

## Pick Up Games in Prague.. Or Friends?

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I didn't move to Prague thinking I'd end up playing basketball here knowing everyone here is obsessed with football. But two years in, I've played more pick up in this city than I ever expected. It started slow, just me wandering around one day near Jiriho z Podebrad with a friend, too much free time and a ball under my arm, hoping to find a hoop.

After passing the Jewish center, my first time ever in Prague 2, I came across this crusty court wedged between two apartment buildings with a rim that looked like it had been through a couple generations of jump shots. I figured we should shoot around a bit to kill some time while we wait for my friend to come home.

Before long, someone else showed up. No words but just a glance as he holds his hands out looking for me to pass him the ball, so we start running 1 on 1s. That's kind of how it goes on the court here, people don't ask where you're from, they just ask you for the ball and see if you can hoop.

These courts aren't shiny by any means, you won't find nets or painted lines. Sometimes the games are half Czech, half English, half whatever else people are speaking that day; but it works.

Over time, I found the best hooping spots with the best people. One in Zizkov, another tucked behind Letna Park, and one at Park Lannova that gets busy as the sun starts to set. The regulars are a mix of students, delivery guys, and a few who look like they used to play somewhere more serious.

One evening at Lannova, a group of men that were no younger than 30 challenged me and my friends to a game. They weren't very good and they played way too aggressive, hard fouls, lots of Czech trash talk, like it was the playoffs or something. I love it though. It's always competitive, but no one's really keeping score, and that's what makes it fun.

That's the thing I've come to love most. It's not about winning but making new friends no matter who they are or where they come from. I've made some of my closest friends in this city through these street pick up games. We'll play for a couple hours, then hit the pub after, sweaty, tired, and arguing over who had the best bucket that day.

Every now and then, someone will ask me why I haven't joined a league. Honestly? I like it the way it is. Unplanned. No refs. No pressure. Just real people, real city energy, and the sound of sneakers on pavement to my favorite rap music coming out of my speaker.

If you ever find yourself in Prague with a pair of sneakers and a little time, find a court. Doesn't matter if it's a nice court. Trust me, the game will find you.