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Parents push for soccer, but Laurel board says nil

SHUT OUT Although parents want their children to play soccer in the Laurel School District, the board will not create a program.

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Parents and the school board do not see eye-to-eye on bringing soccer into Laurel's athletic program.

Eight parents attended last week's meeting, hoping to persuade members to give students the opportunity to play soccer as a school sport.

"I've been involved with trying to get soccer in Laurel schools for at least 10 years," said April Kennedy, a parent of three Laurel students. "The last time we tried to bring this up to the school board, parents were yelling

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and screaming about the use of their tax dollars.

"This time, we've pulled ourselves together with facts. The soccer club has grown, and there is a need for it. It's something the kids should be able to access."

Timothy Redfoot, Laurel School Board president, said by approving soccer into the athletic program, they would not be fully supporting existing programs.

"We have some struggling programs already," he said. "Whatever sport we allow, we want it to thrive. It would be irresponsible for us to jump into something like this."

After writing the school board a letter in 1996, Vincent Bejgrowicz, the Laurel soccer club coach, said the club has received a response stating why they did not permit soccer into the school district.

Bejgrowicz said the club has fixed everything the board mentioned.

"There was no field for soccer at the school," he said. "The Hickory Township community board is creating a park across from the school, near the fairgrounds, with two soccer fields.

"We were also told we couldn't have children crossing the street," he added. "Most schools don't have a soccer field adjacent to the building. The cross country team runs up and down the road, the band practices on the fairground fields and the wrestling team use the fairground buildings for practice."

In addition, Bejgrowicz said the sport would not cost the school any money.

"The soccer club has all of the equipment and new uniforms that are needed," he said. "We have offered to pay for coaching and referees for the first two years."

Redfoot said the school

board has researched the idea, but there is not enough student support. The administration plans to keep the idea in mind if interest grows.

Richard Lenhart, assignor and referee coordinator for the Laurel soccer club, said his son has spoken with teachers about his interest in playing soccer for the school.

"My oldest child wrote several articles about the subject for his English composition classes," he said. "I'm sure he's talked to several teachers about this."

Kennedy said the school board doesn't understand how big soccer has become.

"I don't think the board is up-to-date with the world of soccer," she said.

"They are afraid that the football team or other sports will suffer by taking away players. It's not recruiting, this isn't the Army. We should be able to say to students 'Here's all the sports we have, which one do you want to play?' All kids have their own talents, my child is a girl — she'll never jeopardize the football team."

Although Redfoot understands where parents are coming from, he said they do not see the entire picture.

"When you are a soccer parent, you are only focusing on one issue," he said.

"When you are a board member, you are responsible for the district and must focus on the big picture. I'd love to be everyone's hero, but sometimes that's not always right. We will continue to keep this in mind. Sometime it will all work out. I'm just not sure when."