



Rising Stars Blasters soccer team works hard, plays hard

Photos



Rising Stars Blasters team member Sara Kubera, 14, of Utica, attempts a goal shot during practice Monday at the Rising Stars Sports Complex in Westmoreland. The Blasters begin pursuit of the New York State Cup this weekend.

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By **FRAN PERRITANO**

Observer-Dispatch

Posted Apr 06, 2010 @ 06:28 PM

Wayne Williams loves soccer, and if you're going to play on one of his teams, you better love it, too.

Williams coaches the **Rising Stars Blasters**, a soccer team that plays at the Rising Stars complex in Westmoreland. The Blasters will compete at noon Sunday in the U-15 level in a first-round game of the New York State Cup tournament at Thomas R. Proctor High School's D'Alessandro Stadium.

Williams coaches three soccer teams all called the Blasters (U-14, U-15 and U-19) and also helps train another U-16 girls team. He also coaches two girls' softball teams.

Needless to say, he's dedicated, and his players must be, too.

"This team is different for several reasons," said Williams, 33. "First, we are made up of a group of girls who are extremely committed to being the best players that they can be. ... They are all here for the soccer, and nothing else gets brought to the field with them. I am able to get these girls to give me everything they can, and we have a trust. They know that I would do anything possible to help them, and all I ask is that they give me everything they can at practice and games."

"The most important lesson I teach the girls is commitment," he added, "followed by working as hard as you can and never accept anything but your best."

One of those extremely committed girls is Sara Kubera, 14, who has been playing soccer since she was 6 years old.

"The Blasters are definitely different than any other team," said Kubera, a ninth-grader at Notre Dame Junior-Senior High School. "We don't play just for fun and laughs. We play to win, and we train very hard.

"The most fun about playing for the Blasters is that we are the team to beat," she said. "In our tournaments and our soccer league, the other teams know who we are and they want to beat us more than any other team. That's fun and cool to know."

Williams formed the Blasters about six years ago and has coached some of the girls since they were 6 and 7. He became involved with soccer when his oldest daughter, Ashley, started playing AYSO and the team needed a coach. Ashley, 14, and another daughter, Mariah, 12, play for the Blasters.

Dave Kubera, Sara's father, said one of the best draws about the team is that it molds players from all over the region into one team.

"You typically will not find all your best players in one area or one school," said Kubera, 46. "What the coach has done is identified talented players all over our region and brought them together to build a very strong team.

"Although the girls come from many different areas, they have developed a very strong team bond that has led them to their success. This has also led to some great friendships, not only between the players, but also the parents of the players."

Williams said it's that diversity that makes the team special.

"I started this as a Utica team but quickly realized that if I wanted to make this a premier team, I would need to accept players from other schools," he said. "I think that having players who are there for the same reason helps make our team better."

Williams also is looking forward to the opportunities playing for the New York State Cup affords.

"This tournament is our first time competing for the State Cup, but if we were to do well, it opens a lot of doors to get into other events that we may not have gotten into," he said. "It is something we are training for this year and will continue to for the next few years. These, along with competing in other major tournaments across the Northeast, are all building blocks to getting the girls ready for college and for life."

NEW YORK STATE CUP

RISING STARS BLASTERS

Team members:

Ashley Williams, 14, Utica.

Mariah Williams, 12, Utica.

Adela Racic, 13, Utica.

Brianna Gluck, 14, Utica.

Sara Kubera, 14, Utica.

Alex Yorke 14 Utica.

Adri Yorke, 13, Utica.

Stacey DiGiorgio, 12, Utica.

Brie Heitz, 14, Whitesboro.

Jordan Case, 14, Whitesboro.

Jenn Deuel, 14, Whitesboro.

Mary Pastorelli, 14, Whitesboro.

Nicole Fanelli, 15, Whitesboro.

Emily Ward, 15, Mount Markham.

Emily Gubbins, 15, Westmoreland.

Hannah Shankman, 14, Clinton.

Carly Dennison, 15, Clinton.

Maggie Tower, 15, Waterville.

Kaeli O'Brien, 15, Waterville.

Shawna Gelfuso, 15, Waterville.