and scoring touchdowns, because it helps my team win.”

Playing football also teaches boys how to work together on a team. “There is a little bit of pressure to play on a team, because you’re trying to win and you don’t want to let anyone down,” says Rick Barrick, who plays for the HYFL Stingrays. “It is like a second family to me, we all



The HYFL Cougars



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take care of each other,” says Edward Guerra an HYFL Mustangs player. Youth football puts kids in low-stress situations where their actions have an impact on others, teaching them the importance of conscientious thinking.

Parents also have their own reasons for encouraging their kids to play. “I love the sport, but I also feel this is a great time to begin teaching life lessons, such as teamwork, sportsmanship, and overcoming adversity,” says Peter Beek, proud father of HYFL Mustang, Ean Beek.

Focusing on a Positive Youth Program

Youth football programs like KYF and HYFL work because of all the community and parental support, with an overwhelming amount of volunteer hours put towards making each game a success. The coaching staff of both leagues is made up of parents and coaches from surrounding schools who donate their time to train the kids. “The number one reason I chose to help coach is to spend more time with my children,” says Bassham of his experience coaching the KYF Falcons. “Also, I wanted to teach the fundamentals of football to each individual player and to share my love of the sport.”

Parents who aren't official team coaches play a huge role, too, as Bassham's wife, Denise knows well. “I make sure they attend practices and games, support the coaching staff, and cheer them on,” she says. Being a football parent also requires parents to wear a variety of hats. “I am a coach, cheerleader, [and] mentor, but most importantly, I am [Ean's] father and a role model,” says Peter Beek.

KYF and HYFL stress the importance of making youth football a positive experience for all involved. After watching his two sons play youth football and coaching an HYFL team himself, Chris Barrick encourages parents to let their kids choose to become involved. “If your child wants to play, let them,” he says. “Don't force them because of something you missed out on or some old glory you had. Let them decide for themselves.”

Beek also advises parents to be supportive of their Katy football player. “Make sure the focus is on the kid,” he says. “It is important that we as parents set good examples. While winning is great, it is not the most important thing at this age. The kids are here to learn and improve.”

Friday Night Lights and Family Fun

Football games have been bringing people together for years and youth league football games are no exception. Delyn Gabrel is excited about watching her son play his first season of football on the HYFL Cougars and knows the whole family will enjoy watching him play, too. “My husband loves football,” she shares. “I think this season is going to be great! Our family will come together for lots of family fun.”

Whether you are playing, coaching, or cheering from the stands, getting involved in Katy area youth football is an experience for the whole family to enjoy. So come out and show some community support to the next generation of hometown heroes! **KM**

ASHLEY WITHERS is a graduate of Seven Lakes high school and is currently a junior at Southern Methodist University. She is studying journalism and sociology.

From Katy Youth Football to Cinco Ranch Varsity Teammates

As young Titans in the Katy Youth Football league, these boys won virtually every game for four years and took home three Turf Bowl Championship trophies. Today, they still play football together on Cinco Ranch Varsity. This group of Titans will face off with many of their former Titan teammates who now play for Katy, Taylor, and Seven Lakes.

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Morgan Matthews

Ty Katsarelis

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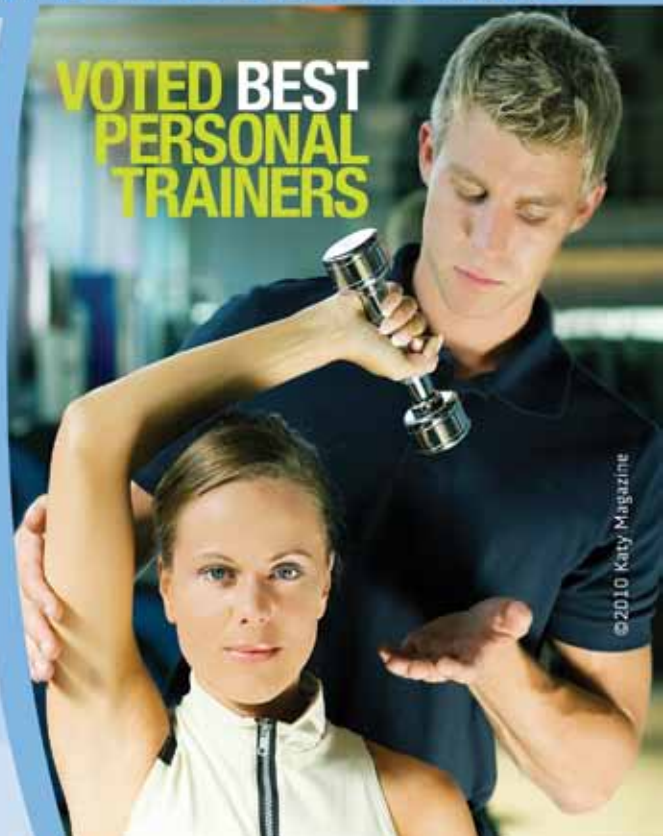
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