

PARKLAND
BUDDY
SPORTS
playing
without limits





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– Lisa Ipince

There’s nothing more exciting to children than when they finally reach the age where they can participate in recreational sports. However, for children with special needs, that same exciting opportunity often becomes a challenging endeavor. Lisa Ipince, whose son Nicholas has both autism and global developmental delays, knows this firsthand.

“With all of his disabilities, doctors told me that Nicholas would most likely not achieve many milestones,” Ipince says. “However, since we joined Parkland Buddy Sports, Nicholas jumps, runs and communicates. Yes, it’s important to have conventional physical therapy, but nothing has done more for my son than this program. He gets physical activity, group social interaction and individual attention from his ‘buddy.’ It’s wonderful.”

With full support from the city, Parkland Buddy Sports was created to provide quality sport programs for special needs children and young adults, regardless of physical or mental diagnosis. Through positive reinforcement, they are encouraged to never quit, do their best and always have fun. The program builds skills, confidence, self-esteem and a lifetime devotion to sports and fitness. “No limits,” is its mantra.

The sports program consists of weekly (either Saturday or Sunday) activities or games. Each player is paired with his or her own buddy for the season, which is typically a student volunteer. The volunteers learn patience, tolerance and the notion that it is possible that one person can change the life of another. Through encouragement from their buddy, the special needs players and their families are able to experience the joys of their athletic accomplishments.

“Nicholas can’t wait to get out on the field each week, and I get to be a sports mom!” Ipince says proudly.

Parkland Buddy Sports was created in 2002 as a single sports program called Soccer Buddies.



However, due to the tremendous success of that program, it has now evolved into a nationally recognized 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, allowing for expansion.

Parkland Buddy Sports now offers soccer, flag football, running, basketball, tennis, kickball (June through August) and golf. It has become so popular that it enrolls hundreds of special needs players ranging in age from 4 to 22. They come from all parts of Southeast Florida. The program also attracts thousands of volunteers, from elementary school age through college.

What makes the program so successful is a very passionate and dedicated board of directors, coaches and volunteers. “My son Garrett was one of the first participants in the original soccer program,” says Bob Mayersohn, president of Parkland Buddy Sports. “He discovered he could move the soccer ball by putting it in front of his motorized wheelchair. Talk about no limits! After watching him enjoy the experience, I felt compelled to get more involved.”

Mayersohn discovered that his family’s decision to get involved in the program was not only making a difference in his son’s life, but in the lives of those volunteering. “The connections made between the player and the buddy are so heartwarming and inspiring,” Mayersohn says.



“Everyone wins here.”

Barry Cohen, former president of Parkland Soccer, decided to get involved after observing a few games and witnessing the thrill and excitement of the players, families and volunteers. His two sons also volunteered in the program until they left for college. Now a board member of Parkland Buddy Sports, Cohen exclaims, “Game day is the highlight of my week. I can’t wait to get out there. It’s such a magical and empowering environment.”

This year, due to the generous donations and grants it has received, Parkland Buddy Sports is now free to enroll. The city of Parkland has helped encourage the program by incorporating a fenced-in area at the new Pine Trails Park extension for its activities.

“What I love most about the program is that they make you feel so comfortable. We don’t feel like we are being pitied,” Ipince says. “The volunteers are so dedicated and they really care. They spend time connecting with your child, both on and off the field.”

It’s safe to say that with such an enthusiastic team of volunteers, along with the benefits and rewards that the program offers, its mantra fits perfectly. There really are “no limits” when it comes to getting involved and getting buddied up. ●