

## **A broom, shoes and an ice rink**

*Martin Miller*  
*LA Times*

*I am standing on an ice rink close to midnight, wearing tennis shoes. There are screaming college students, also in sneakers, slipping, sliding and gliding all around me. We all have brooms.*

This isn't some strange dream or oddball college fraternity rite. I am playing broom ball, a fascinating sport that is essentially ice hockey without the skates, hockey sticks or missing teeth. Last week, I joined a group of about 40 art students and a couple of faculty members as we chased a mini-soccer ball around the rink, knocked into each other and tried to score a goal without falling down.

The game is the perfect recreation for frustrated athletes like me who have always wanted to try a tamer version of hockey but never learned to skate well enough to do so. There's something about being on the ice in the limited traction of shoes – that precarious sense that you could slip at any second – that drives up the fun factor.

Broom ball is believed to have originated in Canada around the turn of the last century as a simpler, more spontaneous game than hockey that didn't require expensive gear. Today, the game has tens of thousands of players, most of them in the United States, Canada, Italy and Switzerland.

I swept the ice with a coed group from the Art Institute of California, Los Angeles, at the Culver City Ice Arena. The rink had put me in touch with the college group, and they welcomed me to their game.

Since most broom balling takes place late at night, after ice rinks have closed to the public, I showed up at 10:30 p.m. My outfit was practical, my gear simple: heavy fatigue pants, a bulky sweat shirt, tennis shoes and our household broom. It was pretty cold inside the rink, and I wondered if I'd freeze. Little did I realize I'd be drenched in sweat within a half-hour.

I quickly noticed that everyone else's broom had duct

tape wrapped around the bristles, whereas mine was bare. The tape provides a firmer hitting surface, helping to speed along the little soccer ball.

With my broom taped, we poured onto the ice to warm up. I wasn't sure how slippery the ice would be under my cross-trainers, but it wasn't bad. The ice was fairly chopped up after public skating, and the Zamboni machine hadn't yet smoothed it out. As long as you moved deliberately, you could easily keep your footing.

Someone dropped a couple balls onto the ice. I took one swipe and connected fairly well and didn't fall down. On my next whack, my broom snapped in two.

We chose teams and went over a few basic rules: Try not to smash people, watch the "high sticking" (swinging the broom above chest level) and have fun.

Screaming laughter wouldn't be an overstatement for the first few moments. With no real strategy, we must have resembled a bunch of 6-year-olds playing soccer for the first time, where everyone on both teams shadows the ball.

As the game wore on, and people tired, players tended to stick to a particular zone on the ice to conserve energy. After spending the first 15 minutes sprinting – as best I could on ice – back and forth between offense and defense, I decided to take periodic breaks by staking out a mid-rink position.

When I'd get my wind back, I'd return to shadowing the ball. With the duct tape, and a clean swing, you can really clobber the ball – at least halfway down the rink.

After about 30 minutes, the score was 2-0 in favor of the other team. After the second goal, a brief break was declared. I was beat. It was around midnight, and my 42 years of accumulated wisdom was telling me to go home and sleep. The college kids, however, were eager for more.

In Southern California, most broom ball leagues rent community ice rinks like the Pasadena Ice Skating Center, the Ice Station in Valencia or Skate Zone in Huntington Beach. (Rental fees vary but generally range from about \$200 to \$250 for the first hour; often, rates

are reduced for the second hour.)

Broom ball tends to appeal to college students and church groups looking for a fun outing; rules are fairly loose and flexible, like a pickup basketball game. There are also organized leagues in which teams of six players or fewer wear jerseys and play two roughly 20-minute periods.

Best of all, broom ball is a terrific workout. I quickly discovered the stamina it took to chase a ball around an ice rink easily rivals a game of soccer or full-court basketball.

I would definitely consider joining a league, especially one for the older crowd. Even without league play, the game is challenging enough to think about renting a rink with a group of friends or co-workers to enjoy a late night of broom-balling fun.