

Adult dodgeball thrives in Sacramento

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Recess lives on for nearly 4,000 grown-ups in Sacramento.

Six nights a week, the Xoso (pronounced "zo-so") Sport and Social League gives these nostalgic professionals an arena to duel with dodgeballs, cavort over kickball and bond with each other amid the coed competition.

"Xoso is a lot of fun and can help people get in shape while making new friends," said founder Nick Berruezo.

Three years ago, Berruezo brought the idea with him from San Diego, where he took part in a similar league. Before then, in 2004, the movie "Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story" ridiculed but also revived interest in that childhood game.

When he founded Xoso in May 2008, Berruezo named it after the letters used in coaches' playbook diagrams. Those first seasons, Xoso didn't include the more traditional pastimes it does now: volleyball, softball, bowling and even a fitness boot camp.

Enough people have joined Xoso that some of its sports have a novice and an advanced bracket. For a season of eight weekly matches (ideally, the playoffs, too), each team must pay several hundred dollars and offer up a referee periodically.

Now that Xoso has netted a big and varied membership in Sacramento, it is about to expand into San Jose and Fresno. About two years ago, Berruezo quit his job to manage Xoso full time.

Players are loyal to Xoso, according to employee Chris Tan, because it does more for them than relieve workday stress.

"It's an outlet for getting plugged into Sacramento," Tan said. "You don't have to be a former Division 1 college athlete."

Berruezo said his goal for Xoso is to translate the silliness on the courts into a formidable social network that partners with local businesses and charities. He thinks going head to head brings out face-to-face connections.

"Xoso is the middleman, notifying our members of ways to help out the community," Berruezo said. "The money stays local."

He rents the gym at the Boys and Girls Club when it otherwise would go unused. Xoso has replaced the silence with grunts, squeaks, sideline cheers and 1980s power anthems churning out of a company boom box.

Cedric Adams, a former Boys and Girls Club employee, is a hard-core Xoso athlete. He doesn't think being an adult is a reason to stop goofing off.

"People who aren't familiar with the area – or who don't get out much – now have a chance to socialize with their teammates," Adams said.

He added that Xoso's email newsletters highlight volunteering opportunities. Apparently, though, it's "a bit of a race to sign up, because everyone wants to help."

Kaila Ricci, events manager at United Way and a former dodgeball participant, said Xoso enlisted a roster of high-energy volunteers for the agency's toilet paper drive. For a Facebook raffle held beforehand, Xoso also donated a season gift certificate.

"It was great to have the support of Xoso It really made a difference," Ricci said.

Charitable functions are not the only place where Xoso die-hards go into overtime with the club, sporting their team shirts and getting to know one another.

After a series of games, the Xoso warriors forget about rivalries, aching joints and the fact it's probably a weeknight. As a blended phalanx, they march their triumphs and troubles over to a pre-designated bar, where they're entitled to a free pitcher and discounts all around.

"Going to the bar afterwards can easily negate the calories you've burned," Berruezo said. "So you might as well work out if you're going to the bar anyway."

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