

Scalzi Park's Bocce Courts: "No Set Up Like It"

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"It's something you do on a summer evening; really more of a social event than anything else."

Emanuele Terenzio referred to the game of bocce, played three nights each week by a 450-member Stamford league in Scalzi Park.

"You just don't find a place for bocce like this anywhere," said Ennio Mallozzi, president of the local league. "They claim Scalzi Park has the best bocce set-up in New England."

The eight playing courts, each 64 feet by 12 feet, consist of tamped stone dust sunk several inches below ground-level, and framed by wooden beams.

The courts were built by the 33-year-old league

after a generation of bocce games at several Italian social clubs on Stamford's West Side.

"We fought hard for these courts," said Pat Masoni, a founding member of the club who still remembers the number of bolts used for each court.

Mallozzi described the club as "eighty percent ethnic" Italian, though it is "mixing more and more," he added. The game is known as a national pastime in Italy, where many local league members were born.

Mallozzi grew up in the town of Minturno, halfway between Rome and Naples. Some of his earliest memories are of watching the game played at a cafe owned by his family.

"Most of us learned the game as children," said Mallozzi. "In every little town in Italy, it's a Sunday afternoon pastime."

The game is also commonly seen in backyards of Italian homes in America. Peter Capitali, vice president of the club, was taught to play by his father on Long Island. "I gave up playing for twenty-five years before I joined the guys here," he said.

At a glance, bocce resembles bowling. "But it's really closer to horseshoes," explained Terenzio.

Four-member teams roll eight-inch balls at the "pallini," a tiny white marker ball. Whoever comes closest scores a point, and 16 points wins.

"It's a simple game and it looks easy," said Capitali. "But there can be a lot of skill involved. It's not just a matter of throwing the ball." Team members shout advice to each other throughout the games. Playing a series of three can take two hours.

Although the sport is strictly amateur, and "not the sort of thing you could make money on," according to Masoni, the Stamford league sponsors one of the largest annual tournaments in the Northeast. Competitors turn up from as far away as North Carolina and Maine.

This year, the event, with \$3,000 in prizes, is set for August 3 and 4

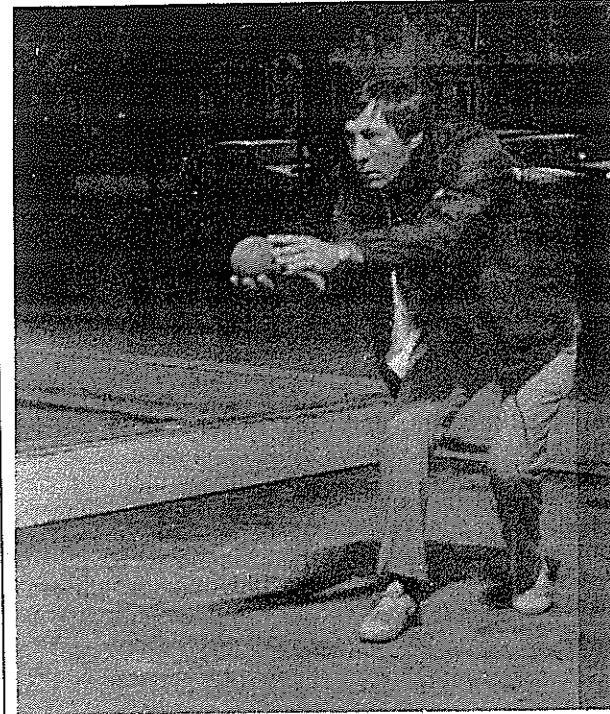
publicizes the competition in an Italian newspaper and in bocce newsletters.

The Stamford league has three divisions: men's, women's, and a newly formed mixed division which plays on Wednesday nights during the 16-week season that began on April 29.

According to Mallozzi, the newly formed mixed division with both men and women, is the only part of the club with room to spare for new members. "We've had to turn people away," he explained. "There are people waiting in line."

Although there are five other bocce leagues in Fairfield County, the Stamford club is said to be the largest in the tri-state area and among the biggest in the country.

The club is made up mostly of first and second generation Italians. "But bocce is generating more and more interest, beyond just the ethnic appeal," said Mallozzi.



SOME OF THE 400-MEMBER Stamford Bocce League can be seen at Scalzi Park four nights each week. "It's a social thing, mostly," says a player.