

More than 300 kids left without a field

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By: Heather Waliga

CHARLOTTE -- Beatties Ford's largest youth athletic association is scrambling to find a place for more than 300 children to practice.

The Beatties Ford Saints said a park and recreation officials told them they wouldn't have full access to the fields at Hornets Nest Park just four days before their first practice. The teams practiced there for the past three years.



Jackson says the county is working with the Beatties Ford Saints to find a solution that will work for everyone.

"We have families that are depending on us," was the first thought that ran through the mind of Latonya Booker when she was told that more than 300 kids in her association would have to find another place to practice. "[Practice] begins Friday, and to be notified four days prior to is just very disturbing."

For the past three years, three-days a week, the Beatties Ford Saints football teams and cheerleaders practiced at the park. In March, organizers submitted their annual request for the fields to Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation. Monday, they learned that an adult team requested the fields three months earlier, and the new request would take priority.

"There's no intent of anything, it's just a matter of when the request came in and when we processed it," said Greg Jackson of Mecklenburg Parks and Recreation.

Jackson admits the association should have notified Booker earlier, but says the county is getting more requests this year for the park than it can handle. Also, water restrictions have caused problems for new parks scheduled to open because the county couldn't grow new grass.

Jackson says a sportsplex, currently in the planning stage for the Beatties Ford corridor, could help in this type of situation. "We don't want to have two or three teams at one park and two or three teams at another park," he said.

That's what it might come down to for the Beatties Ford Saints. Booker says that could end up hurting the teams.

"With the price of gas now and everyone's time, it's just not feasible to have a child running from one side of and another child on another side of town," said Booker. "So we're very frustrated right now."

Jackson says the county is working with the Beatties Ford Saints to find a solution that will work for everyone. In the meantime, Mecklenburg Parks and Recreation officials are working on a new reservation process. The plan includes prioritizing games over practices and putting youth requests before adult requests.