



Sports

Praise the roof

At indoor facilities, athletes can play summer sports all winter long

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Sure, it's been a mild winter. For weeks, the temperature has only rarely dropped below freezing, and the mercury has even soared all the way up into the 50s. If you're like us, you've been tempted to head outdoors to get your heart rate up.

Exercising outside might work for some sports (running, for instance, feels awfully good in the crisp air), but other sports don't translate quite as well to a chilly day. The nets aren't up at most tennis courts, soccer gets you all wet and muddy, and beach volleyball? Please. It might be mild, but you're still not going to want to take your shoes and socks off out there.

So let's be grateful that there are a few places where you can play sports indoors until winter officially slinks back into its hole and spring makes its glorious return.

Tennis

Thanks to the massive McFetridge Sports Center (3843 N California Ave between Grace and Byron Sts, 773-478-2609), you don't have to wait to Andy Roddick—ize your serve. The only indoor-tennis spot in the Chicago Park District system boasts a respectable pro shop and six hard courts. McFetridge offers several ways to play: You can rent your own court, take lessons, enroll in a league or sign up for an all-ages tournament.

That's the good news. The bad news? Landing court time during the winter is a challenge. To make it easier, buy a \$10 membership card (\$20 for non-city residents), which allows you to reserve a court up to six days in advance. For individual rental, the courts fetch \$24 an hour at peak time (Mon–Fri, 4–10pm; Sat, Sun 7am–7pm). The price drops to \$16 from 7am to 4pm during the week.

Beach volleyball

Sure, you can play volleyball at any number of YMCAs and other gyms any time all year. But you'll have to do it on hardwood floors. To feel that heavenly summer sensation of sand between your toes during the winter, the only game in town is North Beach (1551 N Sheffield Ave between North Ave and Weed St, 312-266-7842).

Call ahead at least a week in advance to reserve court space, and be prepared to put down a deposit with a major credit card. Price is calculated by the hour, and you'll pay more to play on weekends and weeknights. (Mon–Fri, 9:30am–5pm \$38/hr. Mon–Thu, 5–11:30pm; Fri, 5pm–2am; Sat, 9:30am–3am; Sun, 9:30am–11:30pm \$54.).

The well-maintained sand for the two courts (one adjacent to a bar and the other next to a half-court for basketball) is trucked in from the Indiana dunes. The volleyball court gets packed during winter, especially on the many nights when Chicago Sport and Social Club hosts league play, but with a little planning, you'll be spiking and digging in no time.

And after you've been spanked by the regulars who train all year round, you can lick your wounds over a stiff drink at one of the two bars inside the club. And if you find yourself waiting for court time, North Beach offers bowling, pool, darts and Golden Tee.

Soccer

The rubber composite floor at East Logan Square's Windy City Fieldhouse (2367 W Logan Blvd at Western Ave, 773-486-7300) plays host to ballers of every stripe, from floor-hockey sticksters to rugby grunts. But the place is particularly popular with soccer players, who don't have a heck of a lot of other indoor options. The unique space consists of a single enormous floor that is divided up using heavy curtains, so you might not necessarily have a full-size pitch at your disposal. But at least you can satiate your footie jones by kicking the ball around a bit.

Space can be rented on an hourly basis (Mon–Fri, 8am–5pm \$110/hr; Mon–Fri, 5–10pm, Sat, Sun, 8am–10pm \$120/hr. Sign a weekly contract for at least 13 weeks and the prices drop to \$110 for a prime-time slot or \$90 off prime.). In a welcome twist on the standard practices at these kinds of facilities, you can play a little pickup for just \$11 per person, as long as space is free.

That means you can either plan ahead and gather a bunch of friends together in your own mini league, or just show up with a couple of buddies to kick the ball around. It will be just like in the old days at the schoolyard, when you played until somebody came along to boot you out.