

# THE VANCOUVER SUN

WESTCOAST NEWS

## Soccer fundraiser builds bridges

**VANCOUVER** | Ethnic groups play together for Wish Cup tournament

BY GLENN BOHN  
VANCOUVER SUN

Adri Hamael became passionate about soccer during his childhood in Jordan, the country his Palestinian family fled to after being displaced from their West Bank home.

As a boy, he hoped he would master the sport well enough to become a professional soccer player on a European team, so he could leave the war-fractured region.

"My dream was always to travel out of Jordan and play in Europe and other regions of the world," he said.

Hamael, now a 34-year-old Vancouver resident, never became an international soccer star.

But, thanks to parents who encouraged him to support charities and pursue an education, Hamael became a relief aid worker, helping refugees and street children in Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Egypt.

He's now an executive director of the Creative Peace Network Society, a Vancouver-based group that tries to build bridges between the local Palestinian, Jewish, Arab and Muslim communities.

Hamael says the enthusiasm many cultures have for soccer can be one of those bridges.

"Despite the differences between people, they play as a team when they play together," he said in an interview Wednesday.

"Faith, religion and nationality don't matter once you drop that ball. You and your teammates have one goal: to win the game, as a team."



PETER BATTISTONI/VANCOUVER SUN

**Adri Hamael, who was brought up in Jordan, practises for the Wish Cup Soccer Tournament, which he helped organize.**

Hamael is one of the organizers of the third annual Wish Cup Soccer Tournament, to be held June 24 and 25 at David Lam Park on the north

shore of False Creek in Vancouver.

The tournament — a fundraiser for the Creative Peace Network and a children's charity, the Make a Wish Foundation — features a multicultural mix of music and entertainment. It includes Middle Eastern belly dancing, Brazilian samba, Cuban and Latino salsa, Polish dancers, a barbecue, beer and wine gardens and a silent auction.

The soccer tournament also has an international flavour. Some teams, like the Brazilian one, are made up of local residents who came from the same country. Other teams embrace people from many nations. More than 400 soccer players in men's, women's and mixed teams are participating.

Hamael noted the winning team at last year's tournament was a multicultural team, including refugee youth from Africa, the Middle East and Europe.

"It showed that although we have different political and religious beliefs, sport is a binding experience," he said. "Sport has the unique power of bringing people together."

Reena Lazar is the other executive director of the Creative Peace Network, a non-profit group formed in 2004. Lazar, 41, said the beauty of her professional partnership with Hamael is that she is Jewish and he is Palestinian.

"We're 'out' about that," she said with a laugh.

Lazar believes that groups of people who are traditionally in conflict can be united if they participate together in things like sports, recreation and creative activities. "It gives people an opportunity to forget their boundaries and forget what keeps them apart," she said.

More information at [www.wishcup.ca](http://www.wishcup.ca)

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