

Games

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off defending champ Ohio State University in the National Collegiate Dodgeball Association tournament in East Lansing, Michigan State University and Oakland University are among 14 colleges with student club teams in the league.

"Everybody you tell thinks it's a little kid's game, but we have tryouts and practice every week," said Lynn, leader of the Shockers dodgeball team.

He and others are serious about refining sandlot and schoolyard games, elevating them to the level of sports. Precise numbers aren't available, but recreation managers throughout southeast Michigan communities increasingly are helping to revive the bygone thrill of recess.

"Four square could be next," laughed Mike Maisner, executive director of the Michigan Recreation and Park Association in Okemos.

"Softball was huge for a while, and it is still a very big sport, but people are looking for new and different opportunities. Going back to childhood days is a popular trend."

In Oak Park, the summer kickball league begins June 1 with 20 teams, more than three times the number signed up for softball. Berkley has half a dozen teams for its inaugural summer kickball league.

"The people who play are so laid back," said Cristin Spiller, Oak

Aaron Walker, 21, throws to a teammate as they toss the ball around Thursday.

Today's dodgeball tournament in Taylor is expected to draw about 20 teams that pay \$195 each for a crack at the \$1,000 prize.

Brandy Baker
The Detroit News



Park's recreation coordinator. She said the game is cheaper for players, who don't have to buy expensive bats and gloves.

"Let's face it. It's an easy program to run, and very low cost," said Dan Sullivan of Oxford Township's Recreation Department, where six kickball teams are expected for a league that starts in July.

Games are played on softball or baseball diamonds, and most leagues require teams to self-officiate.

"We hand them one of those 10-inch rubber balls and, away they go. I think that ball probably costs \$10, \$15. When you look at the price of bats and gloves nowadays, this is very inexpensive."

For those who need a bat in hand to feel a connection with The Grand Old Game, the Internet plays a big part in raising the Wiffle ball experience. League manag-

ers such as 17-year-old Ben Weiner track outrageous statistics from backyard contests and give forum to trash-talking players.

"People turn to video games and fantasy sports, but we have the Yardball Major Leagues," said Weiner, a West Bloomfield High School student and varsity baseball player who expects more than 20, two-player teams to sign up for a summer-long schedule.

The venues are transformed with fanciful names like Fat Field, The Sheep Pasture and Debenedictus Memorial Stadium.

"When everyone buys into hype, that's when it really gets fun," Weiner said.

Farmington Hills history teacher Brian Toth turned his family's tradition of Wiffle ball on the beach at their Lake Erie cottage into an annual tournament for charity. Curves for the Cure, held in August in Holly, last year raised \$5,000 for the cancer care center at St. Joseph's Hospital in Ann Arbor.

"We've had college athletes out there and you'd think they would do well, but Wiffle ball is the great equalizer," said Toth, 32, of Milford.

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In 2004, at the height of the