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## Are you ready for some kickball?

### A school-yard game is catching on with adults.

BY YOLANDA SANCHEZ  
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A sport made popular in school yards is breaking into the mainstream and gaining the attention of many adults.

Gwen Vodang stands on the field wearing her light-blue and dark-blue striped knee-highs. Every time the 10-inch rubber ball is hit or flies up in the air she jumps up and down for one of her teammates to catch it.

"It brings out the kid in you," said Vodang, 33, who lives in Turtle Ridge.

"It's like something you did when you were a kid. It's kind of weird to do it as an adult, but we'll see how it goes," said Jenny Rigg, 28.

Vodang and Rigg are part of a group of about 115 that play the game in Irvine as part of the California Central Division of the World Adult Kickball Association (WAKA).

This is the first year that WAKA has come to Irvine. The new division was formed after the association received numerous inquiries from both men and women expressing an interest to play, said Heather Taylor, president of the association.

WAKA was founded eight years ago in Washington, D.C., by four friends reminiscing about a childhood sport.

"The founders said 'let's play kickball and have fun and forget about our worries,'" Taylor said. "(kickball) gives you one night a week where you don't have to be an adult."

The attraction of the game quickly gained momentum and adult kickball has since grown to include 25,000 registered members in 20 states.

More than the allure of childhood nostalgia, the sport is also touted as being a social sport.

"What makes (kickball) unique is the social aspect," said Kirsten Berg, 33, Orange County's regional representative for WAKA in charge of the new division. Berg began playing kickball three years ago in Washington, D.C., and has been playing in Huntington Beach for the last three seasons.

Berg adds that in many kickball leagues, people date, get married and even network to get jobs. Kickball is where Berg met her boyfriend of six months.

"It's better than match.com," Taylor said. "You are meeting new friends and meeting new guys, some of them hot and some of them not, but the social aspect is the driving force."

Vodang, who moved to Irvine from San Diego a month ago, hopes that playing will bring her some new friends. Vodang, who also plays dodge ball, football and soccer, met a lot of people during a practice game on Monday.

So did Crystal Delaney, 26, who recently moved to Irvine from Chicago.

"I already became friends with the beer guys," Delaney said, pointing to another tradition of the sport.

When the players take the field, a cooler covered with half-empty blue cups awaits at the sidelines. Team members usually meet up at a local bar after games, Berg said.

At the bar, the action continues as teams challenge each other to Flip Cup, a beer-drinking game, said Andrew Simmons. He played in Huntington Beach for about a year before joining the Irvine division.

"We lost (at kickball), but we will take them in Flip Cup," is an often-heard phrase Simmons said.

"Playing something as a team is cool," said Delaney, even though she admitted that she is not very athletic. "(Kickball) is not as competitive."

The same is true for Tod Orbach, 28, who classifies himself as more of a "video game person." Forced to play the game in school as part of physical education class, Orbach was persuaded to join the division by a friend.

"So far it's pretty fun. I'm feeling muscles I've never felt before," he said.


"Kickball doesn't take itself too seriously," Simmons said. "It's adults playing a school-yard game just like you played in second grade."

The division is divided into six teams – Bling Ballers, Buddy Up, Notorious BAL, The Kick Stars, The Fighting Emus and Win or Lose We Still Booze.

The game received so much interest in Irvine that the playing time had to be expanded to include a few Wednesdays, in addition to the already scheduled Monday nights, Berg said. The division plays at Harvard Athletic Field at 7:45 p.m.

Each WAKA division also chooses a local child-related charity to donate time and/or money throughout the season. The Irvine division has not chosen a charity yet.

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