

## Disappointed by inadequate facilities, Harvard softball players advocate for new field

by Amanda LaRiviere

In an effort to alleviate overscheduling and crowding at the only girls' diamond in Harvard, members of the Harvard Youth Baseball and Softball Association are calling on town committees to build a new softball field. But the town's softball players are expressing a different type of frustration—that although their parents, board members, and coaches are attending field meetings and discussing construction plans, the players' voices have gone unheard.

"It's something that I have been fighting to get for years," said 15-year-old Hannah Murphy, one of two remaining high school softball players at Bromfield who were sent to play for the Ayer Shirley Regional High School team. The development of the new Hildreth Elementary School destroyed two softball fields, leaving only one to be shared by Harvard players. Due to having only one crowded field, the high school team could not generate enough interest to sustain the team.

Murphy now has to miss one or two classes in the afternoon so she can make it to her Ayer Shirley team in time for games. "It's been stressful trying to keep up with school; I'm missing lectures and in-class assignments."

A dedicated softball player for about seven years, Murphy confronts these obstacles and sees no end to her softball career. She grew up playing for Harvard's youth leagues, where she noticed drastic differences between the quality of the boys' baseball fields in Harvard compared to what her teams had.

"Poison ivy was the least of it. In the field, you're falling and tripping every time you go out there because there are holes and ditches and rough dirt everywhere," said Murphy. "I think in the situation that we have in Harvard today, it's really disappointing."

Players younger than Murphy are now following in her footsteps, noticing inequi-

ties and imagining what playing on better fields would look like.

Grace Adamy, a 12-year-old catcher for Bromfield's middle school team and player for the town's under-12 team (grades 5 and 6), said the outfield on Ann Lees Road is covered with weeds and chunks of grass. "We're just as good as the boys teams, but we don't get to play as well because we have a worse field and it makes everything harder," said Adamy, adding that the softball field has only one equipment shed that is "stuffed to the brim."

Adamy is known by her teammates as Clementine, her middle name, because there have been a lot of "Graces" on her past teams. She does squats in the morning before school, and works hard to make sure she can pop up fast enough to get the ball so the other team doesn't steal bases.

But the lack of shade structures on the field has affected her ability to play. "Especially as a catcher in the sun, you can get really hot," said Adamy. "Since we don't have shade to go and sit under, everybody starts to feel sick."

Bianca Bazarnick, an 11-year-old pitcher for Harvard's U12 team, also recalled a time when softball players were affected by the heat. "Two seasons ago we were playing there, and most of the team got a heat stroke because of it," she said, calling the fields dangerous and adding that at one point she thought about quitting softball. But as a talented pitcher, Bazarnick did not want to let her team down and decided to stay.

Bazarnick and other Harvard softball players expressed concerns about not being taken seriously by their peers and the town because they are female athletes. "We definitely get treated differently because we're girls and people think we're weak. But we're not. We can hit the ball really hard, and it's unfair," said Bazarnick.

Murphy has heard a wide range of opinions about the softball team from her

peers. "On one side of the spectrum I hear about how softball shouldn't be taken seriously because it's an easier and wimpier version of baseball," she said. "I think I've always prided myself in that I am a female athlete, and I've always stood right next to a male in the same sport and done just as good, or even better, than him."

Thirteen-year-old Chloe Kennedy, who plays for the middle school team, told the Press that she thinks it's important for the players to "show that we are fighting because there are tons of girls who want to continue doing softball. It's really hard as a female in sports because we are never treated as well as the boys are with our facilities and as a person."

Kennedy is a rising freshman who wants to continue playing softball, but is concerned about the uncertain future of Harvard's high school team. "Because we have no support, we are expected to join the Ayer Shirley teams," Kennedy wrote in a letter outlining her opinions on the issue. "Also, along with that, I've seen the high school baseball team going to their games, and it hurts me to be reminded that we have no high school softball team and no softball fields or facilities."

Harvard's softball players are advocating for a new field so that younger players, like 9-year-old Aylin Robertson, can have greater opportunities to play in the future. Robertson likes to pitch for her U10 team, the Harvard Huskies. "I just like to play. I'm a good pitcher and it's fun and easy



Aylin Robertson pitches for the U10 team, the Harvard Huskies. (Courtesy photo)

for me," she said, adding that softball has taught her about teamwork, exercise, and good sportsmanship. "Sometimes when [a batter] doesn't hit the ball or they strike out you have to be kind so they don't feel bad and can play their best for the rest of the game," said Robertson.

"If anything, this lack of attention or equality makes me more passionate and motivated to make sure that it is equal for the girls around me and the girls in years to come," said Murphy.

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