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## Youth sports depends on volunteers

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Call it a large dose of tough love.

When officials of the North Valleys AYSO youth soccer league barred teams from the post-season tournament because of a lack of volunteers, they were sending parents throughout the area a much-needed message: If you want your children to have sports opportunities, it's not enough to simply write a check; every sports league needs your labor, too.

This area is fortunate. There is a wealth of youth leagues in every sport imaginable, all possible through the hard work of volunteers.

Just about every youth league runs on the backs of a relatively few adults who handle the sometimes formidable administrative tasks. They depend on parents who volunteer to coach; usually, though not always, coaches are motivated by the desire to coach their own children, among others. There's little to motivate parents to volunteer as umpires and referees, however, beyond the desire to help out. There's no reflected glory from the children, and sometimes they have to put up with abuse from parents who are content to sit on the sidelines and often have never bothered to read the rule books. And, the fewer officials that a league has, the more work has to be done by those few -- sometimes to the point of exhaustion.

That's why soccer leagues, for instance, have been instituting rules in recent years requiring that every team provide a volunteer referee. The punishment for not complying: In the case of the North Valleys AYSO, it was banishment from the tournament.

The decision couldn't have been easy for the active volunteers in the league. AYSO leagues operate on a philosophy that includes the assurance that all kids who want to play will do so. The leagues take that mandate very seriously, so barring teams from the tournament had to be painful. However, providing an opportunity for every child to play is only possible if all parents are involved.

A lot of parents undoubtedly will be unhappy with the decision. Maybe next year, they'll heed the message and volunteer.