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Jammin' Jayhawks Kick Off New Season

By Denise Nash

The Jammin' Jayhawks recently kicked off another season to the delight of the athletes, coaches, volunteers and parents.

The Jammin' Jayhawks was founded and organized by siblings, and Jericho graduates Alex and Nicole Ripka and current Jericho senior Danielle Ripka and their cousin, Brad Ripka, also a Jericho senior. The program is supported and underwritten by the Jericho Athletic Association (JAA) and Jericho SEPTA.

Alex Ripka approached the JAA in 2008 with an idea to start a basketball program for children with special needs as he felt there were many students in the Jericho community who either cannot participate in or do not feel comfortable participating in already existing athletic opportunities in the district. And from this idea, the Jammin' Jayhawks was formed.

“Over these last three years, the Jammin' Jayhawks has evolved into a very special and successful program for children who were not able to participate on organized intramural or school sports teams,” said Harold Wanderman, JAA board member.

The program, which grew and now includes soccer, basketball, baseball and dance, is a skills oriented clinic with Jericho High School student volunteers coaching and playing along with the special needs students. The clinics are run by Severio Ford, a social worker and adaptive physical education trainer who has run similar programs at the Sid Jacobson JCC in Roslyn.

“The social aspect of this program is also so important,” said Lisa Ripka, who helps her children organize the league. “The kids see each other at school and have become friends. This has been very inspirational for the high school volunteers as well. There is no pressure to win – everyone gets a trophy at the end. It is a great experience for everyone involved.”

This program is made possible with the support of the Jericho School District, Jericho SEPTA, the Jericho Athletic Association, as well as many others including Sports Loft of Mineola, JAA Board Member Jon Gelbwaks, and many volunteers.

“My daughter Lauren loves this program,” said Holly Koenig. “She is not able to participate in regular gym classes at school so this gives her the opportunity to run around the field.”

Students with special needs residing in the Jericho School District in grades kindergarten through twelfth are eligible to participate. Volunteer coaches must be in high school. For information or to participate please email the Jericho Athletic Association at lisag16@aol.com.



Lauren gets ready for practice with some of her coaches.