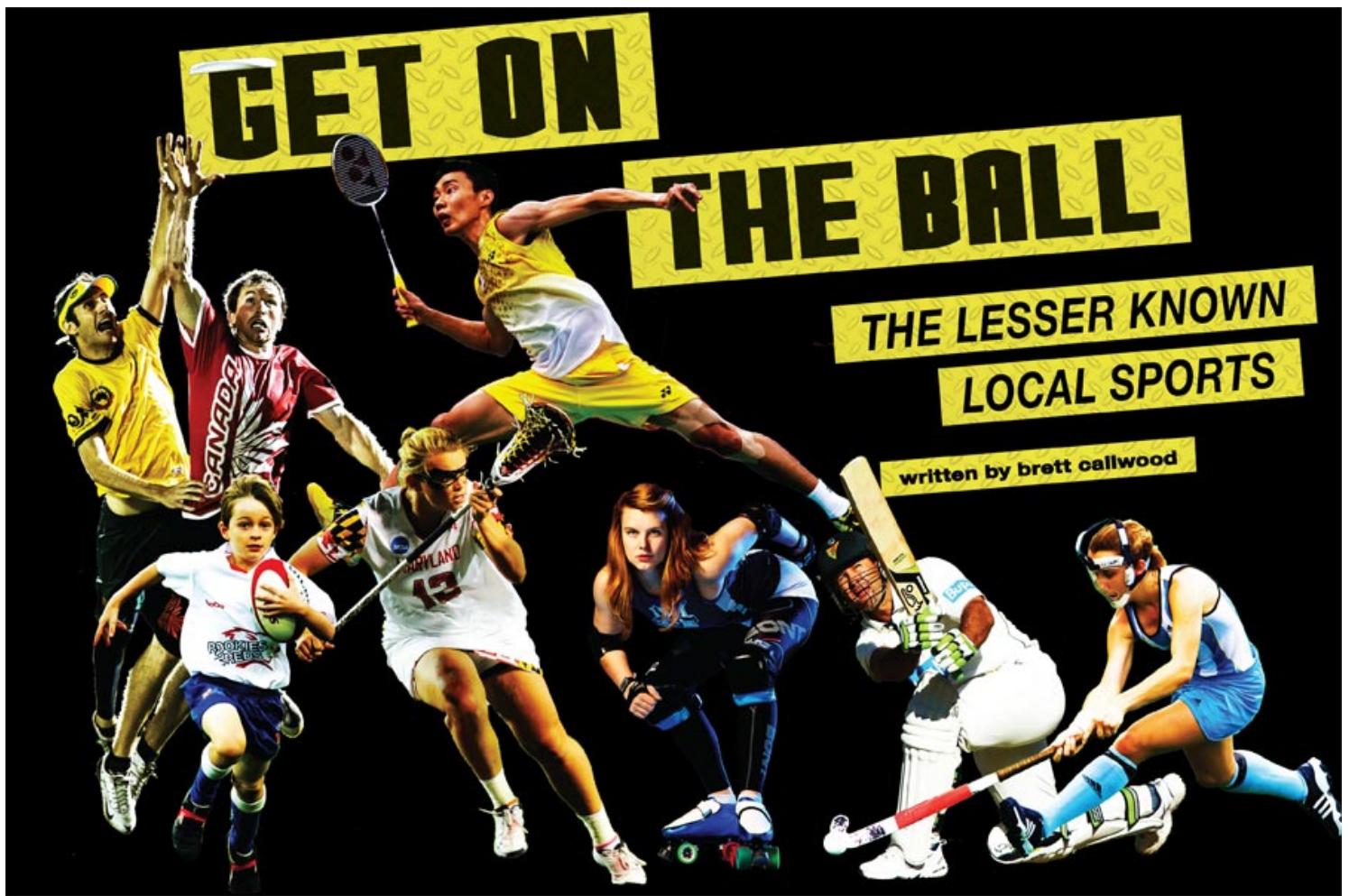


Get On The Ball

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Here in Boulder County, sports and athletic activities are incredibly popular. This is Colorado, the healthiest state in the country. People love to keep fit here.H

Naturally, winter sports are a huge deal, but we love our team sports too. The Broncos are America's darlings, while the Nuggets, the Avalanche and the Rockies also get plenty of support (despite the fact that the Rockies haven't been putting in performances to be proud of). Even the Mammoth get big crowds at their "Loud House," such is the popularity of lacrosse around here.

"...there were two primary soccer clubs in Boulder – Boulder County Force and Boulder Athletic, and those two clubs merged in 2012 to make FC Boulder"

Adam Hayes
FC Boulder

Soccer is still playing catch-up in the States, and that's true in Colorado too. FC Boulder's executive director Adam Hayes is doing his part. "FC Boulder has been around since 2012, but before that there were two primary soccer clubs in Boulder – Boulder County Force and Boulder Athletic, and those two clubs merged in 2012 to make FC Boulder," he says. "I had been with Boulder County Force since 2005, and with FC Boulder since. So ten years would be a fair answer."



