

## RECREATIONAL SPORTS

British Columbia News

### **Sadie's team kicks off season; Mother launched soccer squad after a coach said her daughter couldn't play because she has Down syndrome**

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VANCOUVER -- Sadie Gates will don her new soccer uniform with excitement tomorrow, finally able to play on a team of her own.

That team is the Blazin' Soccer Dogs. It was started by her mother, Abbe Gates of Vancouver, after she was told by a coach last September that her daughter, who has Down syndrome, couldn't play because she would be a "liability" to the team.

Knowing how much 11-year-old Sadie wanted to play the game, Ms. Gates put a note in the paper to see whether other families wanted a place where their kids could play without worrying about acceptance. The response was overwhelming, so she and a few other volunteers started working to make a team where everyone was welcome.

"We have stories about children that have never even been invited to birthday parties. Never. And they're 11 years old. It was very, very necessary," Ms. Gates said.

"We just want it to be a wonderful, fun experience where they can make friends, parents can meet other parents, and just have a really fun time."

The team has 27 players, five coaches, and will have no set positions. Tomorrow will be the first practice, where players will learn the basics of the game and then break up into smaller groups to play. Coaches have been taught how to adapt to the needs of the children. The team is not part of a larger league.

Ms. Gates has been moved by the response from parents and the support from the community.

One mother's e-mail, which Ms. Gates said brought her to tears, told of a boy on the team who will not take off his shin guards all day.

The boy carries around a picture of Sadie and some other kids and tells people, "This is the team I'm on, this is the team I'm on." The mother thanked Ms. Gates for "creating the field of dreams."

"That's why I made this team, for stories like that. It's a total wow," Ms. Gates said.

Maleena Pardhan, of Macey's Sports, has donated all the equipment.

"I've had 23 years of amazing soccer experiences and I was sad Sadie wouldn't have the same thing," Ms. Pardhan said. "I just wanted her to have those experiences and I didn't think it was anyone's right to tell her no."

"It's not about winning," Ms. Gates said, "it's about meeting new friends, about learning a new sport, getting out and getting some exercise, and just being part of a team."