

# Making sports fun is a full-time job

BY PAUL DELEAN, THE GAZETTE JANUARY 14, 2014 6:49 AM



Rachelle Salamon poses for a photograph at the indoor beach volleyball space Griffintown in Montreal on Thursday, January 9, 2014. Salamon is opening the space soon.

**Photograph by:** Dario Ayala, The Gazette

MONTREAL — Rachelle Salamon has a rather unlikely job for someone who didn't play team sports as a child or teenager.

Salamon, 36, oversees one of Montreal's largest recreational networks for adults, [Club Montreal Sport and Social](#), which organizes games in several team sports at more than 30 locations — mostly

schools — in and around the city.

For a fee averaging \$100 for a session of eight to 12 weeks, men and women 18 and older can sign up to be part of a mixed league playing scheduled games of soccer, basketball, volleyball, floor hockey, ultimate Frisbee and even dodge ball, with or without referees.

No need to be good or even have played before; willingness to participate is the main requirement.

“I think I went five years myself before scoring a goal (in floor hockey). I felt like I won the Stanley Cup that day,” said Salamon, now a player as well as the boss.

A graduate of Westmount’s Villa Ste-Marcelline school for girls, not known as a team-sports powerhouse, Salamon got her athletic calling in her 20s while living in Toronto, where she moved to pursue MBA studies at York University.

“My boyfriend at the time used to play soccer every Wednesday night and have a grand old time. I had nothing equivalent so I asked if I could join. I couldn’t, because he was in the ‘advanced’ group at Toronto Sport and Social Club, but there was also a coed, just-for-fun league and that’s where I wound up.

“It can be intimidating coming into something where you don’t know anyone or even the rules of the game, especially when you have two left feet like I do.

“But that went away quickly. I ended up meeting a lot of friendly, like-minded people, and it became my whole social life. I played soccer, ultimate Frisbee, floor hockey ... things I’d never done as a kid. After the games, we’d all go out and invite the opponents to join us. It was a great alternative to going to the gym and pumping iron, a great way to meet new people. My boyfriend ended up wanting to join our group because we seemed to be having a lot more fun.”

As much as she enjoyed Toronto, it wasn’t home, and the N.D.G. native moved back to Montreal. But she missed her sports activities.

Unable to find anything here that compared with what she had in Toronto, she decided to create Club Montreal Sport and Social in 2003.

“I graduated in international business (from Concordia), and ended up doing something entirely local,” she said.

It was a struggle at first. “I coerced friends, family, everybody I knew, to play. The hard part was having to pay (for rental of the facility) before filling up the roster. But I wanted to do this, create this community. It’s really a nice thing to see a group of perfect strangers, from different walks of life, who might otherwise never meet, become a team and friends. As you get older, there are so many reasons to just stay home by yourself. This is a way to open your heart to new people, create an alternate circle.”

Salamon used to know almost every participant by name but those days are long gone.

The business has grown steadily and last year had 30,000 individual registrations. There are five full-time employees at its offices in Lachine and another 40 people work as occasional referees and “fair play” monitors.

Most nights of the week, there are games scheduled somewhere, in several sports.

Sportsmanship isn’t just encouraged, it’s rewarded.

“Teams rank each other on it and you lose points if your opponent finds you lacking in that department. If you’re a hated opponent, you might not even make the playoffs. That tends to weed out the win-at-all-costs people,” Salamon said.

Later this week, she’ll inaugurate her boldest initiative to date, a four-court indoor beach-volleyball centre in Griffintown.

It’s the first time the club will have its own sports facility, and the plan is to open a bar there as well which Salamon hopes will become an informal hangout for all its players.

“The socializing is as important as the game itself,” she said.

The building, a warehouse now replete with 14,000 tons of sand, has been home to beach volleyball before, but it didn’t fly for the original promoters, a couple who played the sport but didn’t have management experience. Salamon is hoping her 10 years of running a business will make the

difference.

She's taken a five-year lease and committed more than \$100,000 to the venture.

"I like new challenges and this is the supreme one. It's a little scary but there's no venue like this in Quebec and we see a lot of potential markets. Athletes, because beach volleyball is an Olympic sport. Recreational leagues. Schools. Kids' birthday parties. Corporate events. Thursdays will be for a corporate (beach-volleyball) league. You can play soccer, ultimate Frisbee and cricket as well on sand. It's going to feel like summer all year round, in the biggest sandbox in Montreal."

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People play beach volleyball at the indoor courts to be opened by Rachele Salamon in Griffintown in Montreal on Thursday,

January 9, 2014.

**Photograph by:** Dario Ayala, The Gazette

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