



Pickup Artists

Ready to play ball? Hit the field, court, or pitch, and see who shows up for a friendly game.

BY JONATHAN ROISMAN



SOCCER

OUTER SUNSET

When: Saturday morning

Calling all: Beginners to pros

Molly's Soccer Group meets at West Sunset Fields every Saturday at 10:45 a.m. to play on the grassy outdoor full- or half-pitches. Expect 11-on-11 games—sometimes smaller side games if there's a surplus of players. There are a lot of regulars, and they welcome newbies. It's free, and everyone brings their own equipment and snacks. 2100 39th Ave., mosoccergroup.blogspot.com

MISSION

When: Afternoons and evenings

Calling all: Intermediates and hotshots

When it was an empty dirt lot, Garfield Square was known as “el parque donde te rompes el pie,” or “the park where you break your foot.” Now that there's artificial turf and permanent goals, the field almost always has a game going, even after dark when the lights come on. It's a mixed group that includes students, 9-to-5ers on their lunch breaks, guys from the neighborhood, and day laborers. 3100 26th St., 415-831-5510, sfrecpark.org

EMBARCADERO

When: Weekend afternoons and lunchtime on Tuesday and Thursday

Calling all: Working stiffs on a break

Tucked between Teatro ZinZanni and an asphalt parking lot is Telegraph Field's lit and turf-covered pitch. A \$20 annual ID card grants you access from San Francisco Soccer to play. The field is also available for rent: \$65 an hour, day or night. Pickup games are held every Tuesday and Thursday at noon and during late afternoon on Saturday and Sunday. Pier 27, 415-640-0021; sanfranciscosoccer.org



BASKETBALL

PRESIDIO HEIGHTS

When: Thursday night and Friday at noon

Calling all: Slam-dunkers

Most SF b-ball takes place inside on shiny court floors. At the Jewish Community Center, more than two dozen show up for a Thursday 6:30 p.m. scrimmage that keeps no score. A smaller crowd comes for a more competitive pickup game on Friday at noon. There are several other games throughout the week, so it's best to call ahead. Entry is free for members; \$12 day pass if accompanied by a member; \$24 for all others. 3200 California St., 415-292-1200, jccsf.org

SOUTH BEACH

When: All day Thursday–Monday

Calling all: Competitive b-ballers

Mornings, afternoons, and nearly every evening except Tuesday and Wednesday, you'll find full makeshift teams battling it out in short, 10-minute games on the YMCA gym's single indoor court. And there's always a small audience watching the action.

It's free to members, and day passes cost \$15. 169 Steuart St., 415-957-9622, ymcasf.org/embarcadero

NOE VALLEY

When: All day Tuesday–Saturday

Calling all: Outdoor diehards

If asphalt is more your thing, the Upper Noe Valley Recreation Center's outdoor court is open from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. Pickups are usually in the early afternoon on Thursday and Friday and from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday. Or swing by after work when the lights come on. 295 Day St., 415-970-8061, noevalleyreccenter.org



SOFTBALL

MISSION TERRACE

When: Saturday morning

Calling all: Glove owners

The San Francisco Pickup Softball Network throws the first pitch at Balboa Park's grass field every Saturday at 10 a.m. It's usually a mixed group of players—some have never picked up a bat, and others are no stranger to rounding the bases. It's free, and teams, which aim for 7-11 players, are picked at random from a pile of everyone's gloves. Ocean and San Jose avenues; anythreewords.com/pickupsoftball

DIAMOND HEIGHTS

When: Taking reservations

Calling all: Team captains

Even if you strike out at Christopher Playground, you at least get a nice view of Glen Canyon Park. The field includes a well-kept diamond, plenty of parking, and nearby snacks to fuel hungry teams. The pickup games are a little sporadic (it's SF Pickup Softball Network's backup field), so if you want to play at a particular time and see who shows up, go in person to the parks department at the Pioneer Log Cabin in Golden Gate Park to reserve the space at least 10 days prior. Reservations range from a flat fee of \$25 to \$65 per hour. 5290 Diamond Heights Blvd., 415-831-5510, sfrecpark.org



EXCELSIOR

When: Weekend afternoons and Tuesday and Thursday night

Calling all: Ex-Little Leaguers to all-star wannabes

The five softball fields at Crocker Amazon Playground are home to pickup games from 3 to 5 p.m. on the weekend. Thanks to some lights on one diamond, you can catch a game at night on Tuesday and Thursday. 1485 Geneva Ave., 415-831-5510, sfrecpark.org x