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RED EYE

GET READY TO PLAY

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GETOUT

For the last 12 years, Eric Davalos has played recreational football, softball, volleyball and, for a lark, even tried his hand at floor hockey. The sports change with the season but, for the most part, his teammates have remained constant.

Davalos, 35, and about six other guys are just a few weeks away from returning for another season of softball through the Chicago Sport and Social Club, the only club they've ever used. Their team has gone though several name changes but is now known as Past Our Prime. "We've probably used that name for the last five years," Davalos joked.

The thousands of people who will participate in a sports league in Chicago this summer have been spending the last few weeks searching for their cleats and checking their calendars to find out which night works best for them.

If the players on Jen Good's softball team, Wait 'Til Next Year, hadn't begun to get ready, she gave them a heads-up. "I just sent an e-mail out to my team today," Good said last week. "It said 'get ready for softball!' "

Good has played coed football and softball (she "retired" from soccer a couple of years ago) with many of the same players over the years, picking up some new teammates along the way.

They play in one of the recreational leagues, in which competition is second to having fun. Most of the clubs separate leagues according to the level of desired competition. "We just have a lot of fun playing, and everybody gets along," said Good, 28. "On my softball team, everybody has their roles. We have someone who does the roster; we have the vice president of naming the team. I'm the captain."

John Kolodziejczak, 36, is a self-described soccer nut who says he has played on 16 championship clubs over the years. That may not seem as impressive considering Kolodziejczak plays on two teams during spring, summer, winter and fall. His teams participate in the Chicago Sport and Social Club as well as the Players Sports Group, two of the largest clubs that organize sports leagues in Chicago. About a dozen of the men and women on his teams schedule a trip to London every year to watch English Premier League soccer matches.

One of Kolodziejczak's friends brought him into the league, and he in turn brought in a friend, Andy Antolak, a few years ago. "He became very attached and played for the team a year or two," Kolodziejczak said. "He unfortunately passed away in a canoeing accident. We have a patch now on our jerseys with his initials on it."

Kolodziejczak, like Davalos, has found a way to be competitive and still enjoy what is, ultimately, a leisure activity.

When Davalos first started playing in the league a few years back, he admits he was ultra-competitive and would get tossed out of games every now and then. But that hasn't happened in seven years. "It's fun to just get out there," Davalos said. "There are only so many months of great weather."

STACKING UP THE COMPETITION

If you're shopping around for a team, consider this comparison of the three largest leagues for coed softball:

- Players Sports Group: $1070 per team for 10 games, T-shirts, umpires

- Chicago Sports and Social Club: $875 per team; $80 per individual for six or seven games (depending on location), single- elimination playoffs, T-shirts, prizes for winners, and drink and food specials at the sponsor bar.

- Sports Monster: $685 per team plus $10 per non-member; $75 per individual plus $10 if not a member for a seven-game regular season, single-elimination playoffs, T-shirts, T-shirt prizes for champs and a party for each team's most valuable players after the season.

SIGN UP WITH LOCAL CLUBS

Chicago Park District
- Web site: www.chicagoparkdistrict.com
- Phone: 312-742-7529

Chicago Sport and Social Club
- Web site: www.chicagosportandsocialclub.com
- Phone: 312-335-9596
- Membership fee: None
- Spring sports still available: Indoor sand volleyball, indoor volleyball, beach volleyball, softball (12" and 16"), indoor soccer, outdoor soccer, outdoor flag and touch football, floor hockey, kickball and basketball.

Chicago Metropolitan Sports Association
(Largest gay and lesbian sports club in the city. Also open to heterosexuals.)
- Web site: www.chicagomsa.com
- Phone: 312-409-7932
- Membership fee: $20
- Spring sports still available: Men's and women's softball, beach volleyball, tennis and bowling.

Chicago Sports Monster
- Phone: 773-866-2955
- Web site: www.sportsmonster.net/chicago
- Membership fee: Pay $75 to join for the year or $10 per team.
- Spring sports still available: Tennis, volleyball, kickball and softball.
- Summer sports: Basketball, bowling, ultimate Frisbee, soccer, softball, beach volleyball, kickball, tennis, floor hockey, football and golf.

Players Sports Group
- Web site: www.playerssports.net
- Phone: 773-528-1999
- Membership fee: None
- Spring sports still available: Softball, indoor volleyball and basketball.
- Summer sports: Softball (12" and 16"), beach volleyball, soccer, basketball and floor hockey (coed and men's for all, women's only for beach volleyball).

Ultimate Chicago
- Web site: www.ultimatechicago.org
- Phone: 312-335-9596
- Only offers one sport, which happens to be several sports in one: ultimate Frisbee. It combines elements of soccer, basketball, football and, of course, Frisbee. Two teams toss a Frisbee from player to player with the goal of getting the disc into the end zone. Sign-up for the summer league begins in May.