

The Journal News

Sunday
December 21, 2008

RECREATION

Youth sports program about having fun with no pressure to win

Not your typical group, Robert Jacobson Sports aims not to be competitive

Jane McManus
The Journal News

ARDSLEY — Jessica Rosenfeld was getting her share of brunch at Pumpernickel Restaurant in Ardsley, and the place was loud and packed. It was just 10 a.m. on a Saturday, but the buzz was what you'd expect for a playoff game.

It was the end-of-season celebration for the kids who play in an Ardsley sports league, Robert Jacobson Sports. And Rosenfeld was there with her father, John, who is a football coach in the RJS program. She is getting ready to play forward in the basketball league.

Jessica said that this program is unique in the world of youth sports because, contrary to the popular notion of athletics, it strives to not be so competitive.

"It's a lot different and it includes everyone," said Rosenfeld, 13. "Some other programs play the best players and this plays everyone."

Rosenfeld plays for a school team, and there she expects to get playing time

based on her ability. But it's nice to be able to spend weekends playing with her friends. That way she doesn't have to worry about playing time in at least one arena.

Glenn Leibel started the program six years ago with his wife to honor Robert Jacobson, who died in a car accident driving home from college during spring break. The reason for starting the program was twofold: They have two kids and noticed that kids who wanted to play youth sports sometimes had to look to neighboring towns. That, and he didn't feel that the kids were being nurtured in the environment as much as he would have liked.

"We started it because we wanted to have a sports program that was different from the rest," Leibel said. "We're about community and inclusion and not stressing winning at all costs."

John Rosenfeld said the experience has been great for Jessica.

"She's using it as a learning experience," he said. "She's on the modified (team) and she's using it as a stepping-stone to the school team."

Lisa Leibel said her husband has poured himself into organizing the basketball program for the last six years, and they work to make sure the tenets of the program are followed at every level.

"That was the problem," Leibel said.

"We talk to all our coaches and our parent volunteers about it."

Sam Shapiro was wearing a Brett Favre Jets jersey during the awards party as a video played on-screen, showing the players on the teams.

"A lot of my friends are in the basketball and football," said Shapiro, 11, a kicker and wide receiver. "I get to play with them and laugh and yell."

Tyler Loccisano, 11, plays halfback and quarterback in the football league and said the best thing about it was being able to play with all his friends.

"It's fair and (the coach) gives everyone an equal start," Loccisano said.

This was the first year for the football program, and about 90 kids took part. The basketball program has been around longer, and will host about 220 players this season. Leibel said he is committed to letting anyone play, regardless of gender or economics.

"I didn't care if we won or lost," said John Rosenfeld, who ran the RJS football program and has coached in other leagues. "It was sportsmanship. It was looking into their eyes and seeing them working with 11 other players on the field."



Reach Jane McManus
at jmcmanus@lohud.com.

Ricky Flores/The Journal News
Glenn Leibel, the program director of Robert Jacobson Sports, runs a clinic for children at Alice Grady Elementary School and Alexander Hamilton High School in Elmsford.