Fans celebrate the 2010 Rapids Championship Team after their 2-1 win over FC Dallas

Despite the fact that the Colorado Rapids is so close by, a professional MLS soccer team, Hayes says, perhaps surprisingly, that the club hasn't had a big impact on soccer lovers in BoCo. "It doesn't hurt," he says. "Geographically, it doesn't have a big impact on our club. The two prominent high schools in Boulder, Fairview High School and Boulder High School, plus the surrounding high schools, have a healthy, competitive soccer scene. The club teams benefit from that, and the high school teams benefit from the club programs. We're lucky to have that in our area, and that contributes more to the soccer culture in our area than the Rapids. The Rapids haven't taken a stronghold as I thought they would in our community. They haven't done a good enough job of marketing, promoting and selling the product to our area. There are people who support them certainly, but to say that we have a professional club 30 minutes away and one out of 25 kids has a Rapids jersey doesn't say a whole lot of the impact in our community."

Soccer isn't the only team sport originating in Britain that is proving popular. Boulder Cricket Club is six years old and the game, which is kinda like baseball (though the ball is bowled underarm, the bat is flat and felt towards the floor, and the scoring is completely different), is showing the slightest signs of attracting a new audience here. Ben George is one of the players.



Boulder Cricket Club

"Largely the players are from the Indian community, Pakistani and Bangladesh," George says. "However, being close to universities, we get a few Australians, New Zealanders, English people – last year we had an English man and a New Zealander with us. We get people from Fort Collins, so it's a healthy mix. But I would say 80 percent of the team is comprised of Indians or Indian origin."

George says that, while most of the players and spectators are from India and that part of Asia, interest from Americans is growing. "We play at a new park called Country Field Park," he says. "We have a cricket pitch which is alongside a baseball practice ground. There are plenty of parents who watch us playing, and they come and inquire about how this is similar to baseball and how it's different. We have plenty of inquiries, but none of the baseball playing kids have come and practiced with us yet. But there's a lot of enthusiasm because of the similarities. However, in a few of the other teams like Colorado Springs and Littleton, I have seen two baseball players that have joined and even played a couple of matches."

In fact, the Colorado Cricket League was started by a white gent. "In Fort Collins, there is a gentleman called Mike Reily, who actually started the Colorado Cricket League more than 30 years back," George says. "He runs a program for kids, and that allows the kids in the schools to learn cricket. He goes to the schools, trains the kids, and it's getting popular in the school districts in Fort Collins. Last year, at the Rocky Mountain State Games (basically a Colorado Olympics-style set-up), cricket was introduced. This will be the second year."



Colorado Buffaloes rugby squad

While cricket is in its infancy when it comes to generating a new audience, rugby is much further along that road. That's perhaps surprising because, while cricket might be hampered by the fact that American audiences already have baseball to enjoy, on the surface rugby might be too similar to "American" football to stand a chance. Both games are played with an oval-shaped ball, carried in the hands towards a goal, or try, line. Both games involve extra points scored by kicking the ball between and over posts. There are differences, but the games are similar. Still, rugby is picking up steam.

"Since Boulder is such a transient town, it's been a great opportunity for people to connect with the community and make friends right off the bat."

Joanna Hoffmann
Boulder Rugby Club

Boulder Rugby Club is in its 49th year, having started in 1966. "I've been with Boulder Rugby Club for five years now," says Joanna Hoffmann. "I've been a board member, and captain and president of the girl's team which we call the Boulder Babes. We do have five different teams – old boys, men, women, high school and youth."

Unlike the neighboring cricket club, most of the players at BRC are Americans. "It's mostly Americans who have played across the country," Hoffmann says. "Since Boulder is such a transient town, it's been a great opportunity for people to connect with the community and make friends right off the bat. We get a lot of people that reach out to us, and into the community."

So how does somebody in the USA get interested in rugby to begin with? "I started in high school, which is pretty rare in the US, but I started 12 years ago in Wisconsin," Hoffmann says. "I moved out here to work for USA Rugby – a lot of people don't know but the national governing body is based here in Boulder so it has a strong rugby community between coaching, youth, referees and supporters. There are a lot of rugby fans in the area. Long standing traditions, and CU has good programs too so that helps feed our pool. There are so many tournaments and teams in Colorado in general, it's really a strong rugby culture compared to other states in the country. It's the fastest growing sport in the United States right now, especially with rugby sevens [seven-a-side] being in the 2016 Olympics."

Let's get technical for a minute and talk league structure. After all, if you're interested in learning more about the games, you'll want to know how the standings are structured. "The Colorado Cricket League is affiliated to USACA (United States of America Cricket

Association), as of now the cricket governing body in North America," says George. "Anybody who wants to play cricket at the state level joins the Colorado Cricket League. There are currently seven or eight clubs from different areas like Fort Collins, Boulder, Colorado Springs, Littleton, and a few in Denver. I'm not only the vice-captain at Boulder Cricket Club, but also the vice-president at the Colorado Cricket League. We book the grounds for a season – we have six or seven grounds all over Colorado, and we schedule the games between the teams. We play from mid-April through September."

