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For Immediate Release

ThinkFirst Canada's *Playing Smart Soccer* – Helping kids understand the risks and play safe!

Vancouver, BC - June 3, 2009: ThinkFirst Canada is proud to offer *Playing Smart Soccer* online and free of charge at www.thinkfirst.ca. Thanks to generous funding from Ronal McDonald House Charities, this important injury prevention resource will reach more coaches, officials, teachers and parents with the information they need to help their young athletes learn how to use their brains to protect their bodies while playing the world's most popular sport.

Playing Smart Soccer is a comprehensive injury prevention program that covers the who, how and where of soccer injuries and offers strategies for preventing the most common and the most devastating injuries, such as concussion. "Few realize that children under 12 should avoid heading the ball as their thinner skulls and underdeveloped neck muscles make brain injury more likely", says Dr. Charles Tator, neurosurgeon and founder of ThinkFirst Canada. "*Playing Smart Soccer* offers important tips and techniques that will keep players aged 6-14 in the game." ThinkFirst Canada's injury prevention message stresses that prevention doesn't mean hibernation. Rather it means that injuries are easily prevented when children and youth are trained, wear appropriate safety gear, and use wisdom to navigate risks.

ThinkFirst Canada is promoting this important resource at the Canadian Academy of Sports Medicine conference in Vancouver, BC from June 4-6, 2009. This conference attracts sport medicine specialists from across the country; ThinkFirst will be providing this group with valuable injury prevention information to pass on through networks in their own communities.

Note: To schedule an interview with Dr. Charles Tator or for more information, please contact: Midori Miyamoto, Manager of Communications, ThinkFirst Canada, 416-915-6565 ext 221, midori@thinkfirst.ca

About Think First Canada: ThinkFirst Canada is a national charitable organization that works to reduce traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries sustained by children and youth - through education, advocacy and work with research partners.

Playing Smart Soccer Q & A

Q: What is *Playing Smart Soccer*?

A: ThinkFirst Canada's *Playing Smart Soccer/Du Soccer Intelligent* is a bilingual injury prevention program developed to promote safe soccer for soccer players aged 6-14. This program was written for parents, coaches, teachers, and officials.

Q: What age group does it target?

A: Although this booklet has been designed for players from 6-14 years old, most of the information contained in the booklet is applicable to soccer players of all ages and skill sets. ThinkFirst chose to focus on younger players because this group is at greater risk of serious injury such as concussion. For instance, children under 12 should avoid heading the ball as their thinner skulls and weaker necks cannot absorb or dissipate forces applied to the neck.

Q: Why Soccer?

A: Soccer is the world's most popular sport, but carries risk of injury to players, especially younger ones. In 1999, soccer was rated second among the top 5 sports that led children under 19 to emergency rooms. ThinkFirst's message is that injuries are preventable. We encourage participation in the healthy activities of childhood, but want to ensure kids are trained, wearing safety gear and using their brains to navigate risks.

Q: Who designed this program?

A: The program was designed with the guidance of the ThinkFirst Smart Soccer Committee that includes sports medicine physicians and neurosurgeons, as well as sponsoring organizations, such as the Canadian Soccer Association.

Q: How do you reach players?

A: ThinkFirst recently promoted the *Playing Smart Soccer* program at the 2009 Canadian Academy of Sport Medicine conference in Vancouver, BC. This conference attracts sports medicine specialists from across the country; ThinkFirst provided this group with valuable injury prevention information to pass on through networks in their own communities.

Q: What are your plans for the program in the future?

A: Thanks to generous funding from Ronald McDonald House Charities, this program is now available free of charge online at thinkfirst.ca. Broadening access to this resource will allow its important injury prevention message to reach more young soccer players across the Canada.