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# Calvinball? It's just one of the new games people play

Internet popularizes such sports as Ultimate Team Cardboard Fortress Battle

By Laurie Rich  
Columbia News Service  
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Instead of hosting an elegant brunch the day after his November wedding in Las Vegas, Alex Getchell had his guests make cardboard forts and tackle each other to the ground.

Getchell and his new wife, Laurenn McCubbin, had their friends and family — Web designers, police sergeants, construction workers, comic book writers and Getchell's own 59-year-old father, retired from the Air Force — joined them in a game they had played in their first week of dating, Ultimate Team Cardboard Fortress Battle.

To play, teams tape together dozens of boxes to create two large mounds on opposite ends of a field. Each team hides a small flag in one of its bottom boxes, then spends anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour tackling and grappling, either trying to defend its property or rip apart the other team's fortress and find the flag.

The sort of capture-the-flag meets arts-and-crafts game was created by Jon Sung on a long commute through Silicon Valley in 2006, who then posted it on his blog. It has since captured the imaginations of 20- to 40-somethings from New York to California.

Getchell and his wife played one of the first games Sung organized in San Francisco, then Getchell took it back home to his friends in Las Vegas. He enjoyed the rough-and-tumble contact element of the game but was especially hooked by its creativity and players' aim to not take themselves too seriously.

"You get a lot of baffled

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stares from people," said Getchell, 31, recalling the first game. "They were like, 'What are you doing?' And what we were doing was having more fun than they were."

New outdoor games and sports are cropping up all over the U.S., spread widely by the Internet and embraced by adults focused more on getting some exercise with friends than scoring the most. That's why someday soon you may come across a group in a local park engaged in something that more resembles Calvinball — the fictional sport invented by comic strip characters Calvin and Hobbes that uses a volleyball, soccer ball, a croquet set and flags — than football.

Some enjoy the childlike freedom of these games. Others like their less-competitive atmosphere.

Many creators and players are trying to return the element of play back into sports and over-regimented lives, said Jay Coakley, a sociology professor emeritus at the University of Colorado, who has written on sports and society. The need to

play is something that he and a host of psychologists and kinesiologists feel is vital for emotional and intellectual well-being.

"Playful experiences provide a dimension of emotional experiences or connections with an environment of other people that are enjoyable and not available in other activities," he said. "Everything doesn't have to be an investment. There can be personal expression, creativity, joy without somehow leading to better business contacts."

Many new sports players like that you don't have to have decades of experience to participate. Unlike a recreational soccer league, where someone may have played on their high school or college teams, newly invented sports offer participants a relatively level playing field.

New York University experimental theater alumnus Greg Manley, 23, invented Circle Rules Football to do just that. First created as a project for Manley's drama degree in December 2006, Circle Rules has garnered a devoted

following in New York. To score, players must get a large Pilates ball through their side of a single goal set up in the middle of a circular field. Players must pass and dribble the unwieldy ball to score, which encourages teamwork, Manley said.

Luci Olewinski, a trauma nurse in New York, stumbled upon Circle Rules Football this summer and is now a regular participant. A former lacrosse and rugby athlete, she sees the game as more accessible and fun for all players.

"You can't really be a jock with a Pilates ball," said Olewinski, 29. "It's really about having fun with your teammates."

The Web has helped build the popularity of these games. Circle Rules Football was featured on an Internet video short called "Wild Frontier of Sports," sponsored by the Saucony sneaker manufacturer. The company is targeting its retro shoe line to non-fashionista but still hip 16- to-34-year-olds. Their research has shown this set to be into reinvigorated childhood games such as foursquare and dodge ball.

"It's not just about softball and beer anymore, that's for sure," Steve Kleinberg, chief executive at Drillteam Marketing, which handles the Saucony account.

Ultimate Team Cardboard Fortress Battle, meanwhile, has a Facebook group devoted to the sport, something that stunned its creator, Sung.

"I have never talked to any of those people before in my life," said Sung, 29.

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