

Beat: Sports

UEFA Equal Game campaign

Everyone should get to play

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USPA NEWS - 'Everyone should get to play': Berlin footballer Zehra supports UEFA's #EqualGame campaign. "When I play football, I'm the happiest person in the world." Zehra Badem, a 17-year-old from Berlin, tells us why she adores football "" "it's my whole life", she says of her passion.

Every month, as part of its #Equal Game campaign, UEFA is focusing on a grassroots player from one of its 55 member associations. This person will be an example that disability, gender, religion, sexuality and race do not have to be barriers to playing and enjoying football.

"Football is my whole life "" love and passion which runs through my veins."

"I never was the kind of child who loved to play with dolls," she reflects. "The ball was more important than a Barbie doll for me. That's when I realised how important football was to me."

Her feelings are crystal clear: "If boys can do ballet, why can't girls take up football?" She is absolutely right, of course.

Zehra reflects the values embedded in UEFA's #EqualGame campaign when she says: "Everyone should get to play." Her father, Erkan, a taxi driver in the German capital, is a proud, fervent supporter "" as is her mother, Fatma, a book-keeper, who recognised the depth of her daughter's passion early on.

Zehra plays for local club Türkiyemspor Berlin. She feels a sense of belonging there, and enjoys the close-knit atmosphere. "Türkiyemspor are like a second family to me," she says. "They aren't just my friends or team-mates, they're also family."

She plays the game with a self-confidence and belief that has impressed all those who watch her. Her pleasure shines through when you see her in action. "When I play football, I'm the happiest person in the world," she says. "No matter if I'm stressed or feel sad, I can let it all out by playing football. I'm a completely different person when I play football."

Zehra's school studies are going well, and she hopes to go to university, perhaps to study law, achieve good results and enjoy a fulfilling life. She is proud to be a Muslim, keeps up with world news and takes a keen interest in environmental issues.

Special football recognition has come Zehra's way at Türkiyemspor. Her impressive personality has brought her the captain's armband for her team "" an accolade she cherishes.

"I feel very proud to be the captain," she says, "because it's an honour to have the responsibility to watch over 15 players. I'm like the coach's second hand."

Zehra advocates the equality that football should generate as a game that must be open and accessible to everyone, no matter who they are, what they are, or where they come from. "I love football, because on the pitch we're all equal," she stresses.

"For me, it is a freedom to play football. Despite the fact that I'm a girl, I can play football. And I think that is why equality is important and everyone should be able to play football if they want."

Her support for the values of UEFA's #EqualGame campaign is firm and clear. "The message is perfect," she says. "I didn't know that blind people also played football. This shows the fact that there are no barriers in football."

Zehra is planning a positive future for herself, both in the game and in life. The signs are already there that plenty of success awaits her.

"I want people to say later that Zehra Badem was a very good footballer. I want to leave a lasting impression. I want to be successful."
Zehra is certainly on the right path.

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