



## Girls in the Game

**G**irls in the Game is the perfect title for this program, as it is all about girls getting active, getting involved, and getting in the game.

Sport is now very inclusive to both girls and boys. But sometimes it's a little bit harder for girls to take that first step.

June Zimmer, a nationally recognized coach, teacher, and researcher, saw this as an issue, and took her expertise and applied it to practical programming.

"We started in 2008," said Zimmer of the origins of Girls in the Game. "I used to be a teacher, so I had always noticed with my physical education students that girls would choose to withdraw and not participate. I grew up as a competitive athlete, so I didn't really understand that. I started working at the university and researching, and I realized we needed to do something."

Zimmer took her idea to the University of Regina. With gym space, she began Girls in the Game, a program for girls. The first program was multisport, which 160 girls registered for. This year there are over 1,000 girls registered in programs in Regina, Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, and White City, in the seasonal multisport programs, as well as more specific programs such as curling, golf, water polo, gymnastics, running, and yoga. There are also "mom and me" programs and this year for the first time there is a co-ed program for siblings, although the program as a whole is still focused on girls.

"They are really excited to come," said Zimmer, who knows first-hand as her daughter is involved. "Our motto is confidence



and friendship. We try to instill confidence, we're teaching them skills, and we focus on friendship and team-building. The goal is not to create the next Olympic athlete – although that would be awesome – but we really just want to create a generation of girls who are confident in their abilities and themselves, who might head out and play outside instead of standing there and watching."

The base of the program is learning sport skills and then implementing them in modified games to put the skill into context. The older group will then start to understand strategy. The idea is to introduce girls to sport and activity and help them enjoy it and participate.

Tanya Elliott always wanted to make sure her daughter, Jorja, wasn't afraid or intimidated by sport. Jorja had been involved in other activities, but when Elliott heard about Girls in the Game she really liked the idea behind it.

"She loves it," said Elliott. "Girls in the Game, she wants to be there and has a blast. I think it has a lot to do with that it's all girls, either her age or a little bit older, and the coaches are female. Having a role model is a good thing."

Jorja has only been involved for one season, but Elliott has found that she is not as fearful of new situations and is more open to giving things a chance.

"I think this program also builds confidence and preparedness for the future," said Elliott. "There are so many benefits."

Girls in the Game fills up quite quickly, which shows how much both girls and their parents are enjoying the program and benefiting from it. During the nights at the U of R and other venues, there are many excited little girls in pink shirts running around, ready for their time in the gym. It translates outside of the program as well.

"I've had a couple of really cool experiences," said Zimmer. "A dad emailed me, telling me he came home from work and his daughter was waiting with a hockey stick to shoot pucks, and that had never happened before – she had developed an interest."

For more information, see [www.girlsinthegame.ca](http://www.girlsinthegame.ca).

Photos courtesy of Girls in the Game