



Highland Park High School graduates and long-time friends Barb Lazarus (left) and Julie Kollada are teaming up to start an all-girls sports summer camp called "Game on! Sports Camp 4 Girls" that will be held at Lake Forest College starting next summer. — Rob Dicker/Staff Photographer

HPHS alumnae unveil sports camp for girls

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Thirty years after starring together on the athletic fields at Highland Park High School, Barb Lazarus and Julie Kollada are teaming up again, and sports-minded young girls in Lake and northern Cook Counties stand to benefit.

Lazarus, of Deerfield, and Kollada, of Riverwoods, who run separate consulting businesses, have created Game On! Sports Camp 4 Girls. Set to debut in the summer of 2007 at Lake Forest College, Game On is being billed as the Chicagoland area's first private summer day camp devoted to female athletes. Girls in grades K-8, and of all skill levels, are welcome.

Though one might say the camp is several decades in the making, Lazarus and Kollada first began serious planning for the project two years ago after speaking with Marv Tuchman, founder of the popular local sports camp Hi-Five, which caters mostly to boys. Both women had sons at Hi-Five and discovered there was no equivalent for girls locally, or perhaps anywhere in the country.

Conversations with parents of young girls revealed many were looking for just that sort of summer experience for their daughters: a camp that offered better coaching than park district sports programs, more sports than traditional summer camps but was less intense than the single-sport, specialty camps often put on by high schools or colleges.

'Extreme enthusiasm'

"What we're finding is extreme enthusiasm from moms and dads who have not been able to find something like this. Seriously, what we've gotten a lot of is 'Finally, it's about time,'" said Lazarus, who runs a media relations company after previously working in the U.S. Attorney's office in Chicago.

Having both been college scholarship athletes in the 1970s, Lazarus and Kollada have paid close attention to the tremen-

dous growth of girls' and women's sports over the years. But they were surprised to find there are still several areas, like summer camp options, where girls still lag behind their male counterparts.

"Boys simply have more opportunities available to them to experience different sports and grow themselves in different sports. There really is a long way to go, which was kind of a surprise (to discover)," said Kollada, who like Lazarus, was an early beneficiary of Title IX, the 1972 education amendment that created more athletic scholarships and other sports opportunities for women. "There is still a big gap between the opportunities for boys and the opportunities for girls. We want to play a small part in filling that gap."

Simply welcoming more girls to Hi-Five was not an option. Lazarus and Kollada felt it was necessary to create a camp tailored to the unique needs of girls. Lazarus, who has done research on the topic, illustrated one of the major differences between young boys and girls relating to sports.

"You can tell a group of elementary school boys to get on a basketball court and go play 5-on-5, and they know what to do," she said. "In many cases, girls haven't had the opportunity to learn the fundamentals and to learn what it takes to be able to go on the field/court and have fun. Part of our mission is to help teach fundamentals in a fun way."

But the camp will be about more than just teaching girls athletic skills, it will be filled with life lessons

"We both feel very strongly about what sports did for us in helping us to shape our lives the way we have; giving us the ability to operate successful businesses and also have a family," said Kollada, who coaches corporate employees in the art of selling. "Sports are really about experiencing successes and learning to push yourself, developing self-discipline and belief in yourself and working with other people. One of the things we'll foster is building self-esteem and confidence along with building

Lots of offerings

The camp calls for girls of differing abilities, from the recreational athlete to the travel athlete, to all participate in several sports; in some cases playing a sport for the first time. Girls will also have the opportunity to "specialize" in certain sports. Among the many offerings will be: basketball, volleyball, softball, tennis, flag football, soccer, field hockey, lacrosse, track and field, swimming, handball, golf, martial arts, ice hockey and horseback riding.

Lazarus and Kollada said it has been a priority to carefully select the camp's staff and guest instructors. Most of the counselors will be female college and high school athletes and physical education teachers chosen for their athletic talent, personalities and willingness to act as role models for the campers. The counselor to camper ratio will be designed so kids receive extensive personal attention.

The camp's founders said several local coaches have already reached out to them, expressing an interest in coming to the camp to give motivational presentations and on-the-field instruction. Most of these coaches are women, though there will be a few men who have worked extensively with female athletes.

Game On has also entered into partnerships with local professional sports franchises, the WNBA's Chicago Sky and the NPF's (National Pro Fastpitch) Chicago Bandits softball team, and players from

those teams will make guest appearances. There will be field trips to Sky and Bandits games.

The camp will run from approximately 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. each day and last for eight weeks, June 18-Aug. 8. Campers have the option of 2, 4, 6 and 8-week sessions, and there is even a chance to design a more flexible plan of attendance.

Nearly all of Lake Forest College's athletic facilities will be available to Game On, and there will be bussing to the camp from around the area. The cost of the camp is expected to fall somewhere between the price of park district programs and of a more traditional day camp. The goal is to eventually replicate Hi-Five and attract about 300-400 kids per week.

It may all sound like a massive undertaking, but Hi-Five's Tuchman said the camp is in good hands with Lazarus and Kollada.

"They are two very sharp women. They are athletic and involved in the community. They are business women and good marketing people with tremendous energy," he said. "It seemed to me that they were the right people to do this with."

From 3:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday, Game On! Sports Camp 4 Girls will offer a free basketball clinic featuring members of the WNBA's Chicago Sky. Girls in grades K-8 are invited to attend the event, which will be held at Regina Dominican High School in Wilmette. During the clinic, parents will have a chance to learn more about next summer's inaugural Game On camp. To register, e-mail the name and age of the attendee to info@gameonsportscamp.com or call (847) 267-0670. More info about Game On can be found at www.gameonsportscamp.com.