

INSIDE + OUT

HIT THE HARDCOURT

Introducing Bike Polo

CAIT BARNETT

ELEVEN

At the dead end of Joselin Avenue in Clifton, the countdown begins. "3 2 1, polo!" Players charge towards the ball for the joust. But they're not on horses; they're on bikes.

Meet hardcourt bike polo, the up-and-coming urban sport that—unlike its centuries-old sister—is rooted in a DIY attitude, not royalty.

"It's a truly DIY sport," says Ian Bulling, this year's elected club representative. "You can play on almost any old bike, on almost any old strip of asphalt."

But thanks to the Cincinnati Recreation Commission, our city's league doesn't have to play just anywhere. Earlier this year, they opened the Coy Bike Polo Court, making us one of the first cities to recognize bike polo as an official sport.

The game is simple: hit the ball into the goal. Each goal is one point, and teams play to 5 points, or for 5 minutes.

"There are a lot of parallels to hockey in that it's a fast, contained and very physical game," says Ian. He thinks that makes it "reliable and appealing to a lot of people."

And we agree. But it's the community that won our hearts—and Ian's. "I've made some lasting friendships through playing both in Cincinnati and other cities. There's nothing like it."

Don't be fooled by their die-hard bond, tattoos or beards—these dudes (and dudettes) have hearts of gold, and happily welcome newbies to the hardcourt. Try it for yourself Tuesdays and Thursdays around 4pm, and sometimes Sundays around 6pm. Times change from season to season, so check [Facebook.com/cincinnati.hardcourt](https://www.facebook.com/cincinnati.hardcourt) for the latest info.

Come with a bike—one you don't mind getting a little beat up. "A basic 36" mountain bike is the best to start, but anything with capped handlebars, one or more breaks and without bullhorn handlebars will work," says Ian. Also bring a helmet, gloves, kneepads and elbow pads.

First-timers can borrow mallets, and once you're hooked, longtime players can help you upcycle your own.

Lastly, don't forget your koozie (wink).

