

## Padres' performance does not mean families are not enjoying their trip to Petco

The San Diego Padres may be striking out on the field, but the organization is hitting a home run when it comes to family fun at Petco. On a typical Saturday night the northeast side of Petco Park is transformed into a compact carnival for kids of all ages to enjoy.

The Padres are taking advantage of the family friendly image of the ballpark and reinforcing it with an emphasis on fun activities for children, just beyond the confines of the center field stands.

That area of the park, known as Park at the Park, has been installed since the park opened in 2004. Alex Williams, manager of fan programs for the Padres, said in a phone interview it was one of the biggest features when the ballpark was being constructed and has remained popular since.

"The Park at the Park passes sell out really early. They are a very popular ticket choice," Williams said.

Phil's Barbeque is located in the middle, with its overwhelming smell of smoked meat and rich hickory. Next to Phil's is a mini baseball diamond for kids. Kids are scattered across the field and focused on the opportunity to catch a yellow whiffle ball, provided by a Padres employee playing both pitcher and umpire.

Over 25 boys and girls patiently waited along third base for their turn to showcase their batting skills and imitate major league form.

A tall brunette girl wearing a pink softball jersey stepped up to the plate and took a few practice swings. The crack of the bat echoed through the field followed by feet quickly running down the first base line.

Next to the ball field, two college age girls sat in front of a table, twisting balloons and using children's faces as an easel to do their best Picasso impression.

"I want a dog!" said a young girl with a blue glittery dolphin painted across the left side of her face.

The Padres staff member with large red heart-shaped sunglasses carefully constructed a dog out of white and brown balloons.

Nearby, in an area situated beyond right and center field is one of the most popular areas for kids and families to enjoy. It evokes a truly typical part of the San Diego landscape: the beach.

It looked like a scene from La Jolla Shores, boys and girls digging holes with plastic shovels, building castles, and transferring sand from one side of the area to the other.

A Padres employee wearing a beach style straw hat walked through the glistening soft sand and told the kids to share the toys.

“This is the greatest idea ever!” shouted a blonde girl with a pink bow wrapped around her ponytail.

She recruited two boys to help her dump sand on top of toys stacked on top of each other. They held them as high as they could before the tower fell over.

The Padres on and off the field ambassadors, the Pad Squad, could have been mistaken for Justin Bieber considering how they were being followed.

Kids swarmed to Pad Squad members while they passed out baseball cards, rally towels and stickers.

Five-year Pad Squad member Bre Priest says Park in the Park is really unique and that not many teams have anything like it.

“Interacting with fans is what it is all about,” smiles Priest. “I love being able to give kids moments that they will remember for life.”