Despite the fact that Littleton is the star performer when it comes to local success, having won the T20 and P40 championships (differing formats depending on the number of "overs," or periods of play) numerous times in recent years, Boulder has high hopes for the coming season. "The Boulder Cricket Club will be having its AFGM on 2/22, and we will be discussing our approach for the season, like do we want to play only T20," says George. "Boulder hasn't played 40 over cricket because it usually takes the whole day. We are looking for new players, so we'll discuss how to approach the 2015 season, and we'll try to win the T20 championship if possible."

"The idea there is that it's providing the best experience for the kids, playing with people at a similar ability."

Adam Hayes
FC Boulder

Boulder FC has about 60 competitive soccer teams, age under 11 to under 18. They have over 1000 recreational players, ten years old and younger. The club as a whole has close to 2000 players. "There are three phases of the programming," Hayes says. "There's the recreational phase, which is playing a game, having fun, no standings, no keeping score, that kind of stuff. Then we have our nine and ten year olds, and that's the transitional years. U-11 through U-18, you've got our competitive teams, and those teams in every age group are broken down by ability. The idea there is that it's providing the best experience for the kids, playing with people at a similar ability."

And then there are the adults. "We have three adult teams – an all women's team, and that's really good," Hayes says. "There are two men's teams. One is definitely good. It's a bit like an A and B team. The top level team plays in the Boulder Area Men's League. The second level is more than recreational – they train hard and practice, but it's not the same level of players. It's socially competitive. For the younger age groups, it's about player development. To get them to love the game, putting results second. Above that, we've been fortunate enough to win four state championships in recent years, and we hope to have one or two more state champions this spring."



Rugby offers a contrasting image to that of cricket

At Boulder Rugby Club, the men are division one and the girls are division two. They compete regionally, and play in different tournaments throughout the west. There is a USA national rugby team, but the player pool comes from a higher level of rugby. "For the women, it's the premier league," Hoffmann says. "The men's are a little bit higher than D1 as well. Though Boulder rugby is very competitive, it's not necessarily at the highest level – it's more social and amateur."

If you're wondering which players you should be looking out for, BRC has its stand-outs. "Mara Hasenstaub is a very strong player for the Babes, and Kate Zullo – those are our two captains," Hoffmann says. "For the men Eliot Kairys is a strong player, as well as Louie Wilson. We practice on Tom Watson field, which is on 63rd and Diagonal. There's more information on boulderrugby.com. Just show up to training. It's a very welcoming atmosphere."

Boulder Rugby Club is also very supportive of Out Boulder. "We've been supportive of their events, and we've been able to collaborate with them and let other female athletes in the area know that we're here," Hoffman says."



Boulder County Bombers

Speaking of female athletes, the Boulder County Bombers is the local roller derby team and Amber Cotten, aka Smashalotapus, is one of the star players. She's been involved with the team for two years, having moved to the area almost ten years ago from Dallas.

"I learned about roller derby after I moved here," Cotten says. "A friend invited me to a bout, and I played soccer growing up and in college, and I was looking for another avenue to be active and competitive, so I tried roller derby."

Since the movie *Whip It* came out and introduced a whole new audience to the glory of roller derby, the crowds, which were already getting bigger, shot up. "I'd say we get between 500-1200 people at our bouts," Cotten says. "It depends on the time of year and whether it's a holiday. I started roller derby quite a bit after the movie, but I think it definitely helped to get the sport's popularity out there. People including myself had not realized how popular roller derby had become over the last few years, so I think it'd helped to get the word out there that roller derby is a sport and how much fun it can be."



Cotten picked the name Smashalotapus when she was watching the show *Dinosaur Train* with her oldest daughter. “It’s pretty difficult to come up with a name, because the website has over a thousand names,” Cotten says. “It’s hard to find one that hasn’t been taken yet. We were playing around with dinosaur names and came up with mine. It just evolved from there. My oldest is trying to do junior roller derby. Once you’re six, we have a junior roller derby program and she loves it.”

The Bombers bout against some local teams, but also do some traveling to play some teams outside of the local area. “We play teams down in Denver – the Rocky Mountain Roller Girls and Denver Roller Derby,” Cotten says. “We play teams in Fort Collins, Colorado Springs – a lot of the local teams. And then we’ve traveled to Wyoming for a tournament. We’re kind of rolling into a season. It’s a spring season through early fall. We usually start around March and go to September/October. We were ranked in division two after last season, and we’re really hoping for our travel team to stay ranked in division, and we’re aspiring to be a division one team.”



Here in Boulder County, then, there is plenty in the way of sporting entertainment to both watch and join in with, without having to drive all the way to Denver to pay huge sums of money to watch a Broncos game with the kids, paying extra ridiculous sums to eat a hot-dog and drink a beer. Rather, check out a cricket, rugby or soccer match in Boulder, or maybe take in a Derby Girls bout for the first time with the Boulder County Bombers. Hell, CU Boulder even has a Quiditch team for you Harry Potter fans. Dig a little under the surface of what you consider to be normal team sport entertainment, and you'll be able to experience something new and exciting, right on your doorstep.

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