

My name is Ryan Kent and I am the Unified Athletics coach at the High School. Relatively new to MVRHS, Unified Athletics is a Special Olympics affiliated program which joins differently-abled athletes and students with their typically functioning peers through athletic competition. Due to their differing abilities, a number of our on-island athletes as well as off-island competitors face gross motor and mobility obstacles. These can make gross and locomotor movements such as walking, running, jumping, pivoting, shuffling and even throwing challenging. When they are performed on uneven and unstable surfaces, they can be dangerous and risk unwarranted injury.

The new track will provide a safe and level surface, allowing ALLI athletes, regardless of ability or skill to train and compete free of hazardous terrain. Beyond providing a proper surface, consistent with nearly every single competitors', the substructure further provides an inherent level of cushioning currently unavailable with the provided substandard conditions. The new track and field structure will prove to be an asset to all athletes accessing its features, features which will further prove invaluable to the differently-abled throughout our community.

Unified Athletics, Adapted Physical Education, and the Special Olympics exist to break down barriers and create environments where all are included; their function is to 'level the playing field'. Synthetic turf can quite literally and easily fulfill that charge. In communities off island, differently-abled athletes access these surfaces freely, as their rights provide them. These surfaces do not exist on Martha's Vineyard; is the same to be said for human rights?

Synthetic turf athletic fields and playing surfaces provide consistent and divot free fields-for the extent of their use, always. Divotted fields and uneven playing surfaces cause twists, tears, sprains, and hyper-extensions to knees and ankles in all athletes, regardless of skill or ability. Typically functioning athletes however, also have the added benefits of abilities like typical processing speed, which allows for the highly technical skills required for swift agility. Differently-abled athletes can experience differences in this area as well, making split second changes in direction (required because of (hopefully) a recognized need, like a divot) challenging. The increased risk in this case further magnifies the severity of possible injuries far beyond any type of acceptable measure.

Everyone one of us loses our balance, trips, stumbles and can fall. We no longer need to do that on unforgiving and hard impacting surfaces. Synthetic turf has the added benefit of a shock absorbing pad. When athletes do fall, this surface aids in softening the blow and absorbs some of the force of impact. I cannot stress enough how the new track and synthetic turf playing field, free of injury-risking divots and complete with a shock absorbing pad will positively impact Unified Athletics on Martha's Vineyard.

A new synthetic turf field and track open the possibilities for inclusion throughout the Martha's Vineyard community to new and previously unimagined possibilities. Who's to say we couldn't one day bring the Regional Special Olympics Day Games to Martha's Vineyard?

Thank you for your time and consideration. Thank you for making the safety of our student athletes your priority. Thank you for recognizing the right of mobility for ALL athletes. Especially thank you for understanding and considering the rights of differently-abled student athletes when casting your vote. Please vote "Yes" to Phase One. Vote "Yes" for inclusion and vote "Yes" for safe playing surfaces for all athletes.

Respectfully Submitted,

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