

VIP (Very Important Player) Soccer at Balboa Park

Soccer is for Everyone

The AYSO (American Youth Soccer Organization) VIP Program provides a quality soccer experience for children and adults aged 4 and up whose physical or mental disabilities make it difficult to successfully participate on mainstream teams. VIP teams may include, **but is not limited to** those who are:

- blind or visually impaired	- autistic
- amputees or conditions that impair mobility	- Downs Syndrome
- mentally or emotionally challenged	- Cerebral Palsy

All players are welcome. In AYSO, these individuals are Very Important Players (VIP). We recognize that everyone needs to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. Through participation in soccer, VIP players experience this and more.

Everyone Plays

People with disabilities are members of our community: the children of friends, neighbors, relatives; our classmates and co-workers. Special schools and classrooms can isolate these children, but VIP provides integration with non-disabled people -- or "buddies" -- who assist VIP players on the field. These relationships frequently grow into meaningful friendships. Our goals for every participating player are to:

◆ have fun playing soccer	◆ increase positive self-esteem
◆ understand soccer fundamentals	◆ become more physically fit
◆ learn teamwork and fair play	◆ meet and be comfortable with new people

Everyone Benefits

VIP benefits all participants, not just the players. Buddies and other volunteers increase their understanding and appreciation of people with special needs. They find their lives greatly enriched by their involvement with these new VIP friends.

For parents and caregivers who may have thought they would never see their children playing a sport and belonging to a group, VIP renews hope and gives them joy. They are able to relax and enjoy watching their VIP players having fun like everyone else.

The Players

VIP teams are typically small and coeducational. VIP teams are balanced by size, mobility and ability rather than by age. When numbers allow, older and younger age divisions may be formed as well. There are no upper age limits for VIP players. There are a wide variety of ability levels and sizes. Flexibility is the key.

Getting Involved

The season at Balboa Park in Encino runs from early September to early December, with all games and practice sessions on Saturday morning. For more information about our AYSO VIP program, contact Nanette Hauser, regional VIP director, via e-mail at Nanette.Hauser@sce.com or at 818-785-2353 or go to the region's website at www.ayso33.org.