

SPORTS

SPORTS EDITOR: STEVE LeBLANC e-mail sleblanc@haltontsearch.com

Field-building coach beloved by players

By Herb Garbutt
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

He didn't hear any voices whispering from his corn field, but Dave Saliba built it anyway.

Like Ray Kinsella, who built a baseball field in his Iowa corn field in the movie *Field of Dreams*, Saliba gets a few odd looks when he schedules exhibition games or soccer practices at his rural Milton farm.

"It's not easy to get fields to practice on. Everyone says, 'You can teach them to play soccer in an open field, but how do you teach someone to score without a net?' he explained. 'So I thought, 'I'll put a field here.' It's lined, marked, the whole works."

Saliba's team has been using the field to squeeze in extra practices for two years. But building a regulation-size pitch to help his team to practice on isn't even near the top of the list when it comes to why his players like playing for Saliba.

"He always tells us when we do a good job and he's the best coach I have ever had," said Becca Hinton, who plays on Saliba's Milton girls Under-12 select soccer team.

It's Saliba's dedication to not only helping his players improve but to make sure they have fun doing it that's earned him July's Champion Coach of the Month honour.

It's hard to argue with Saliba's success. Since assembling a select team from house league players, the squad has entered five tournaments, winning three and reaching the final in the other two. One of those victories cost Saliba his hair after he promised to let the team shave his head if they won the tournament.

But victories are only part of the equation.

"Some people can get too serious when they're trying to build a competitive team," Saliba said. "You can't lose sight of what it's all about. They have to have fun or they'll leave."

And the players are having fun. Often after practice, the team stays for pool parties or barbecues.

Saliba says he couldn't do it alone. His wife Debbie, who manages the team, and assistant coach Todd Carey are equally important.

"My wife does all the bookings. I can't even work a computer," he admitted. "Todd runs all the drills. I look after the technical aspect of the game and then Todd comes up with these wild drills to help them practice."

The end result is that the players have improved their skills.

"They've all improved. It's not like two or three have become superstars to make the team better. There used to be a lot of chasing the ball around. Now they're more of a complete team, with more passing. When they're doing that they can compete against anyone."

And in the eyes of his players, they have an edge on the competition — their coach.



POPULAR COACH: Feeling right at home — literally — on the soccer field, Dave Saliba is July's Champion Coach of the Month. GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

Bantam girls make Ontario Games

Holding bottle drive fundraiser for trip this weekend

It took a little longer than expected, but the Milton bantam girls baseball team is headed for the Ontario Games.

Part of the Central Ontario Girls Baseball League, the team got word last week that it would be one of the six squads vying for the championship at the Ontario Games in Ottawa August 9 to 13. The outcome of two tournaments plus the results of the first six regular season games determined the entries for the tournament. However, because of the number of rainouts this season, it took many teams longer to get those six games in.

Guelph, Burlington, Birchmount, North York and Annette round out the entries. It was a semifinal finish at a

tournament in Burlington earlier this month that solidified Milton's berth.

With five games scheduled in two days to determine who will play in the medal round, Milton's manager, Anne McColl, says the team's pitching depth will be crucial.

"Almost all of our girls can pitch," she said. "We can rely on pretty much 11 of the 13 girls."

McColl said the team's hitting — which has improved greatly this season — will also be a strength, adding, "The hitting has come along immensely."

Many of the players have been playing together since t-ball, although they do have three new players this summer.

McColl said the team is hoping to make the semifinals and from there, it

will only take one victory to secure a medal.

Finding out so late that they'd be heading to Ottawa, the players are now doing some intense fundraising to help offset the costs. They collected \$1,000 last weekend and will have a bottle drive this weekend. They'll be collecting between Ontario Street and Wilson Street and Main Street and Steeles Avenue. Pickups can be arranged by e-mailing mgba@sympatico.ca.

Members of the Ontario Games team are: Shelby DeSousa, Amber Goulding, Sarah Kingdon, Desiree Malone, Robyn McColl, Tori Pickering, Meg Rector, Natasha Thurston, Sarah Todorski, Stephanie Trischler, Rebecca Trischler, Allison Wallis, Joy Wicks, head coach Jeff McColl and assistants Terry Malone, Zenon Todorski and Arden Rector.

CROSSWINDS

GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB

Monday...Ladies' Night
Tuesday... Chamber Night

6621 Guelph Line, Burlington, Ontario
(Just south of Derry Rd.)

www.crosswindsgolf.com Tel: (905) 319-5991

- 18-hole Championship Golf Course
- Driving Range and Practice Facility
- Licenced Lounge and Bar
- Golf Tournaments
- Weddings and Receptions
- Private and Corporate Functions

Rates

- Monday to Thursday \$65
- Early Bird (weekdays before 8:30am) \$50
- Twilight (everyday after 4:00pm) \$50
- Weekends (Friday to Sunday & Holidays) \$75