

Newsweek Society

It's OK to Play Games

As coed sports leagues boom, there's action on and off the field

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Newsweek



Nov. 1 issue - In the basement of Manhattan's Big City Bar and Grill, the Multiple Scorgasms challenge the Fumbleruskis to a "team bonding experience," also known as "flip-cup." The Fumbleruskis accept (they are seeking revenge after losing at touch football, 48-6). After each team member chugs a half cup of Bud Light, they must place the empty cup on the edge of the table and then flick it into the air so the cup lands upside down. "They may have beat us in football, but we're going to beat them in drinking," says Fumbleruskis' Pam Wagner.

These aren't frat kids acting out a scene from "Animal House," this is ZogSports, a new kind of coed sports league, where young professionals—lawyers, bankers, brokers—bond over football 'n' beer. On a typical Sunday in Manhattan, more than 1,000 people take part in as many as four dozen ZogSports games at three fields. Afterward they gather at official ZogSports happy hours (the bars donate about 15 percent of their profits to charities like the American Cancer Society) to re-enact the highlights and, well, party. Rivalries turn into friendships, which can turn into hook-ups, which can turn into Cinderella stories.

Created two years ago by former technology exec Robert Herzog as an alternative to singles bars, online dating and lonely weekends, ZogSports boasts 9,000 members (most of them single) who pay an average of \$100 per season to participate in eight different sports, including

volleyball and soccer. The sweat-and-beer formula is working for similar leagues across the United States. More than 50,000 people participate in the Chicago Sports and Social Club each year. In San Diego the VAVI Sport and Social Club started with 48 softball players in 2002. Today 6,000 members play 12 sports.

The casual, no-expectations scene that is ZogSports offers a refreshing change for anybody who's tried online dating, where prospects tend to look better on screen than they do in real life. It's hard to be a poser when you're sweaty, sporting turf burns and trying to score the winning touchdown. It was on the Zog playing fields that Marc Weinstein and his ex-girlfriend Stephanie Novak, who joined the league separately in 2002, discovered an amazing fact: they were right for each other after all. Weinstein, 35, joined the league to quarterback the Enforcers. Novak, 36, enlisted for social reasons. After running into each other at a game, they started talking, which led to a new round of dates and, eventually, marriage. Herzog knows of seven other couples who have become engaged since the league started.

Of course, Zogsters don't always score. After a recent football game, Michele Follick—who plays with the Fat Bastards (a team that puts cookies in the end zone as an incentive)—recalled a play in which the guy covering her accidentally grabbed her breast. His clumsiness didn't get him any yardage. But a "funny guy" who did push-ups in midplay did get the 29-year-old's attention. They became friends, but after one date, the spark went out.

Back at the Big City Bar and Grill, the Fumbleruskis take the lead after seven cycles of flip-cup. "Normally we're a flip-cup powerhouse. I don't know what's happening," says Scorgasm's Alex Smith. Of course what really matters to Smith and the others is that, with charitable contributions at \$60,000 and counting, ZogSports is not just another singles scene.

In Action: Beats Online Dating

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