

# On Tap

## DC is Getting Some Balls Bocce Mania Heads Indoors

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By Chris Silva

Throwing balls toward a target is one of the oldest games invented by mankind.

Drinking is also one of mankind's oldest hobbies. Combine the two and the result is the DC Bocce League. After a summer in the sun, the crew is heading indoors and bringing bocce with them.

"At the end of the summer season, everyone is like, 'Okay, what's next.' So we brought it indoors to the bars so people can drink and play at the same time," said Sarah DeLucas, a DC Bocce player and organizer who also works a couple of shifts at the Pour House, the Capitol Hill bar that first championed DC Bocce.

The Pour House, Tom Tom in Adams Morgan and Sign of the Whale on M St. are a few of the bars that host the DC Bocce league. Bar specials at all games include \$3 drafts and \$10 pitchers of Blue Moon and Peroni, food specials, events throughout the season and a wrap party. Several games in the Capitol Hill division are also played at the American Legion Building, which offers great bar specials, including \$3 tall boys of Pabst Blue Ribbon.

The league was created by DeLucas and co-founders Rachael Preston, Gautam Chowdhry and John K. Groth in the fall of 2004, and participation has grown steadily since inception. The league had 5,000 people registered for 2010, and estimates that number will grow to 7,000 in 2011.

The group had seen how popular other activities like softball and kickball had become in Washington, and figured a bocce league might catch fire. And they were right.

"We're all friends and we started bocce because we thought DC was the perfect place, it's a huge 'joiner' city," DeLucas said.



Bocce's popularity also caught the eye of the city, which has built two outdoor public courts in Capitol Hill's Garfield Park.

"It's a good way to meet people, but bocce is also a great game. No one is going to yell at you and make you feel bad if you don't play well," DeLucas said. "It's a very accessible sport."

According to the United States Bocce Federation's website, the early Romans were among the first to play what resembles the bocce sport of today, using coconuts as balls. It enjoyed rapid growth among Europeans, and was eventually played in America on close-cropped grass in the 1700s. George Washington had a court built at Mount Vernon around 1780, and the sport increased in popularity throughout the 20th century thanks largely to Italian immigrants.

DC Bocce has a designated set of rules that members can view on the league website. A game lasts until one team reaches sixteen points, or one hour has passed from the designated start time — whichever comes first. If the game is going slowly managers enforce the one hour time limit. A game is considered official once one of the teams reaches seven points.

There's a strategy involved, DeLucas said, and teams will often have some players who focus on accuracy and others who are better at throwing with force in an effort to knock an opponents balls away.

Like most sports, bocce is something you get better at with practice, and most members are hooked after their first match. The camaraderie and good-natured attitude of DC Bocce's participants makes it a welcome endeavor for newcomers.

During the Capitol Hill division's first meeting at the Pour House in October, players sipped happily on drafts, chatted about strategy and compared team t-shirts. Some ambled up to DeLucas as she answered a reporter's questions, asking about court sites and schedule times. It was a great chance to hear first-hand one of the most entertaining parts of the night – the team names. "No Bocce for Old Men," "Ball Breakers," "Bocce Kong," and "Jesse 'The Bocce' Ventura" were just a few of the more memorable. With the popularity of DC Bocce increasing, more great monikers are sure to be added in years ahead.

Registration for the fall league is already closed. Registration fees are normally \$50 for outdoors and \$40 for indoors. For more information about DC Bocce and upcoming seasons, visit [www.dcbocceleague.com](http://www.dcbocceleague.com).