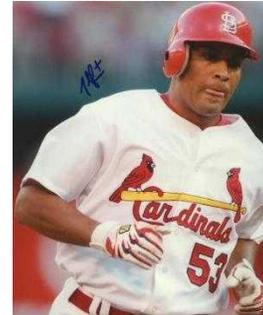


## PLAY BALL!

The Most Established Youth Sports Program In NYC Talks Competition, Camaraderie, Community—And Getting In The Game.

By Lorraine Duffy Merkl

“Yorkville Youth Athletic Association (YYAA) has become the greatest youth organization in New York City,” says John Rodriguez, World Series Champion and staff member.



Six thousand kids a year agree. So parents of these children from pre-K through high school sign them up for basketball, flag football, dodgeball, hockey, lacrosse, soccer, tennis and—now that spring is here—baseball, which can be played in recreational leagues or on more hardcore travel teams.

“We offer a lot of different levels, so everyone can play,” says Arlene Virga, YYAA Executive Director.

Yorkville’s recreation, parent-coached baseball league is the largest in the United States with over 1800 players participating each year. The program boasts beautiful turf and well-groomed grass fields. This stage is a great way to be part of a team, learn the game and have fun with other kids in the community.



Parent coach, Bill Stanton, says, “Seeing these kids have so much fun on the playing field makes it worth the effort. The leadership, support and guidance from Arlene and her staff are invaluable. They’re constantly looking for ways to improve the programs and are always open to feedback.” Greg Aiello, another parent coach, adds, “Most importantly, they emphasize the right values and make participation in sports what it should be for kids.”

In the Developmental League, players who want more baseball each week, work with an experienced coach to hone their skills and kick their game up a notch with an extensive workout that includes participating in high-performance drills, as well as playing a competitive game.

For those who make it, Yorkville Travel baseball—home of The Eagles—provides heavy hitters the best baseball experience. The team competes against the best teams in New York, as well as against those on the East Coast, during holiday weekend tournaments.

At this level, the program provides two professional coaches to ensure the ultimate learning environment. Professional coach, Anthony Dilillo, says, “YYAA is well run and well respected by other programs. Our kids play more games and enter more tournaments than those in other organizations. Plus, Yorkville’s one of the few leagues that actually has its own baseball facility.”

He speaks of their impressive space known as The Yorkville Baseball Academy, where The Eagles engage in weekly



“Swing Out” sessions. Team members also receive intensive training with an outdoor team practice on the weekends.

The facility also offers batting cage rentals and private hitting, pitching, fielding instruction and an awesome after school program, plus camps and clinics year-round.

Besides America’s pastime, Yorkville’s spring agenda includes equally impressive programs for basketball, lacrosse and soccer.

“We’re teaching these kids about skill, but also integrity and sportsmanship. We stress that it’s not about winning; it’s about learning and fun,” says Virga, who is also a full time nursery school educator, and former physical education teacher.

Even though she runs one of the largest community-based sports programs for kids in the city, Virga insists, “We still maintain a grass roots vibe.” The organization was started back in 1968, when Harold Gibson, a New York dad, founded the all-volunteer association because there were almost no community athletic activities for children in Manhattan.

Now, along with a wealth of sports, the organization also boasts a theatre workshop, and afterschool programs for academics and recreational activities. YYAA even hosts birthday parties. “Our community needs all these things,” says Virga, “so that’s what we provide. You might say we’re one-stop shopping.”

Although Virga is very hands-on, she is first to acknowledge those who help her keep this well-oiled machine running a staff of ten full-time YYAA employees and 19 part-timers.



The team coordinates—with mission control-like precision—the logistics that assure all activities have venues in which to operate; and that all umpires, referees, and coaches, as well as instructors and staff are where they need to be, when they need to be there. Virga says proudly, “We exist so children can have a good time.”

Aside from being an idealistic cheerleader for sports and other activities for Manhattan’s youth, Virga is also a realistic businesswoman who understands that no matter how much parents want their children to participate, cost has to come into consideration. “We keep our prices low; in fact, we aim to be the lowest.” And in true not-for-profit form, there are also scholarships and financial aid.

With all that YYAA has to offer, it’s no wonder why so many families from all over the city sign up, and why those who leave for other programs end up returning to the fold: “Competition, camaraderie, community,” says Virga. “That’s what makes us a triple threat—in good way.”

To get in the game, go to [www.yyaa.org](http://www.yyaa.org) and register today.