Italian Wedding Soup *(Level: Sublime)*

INGREDIENTS

Meatballs
8 oz lean ground beef
8 oz ground pork
1/2 cup fresh hearty white bread crumbs*
1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
1 1/2 tsp minced fresh oregano
1/2 cup finely shredded parmesan
1 large egg
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 Tbsp olive oil

Soup
1 Tbsp olive oil
1 1/4 cups 1/4-inch diced carrots
1 1/4 cups diced yellow onion
3/4 cup 1/4-inch diced celery
4 cloves garlic minced (1 1/2 Tbsp)
5 (14.5 oz) cans low-sodium chicken broth
1 cup dry acini de pepe or orzo pasta**
6 oz fresh spinach, chopped
Finely shredded parmesan for serving

METHOD

For the meatballs:

Add beef and pork to a large mixing bowl. Add in bread crumbs, parsley, oregano, parmesan, egg, 1 tsp salt and 1/4 tsp pepper.

Gently toss and break up mixture with hands to evenly coat and distribute. Shape mixture into very small meatballs, about 3/4 inch to 1 inch and transfer to a large plate.

Heat 1 Tbsp olive oil in a large non-stick skillet over medium-high heat. Add half of the meatballs and cook until browned, turning occasionally (to brown on 2 or 3 sides), about 4 minutes total.

Transfer meatballs to a plate lined with paper towels while leaving oil in skillet. Repeat process with remaining meatballs (note that meatballs won't be cooked through at this point, they'll continue to cook through in the soup).

For the soup:

While meatballs are browning, heat 1 Tbsp olive oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add carrots, onions and celery and sauté until veggies have softened about 6 - 8 minutes, add garlic and sauté 1 minute longer.

Pour in chicken broth, season soup with salt and pepper to taste and bring mixture to a boil. Add in pasta and meatballs, reduce heat to light boil (about medium or medium-low).

Cover and cook, stirring occasionally until pasta is tender and meatballs have cooked through, about 10 minutes, while adding in spinach during the last minute of cooking. Serve warm, sprinkle with parmesan cheese.