

## THE MISFITS

Howard Schneider

### Looking for a Game, Mr. President? Jog Right Over to the Y.

I'm not holding my breath for an invitation to a pickup game with America's Best Basketball Administration. But on the assumption that basketball is about to become the new golf — and that the rest of networking-crazy Washington will be elbows out, angling for a game — we thought it would be a reader service to help everyone prepare should the moment arise.

Because the only thing worse than not getting invited to an Obama Invitational in the next four years would be to get your ticket punched, arrive at the White House — and then collapse in a heap after the first fast break.

But take heart. As those of you who play regularly know, the Washington area has an extensive set of resources for people who want to pick up a ball: leagues run by county and city recreation departments and private health clubs, regular indoor and outdoor pickup games, and even a few nonprofit groups that sponsor tournaments and weekly competitions.

This may be a wise year to get involved. "This is one of the most talked-about topics" in the locker rooms of the YMCA National Capital branch on Rhode Island Avenue, where a boisterous lunchtime pickup game is just a few blocks from the White House, said Kevin Swann, director of association and branch wellness operations for the YMCA of Metropolitan Washington. "Will [Obama] come to play ball? Will this be a gym he might choose? . . . There has been a buzz about that."

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Basketball was invented at a Massachusetts YMCA in 1891 as a winter sport to occupy a group of what a Y brochure referred to as "incorrigibles," but Swann said the leagues around town are anything but all rough-and-tumble. Some are highly competitive, but organizations such as the Y, which runs a 14-team league at its downtown branch, usually allow for different levels of ability in scheduling matches between teams.

If you don't belong to a health club with a basketball court, contact your city or county recreation department. Montgomery County runs an adult league, for example, with separate divisions for those who played college-level ball and another for newcomers to the sport. The District's Department of Recreation has a variety of programs as well and is hoping to begin early-Sunday-morning pickup games

at some city gyms for adults who find the facilities crowded at other times, said city adult sports coordinator Simmeon Williams Sr.

Regular pickup games, whether at a public court or a health club, will often have a feel to them, with some more casual and others more competitive. If you want to work into an "open gym" game, be sensitive to the group that's gathering. If it's obvious you're going to slow the pace appreciably (or, at the other extreme, fracture some poor person's hip with a hard foul when they expected a game of Horse with friends), be generous and offer to bow out.

There are, after all, plenty of alternatives. Get in the Game, for example, is a women's-only league started by a group of Georgetown Law students frustrated with male-dominated pickup games.

"They either guard you really hard or you never get the ball," said Jennifer Schwab, associate director of Get in the Game and coordinator of its D.C. league, which now has nine teams with more than 100 regular players. Though most are connected to the legal profession, the league is open to anyone of any ability. Schwab said the players range in age from 20-something law students to 50-something practitioners, and from college-level athletes to newcomers. The group will be hosting a clinic Feb. 1 at Georgetown University with players from the Lady Hoyas. Anyone interested should e-mail [getinthegamehoops@gmail.com](mailto:getinthegamehoops@gmail.com).

(Note to the White House: Schwab, an '02 Georgetown Law graduate, is working in the general counsel's office at Health and Human Services, so maybe there is a game budding here, though the president, judging from appearances, has several inches on Tom Daschle.)

Finding a game or league is one step. Being ready for it is another. Basketball is an "open" sport, where continuous play means continuous motion. That involves both underlying endurance and the ability to sprint as needed. (Full disclosure: I played on the varsity team in my senior year at Sts. Peter and Paul High School in Easton, Md., but only because a good part of the actual varsity had "academic issues" and the coach's need for bodies that could



“sprint as needed” was replaced by a need for those that were simply warm. . . . Sorry, everyone.)

Though the game can be played at a leisurely pace, local athletic trainer Kris Johnson suggests giving yourself a few weeks of aerobic exercise off the court before you venture onto it.

Johnson, regional director for Explosive Performance, which operates out of the local Sport and Health chain of fitness centers, said that for someone who has not been exercising regularly, half an hour of cardio training three times a week for a month would provide a minimal base for a slower-paced game.

What about the knees or the likelihood of a twisted ankle?

“There’s a little bit of risk,” Johnson said, but it can be minimized with some basic exercises to help improve balance, strengthen the lower body and stabilize the knee.

Standard squats and lunges are one recommendation; just make sure they are done with the knee in line and never moving over the foot. In addition, Johnson recommends a reverse lunge (the same motion, but take a step backward) and a toe touch on one leg (stand on one foot and reach down with one hand to touch the foot on the ground).

“Jump training” has become a recommended way to prevent knee injuries (particularly among women, who are prone to ligament tears), and Johnson offered basic jumping exercises to do at home. The simplest: Stand with feet together, then jump forward and land softly on one foot while concentrating on keeping the knee stable. The same idea can be used with a side jump (pushing off on the left foot and landing on the right) or with a spin.

What about the upper body? A regulation basketball weighs just 22 ounces, so upper body strength is not crucial. But range of motion in the shoulders is important for shooting and rebounding. Arm circles and swings can help get your upper body ready for battle.

If you are already in playing shape and want to get stronger, Johnson has two thoughts: Use your cardio workouts for interval training, to increase your speed and endurance, and focus on strengthening the core muscles (the abdominals, lower back and thighs) to make all your athletic movements more powerful.

What are the benefits of all this? Like other open sports such as soccer, basketball is a powerful aerobic workout. You are moving in all directions, changing

direction, going backward and sideways — all good things that you don’t get on a treadmill.

You can even work out solo: Just take a ball, find a court, and dribble around and shoot at your own pace.

For that you don’t even need a team — or a president.



BY JAE C. HONG — ASSOCIATED PRESS

**Nothing but net? In the new administration, basketball may become the new golf.**



BY HOWARD SCHNEIDER — THE WASHINGTON POST

## HOOPING IT UP

*On winter break from college, Hampton University student Chris Jenkins tries to evade Matt Gusdorf and Eric Cantrell during a pickup basketball game at Worldgate Sport & Health in Herndon. The region has plenty of places to learn and play the new president's favorite sport.*