

## Columnists

### **Baird: Not that I'm a soccer mom...yet**

By Esther Baird

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BEVERLY, MASS. -

When we first had children, I declared that weekends would be for family. We weren't going to get caught up in carpooling from sports practice to sports games on a Saturday. Further, I wasn't going to be one of those parents on the sidelines with take-out coffee and those little fold-up chairs that can sling over your shoulder and break down with the flick of a wrist. In short, while I might be a Mom, I was not going to be a Soccer Mom.

But something went terribly, terribly awry. Something I hadn't planned on and that nobody explained to me. That was this: some children love sports. They are born athletic and competitive and with a brain that actually cares about the nuances of games and rules. For example, my 5-year-old daughter.

That is how I found myself two weeks ago, standing in the pouring, driving, rain in a field swarming with kindergartners wearing either black or orange attempting to play soccer . . . on a Saturday. And oh yes, I was holding take-out coffee.

A lot of my friend's children had participated in the community soccer program the year before and had told me it was fun.

"But isn't it on a Saturday morning?" I said.

"Yes, but it's no big deal. They play for a little bit and it starts your day off outside in the fresh air."

I mentioned it to my highly sports-minded husband. He took my small crack in the door and flung it wide open.

"Absolutely! Sign her up! She'll love it - she loves sports."

Fine. I figured, we'd roll out of bed, dash off to some field, play a little bit and be done. Nothing overly complicated.

But then the e-mails began. Turns out there were so many children, so vastly high was the number of kindergartners in Beverly who wanted to play soccer, that there were actually two zillion different teams. The e-mail let us know which team our daughter was on.

The next e-mail reminded us to get our uniform shirts at Todd's on Cabot Street and to consider our footwear.

Uniforms? Footwear? I had assumed the uniform would be something that closely resembled what was slept in the night before. As for footwear, I'd imagined my daughter would wear that common, yet versatile, shoe: the sneaker.

And yet, before I knew it, my daughter had a bright, orange T-shirt complete with a number and her name on the back, soccer shorts and hot pink (her choice . . . clearly) shin guards that matched her new black soccer cleats with the hot pink swoosh.

The following e-mail informed us that specialty coaches from England were arriving soon and to consider whether we could house or feed them.

My friend whispered to me. "I thought about it but we don't have a guest room. It's just so cool! When I was growing up we always hosted the coaches from England."

Really!? Was I the only person who hadn't had that, apparently standard, childhood experience of hosting the English soccer coach?

The final e-mail came the morning of the first game. It was pouring. Flood-like, you might say. The e-mail said in a chipper way that only bright orange font can convey, "All games are still on!"

Go team.

And so we sloshed over to the kindergartenalooza at North Beverly Elementary and found ourselves huddled in a monsoon surrounded by drenched, yet wildly active, 5-year-olds. This was precisely why I had drawn the line! I'd crossed it and was about to wash away into the North Beverly woods.

But we went and we endured. Because that's what sports teach you. Dedication. Perseverance. Commitment. Annoyance. You're telling me we wouldn't have all learned a better lesson by sleeping in and letting the kids watch cartoons?

But then the second Saturday came. It was sunny and the air was crisp. The field glistened in the sunlit-dew and the children could see their field boundaries and ran around in quasi-organized, well-uniformed herds. The parents laughed and visited on the sidelines and were buoyed by their warm, take-away coffee.

I saw my friends, I cheered for my daughter and I felt like part of the community even if I wasn't hosting an English coach. I had, in short, fun.

Later that weekend I called Modell's. "Do you sell any of those chairs that you can carry over your shoulder and flick open or closed?"

"Oh yes, of course." The clerk replied.

I took a deep breath. "Great, I'll be over."

Not that I'm a soccer mom or anything . . . yet.

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