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Orecchiette with Broccoli Rabe and Chicken Meatballs

Yield: 6 servings (about 40 meatballs)

Time: 30 minutes active; 80 minutes total

For the meatballs (and garnish):

¼ cup whole milk
3 eggs
1 cup breadcrumbs with Italian seasoning
1 cup freshly grated Asiago cheese (use ½ cup for garnish)
¾ cup fresh basil, chiffonade (use ¼ cup for garnish)
¼ cup fresh parsley, coarsely chopped
1 onion, finely diced
1 tbsp. ketchup
1 tbsp. tomato paste (reserve the rest of the 6 oz. can for sauce)
3 cloves garlic, minced
¾ tsp. salt
½ tsp. pepper
3 lbs. ground chicken (~80% lean)



For the pasta and sauce:

1 onion, coarsely chopped
3 cloves garlic, minced
2 tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
6 oz. can (minus 1 tbsp.) tomato paste
1 tsp. red pepper flakes
32 oz. your favorite pasta sauce
¼ cup fresh basil, chiffonade
12 oz. orecchiette
2 large bunches broccoli rabe

1. To prepare the meatballs, whisk the eggs and milk together. Allow to sit at room temperature until needed. Combine the following ingredients in a large mixing bowl: breadcrumbs, ½ cup grated Asiago cheese, ½ cup basil, parsley, onion, ketchup, tomato paste, garlic, salt and pepper. Stir in the egg/milk mixture and mix well to combine all of the ingredients. Add the ground chicken, breaking up large clumps of chicken. Knead the mixture with your hands to thoroughly blend all ingredients together. Chill in the refrigerator for 30 minutes.
2. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Grease a large baking sheet and set aside. Form about 40 meatballs, each roughly 1½ to 2 inches in diameter. Place them on the prepared baking sheet and cook for 24-30 minutes, until cooked through (cut one in half to check for done-ness).
3. Meanwhile, cook the orecchiette al dente according to the package instructions.
4. To make the sauce, place the onion, garlic, and 1 tbsp. olive oil in a medium-sized pot. Sauté over medium heat until the onions are tender, about 5 minutes. Stir in the tomato paste and red pepper flakes and cook for another 2 minutes. Add the pasta sauce and basil. Cover and reduce the heat to low. Simmer until step 6.
5. Thoroughly rinse the broccoli rabe. Chop off the tough ends (discard the bottom 1 to 2 inches of stalks) and cut into 2-inch segments. Place in a stock pot with 1 tbsp. olive oil. Cover the pot and cook over medium heat for 4 minutes. Remove the lid and toss the broccoli rabe using tongs. Cover and cook another 4 minutes until tender.
6. Toss the al dente orecchiette with the sauce. Transfer to a plate, top with sautéed broccoli rabe and tasty fully cooked chicken meatballs. Garnish with additional grated Asiago cheese and basil. Pour yourself a big glass of red wine and sit down to a delicious dinner. You deserve it!