



Members of Dynamoms show their enthusiasm for soccer on the field at the Schenley Oval in Squirrel Hill, where they practice.

# Just for Kicks

This women-only recreational league gives “soccer mom” a whole new meaning.

BY SARAH TUTHILL • PHOTO BY MELODY FARRIN

In any given weekend, hundreds of Dynamo Youth Soccer players can be found on fields or in gyms across Pittsburgh’s East End. And on the sidelines, their parents are loyally camped out on portable chairs, chanting and cheering them on.

While most parents are content to stay on the sidelines, Lorrie Faith Cranor was itching to get in the game, despite the fact she had never before played soccer. “My children have been playing for years,” she says. “At the end of every season, we have a parent vs. kids game. It’s always a great time, but as my kids got older they expected me to play at a higher level. I thought, wouldn’t it be fun if I actually knew how to play?” And so Dynamoms was born.

Cranor, a Carnegie Mellon University professor from Squirrel Hill, didn’t have to look far for likeminded active women with a desire to combine fun with fitness. Turns out many of her fellow “soccer moms” loved the idea of learning more about the sport they spend so much time watching. The Dynamo League agreed to sponsor the program, although par-

ticipants are not required to have a child playing on a Dynamo team. “In fact, you don’t have to have a child at all. Anyone can play— neighbors, friends, family,” Cranor explains.

However, the newly-formed league had to put some important parameters in place: first, it would be women only; second, nobody under the age of 30 would be allowed to play. In other words, don’t try to bring in your 20-year-old niece who plays Division 1 college soccer— unless she is willing to coach. In fact, by sponsoring these clinics, Dynamo hopes to encourage more women to get involved in youth soccer as coaches and referees, or even just kicking a ball around with their kids.

From the start, this group was not about competitive game play. Rather, it was about offering recreational clinics to women with little or no adult soccer experience, to teach them how to play the game safely, get some exercise, and have fun.

In the fall of 2013, more than 30 women ranging from 30 to 55 years of age showed up at the Schenley Oval in Oakland on Saturday afternoons for Dynamom’s first season.

Deanna Matthews of Point Breeze was one of them. “There’s something to be said about not playing with men,” she laughs. “It’s not the same must-win mentality...and, since we’re all moms and over 30, we understand the demands that might make someone need to attend to a small child on the sidelines or be running a few minutes late.” Many of her teammates echo that sentiment, characterizing their group’s mentality as both “politely competitive and competitively polite.”

After the first season’s success, these moms weren’t ready to hang up their cleats. So they added an indoor winter season—six clinics held in The Ellis School gym in Shadyside—and then kept it going with a spring season that wrapped up in May.

“It is the highlight of my week,” says Margaret Nguyen, a pediatrician from Squirrel Hill. “Working out alone can get monotonous. This doesn’t feel like a workout, but it’s great exercise.” Each 90-minute session includes stretching and cardio warm-ups, followed by a skills clinic on everything from ball control and passing to goal-keeping and defensive strategy.

Then the women play a scrimmage to practice what they've learned.

Part of the Dynamom philosophy is based on the idea that play is not just essential for kids; it can be an important source of relaxation and stimulation for adults as well. What's more, it's important for children to see their mothers playing team sports.

"I never knew that my mom was good at soccer until I saw her play," says Fiona Riegert, 10-year-old daughter of Dynamom Kitty Julian of Lawrenceville. "It makes me happy that we have a soccer family," Fiona adds. "I like sharing my skills with my family and having them teach me new skills, too. It was also sort of funny watching [Mom] fall down!" she laughs.

"I'd fall down in the mud any day for that kind of emotional connection with her," Julian responds. As director of marketing and communications at The Ellis School, she sees the impact sports have on girls and women of all ages. "Playing a team sport is a risk and a confidence builder," she says. "When kids see their moms out there, taking risks and not letting mistakes on the field stop them, it shows them they can do that too."

Joyeeta Dutta-Moscato agrees. Her son, who no longer plays the sport she now loves, is the one on the sidelines cheering her on. "She wanted to try soccer because our son was playing," her husband, Mike Moscato, explains. "She is busy working on her Ph.D. [at Pitt] and doesn't have a ton of free time, so this is perfect. Even though Ari doesn't play soccer anymore, I don't see Joyeeta stopping any time soon. She loves it."

So after the success of its first year, what's next for the Dynamoms? They are looking forward to another fall season, which is just getting under way. Only one thing is certain: don't expect to see them take their show on the road as a competitive team. "If someone is looking for more serious competition, there are many leagues out there for that," Cranor emphasizes. "We started this as a program for people who don't know what they're doing. And we like it just the way it is."

*For more information about Dynamoms, visit [www.pittsburghdynamo.org](http://www.pittsburghdynamo.org).*

SA