

Young professionals connect in kickball

As fun as it is to play kickball, it might be even more fun to name the teams.

Among the top teams in the World Adult Kickball Association's Raleigh summer leagues are

WHO'S GOT GAME?



TERI SAYLOR

What Willis Was Talking About, Those Guys and Nacho and the Jew.

On Sept. 15, a fired-up Ballzdeep team conquered

Harvey Ballbanger 8-3 to take the Capital League summer championship at Pullen Park. The championship came on the heels of the smaller Storm League playoffs Sept. 1, when Nacho and the Jew was the winner.

Amy Gretenstein, 27, customer service representative for WAKA's Raleigh Storm League, made up her team's name, Nacho and the Jew, after enjoying a plate of nachos with friends.

"My best friend Nicki and I thought 'nacho' would be a good name for our team, and I am the only Jewish player, so that's how we came up with the name," she said.

The Storm and Capital Leagues are part of the WAKA franchise of leagues across the country. As customer service reps, Gretenstein and Bailey Robbins, who is in charge of the Capital League, are employees of the organization. Running their leagues is a part-time job.

Last spring, the Capital League, which plays games Thursday nights at Fred Fletcher Park in Raleigh, was the second-largest league in the country, with 17 teams, according to Robbins. The sum-

mer league had 16 teams.

"We usually have about 300 players year-round," said Robbins, 27. "We have to limit the number of teams to 16 or 17 due to the availability of playing fields."

Gretenstein's five Storm League teams play at Fred Fletcher Park on Tuesday nights.

Raleigh's kickball teams generally consist of young professionals who are looking for healthy activities, new friends and even professional connections.

"I know people who have actually found jobs through people they have met playing kickball," Robbins said. "Kickball is a bit of a culture."

On a recent late summer night, Harvey Ballbanger faced off against What Willis was Talking About, and competition was fierce. The game was running late because of lightning, likely the only weather event that would keep the show from going on.

Even though bragging rights, trophies and an invitation to the WAKA Founders Cup National Kickball Championship were at stake, it was a friendly competition, as usual.

The games are so friendly they sometimes lead to marriage, even among players on opposing teams.

Nicki Cherbonneau, 30, and Jeff Ellington, 29, are planning to tie the knot Saturday at Emerald Isle. They met as opponents on the dusty kickball fields.

Both began playing as a way to make friends and connections, never knowing they would make a connection that would last a lifetime.

"For about two months, we were just friends," Cherbonneau said. "We both enjoy pick-up sports and started

playing beach volleyball. Then we went camping with some friends."

After the camping trip, they began dating. Six months later, they were engaged.

Their Mediterranean cruise honeymoon won't lend itself to kickball, and they are too young for shuffleboard, but they'll return to Raleigh in time for the fall season.

And now they are playing on the same team.

Notebook

Wake Forest United Blue Wins Tournament: The under-14 girls Wake Forest United Blue team won their first tournament of the season, taking first place in the CASL Fair Play tournament.

The Fair Play tournament, Sept. 3-4 at the WRAL Soccer Complex in North Raleigh, was a Classic and Challenge team tournament for boys' and girls' teams ages 10 to 18.

Wake Forest United Blue was undefeated in the tournament and beat rival Wake Forest United White 1-0 in the final, according to the event website.

Team officials said WFU Blue has placed at the top of its division for the last two seasons.

Teenage Bowling Ace: Tyler Liverman, a recent graduate of Wakefield High School and the North Carolina state high school bowling champion, tied for sixth place in the 2011 Teen Bowling Masters Championship at Laurel Lanes in Maple Shade, N.J. He bowled an average score of 197 in the weeklong event last month.

Liverman, who lives in Wake Forest, bowls at Buffalo Lanes North in Raleigh.

"Tyler started bowling in Wakefield High School's lifetime sports PE class," said



Melissa Morrow, the assistant manager and youth coach at Buffalo Lanes North.

“Tyler is very unique in that he doesn’t use his thumb when he bowls. He’s gotten really good at it.”

Liverman is attending Morehead (Ky.) State University, which has a perennially strong bowling team.

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Bailey Robbins lines up to kick for her team, What Willis Was Talking About.



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Above: Harvey Ballbanger catcher Mike Johnson is on high alert as Mike Durkin gets a piece of the ball for What Willis Was Talking About.