

3-2-1-Polo!" Those four words fill the air and six bicyclists barrel toward each other across the blacktop, three per side. They each carry a makeshift mallet crafted from cuts of PVC pipe bolted to sawed-off ski poles and golf clubs. A tattooed rider reels back, swings and connects...with a red street-hockey ball. No, this isn't a "Warriors" style rumble. It's the opening joust in a bike polo match at Virgil Middle School.

Bike enthusiasts meet every Saturday night behind the Eastside school to compete, socialize, and drink. The blacktop field is as long as two tennis courts are wide. Two orange pylons serve as each goal.

Matt Vidal helped introduce bike polo to L.A. last year. He considers Virgil players "super diverse. Many are anti-authoritarians or individualists." Mike Hammer works at the Getty Center library. Tim Hammer (unrelated) works in residential real estate development on the Westside. Vidal was just hired at King's College in London, Department of Management, on a tenure track. Other players work as bike messengers, at R.E.I., and at a motorcycle concept shop.

Some of the regulars have earned nicknames. Vidal is known as "the Professor," since he has his Ph.D. Dave Cargill is "the Scotsman," due to his homeland. Tim Hammer is called "Centaur," because he's "half man, half bike" and pure adrenaline.

Drinking is a key component of bike polo, but hardly required. Still, Alex Dash, a bearded polo enthusiast with a star tattoo on each elbow, calls beer "the official Gatorade of bike polo" and jokes "Cheating is not drinking." Another player's orange bike sports a bumper sticker that reads, "My drinking club has a biking problem."

A RECENT L.A. PHENOMENON

People first played bike polo in 1891. According to the International Bicycle Polo Federation, "Its originator was a well-known Irish cyclist, Richard J. Mccredy. The British army and the Indian Maharajas played cycle polo in India as far back as 1900."

Vidal and Wisconsin native Jared Linzmeier discovered bike polo in Madison, and both helped import the sport to Los Angeles. Linzmeier says, "Before I came out here, I went on LA Fixed and Midnight Ridazz [bicyclist message boards] and said, 'When I get out I want to play bike polo. Who's in?' People were stoked. I promoted it at the Bicycle Kitchen, [a non-profit bike repair shop in East Hollywood]. We got eight people [at Beverly & Fairfax] on a Sunday and played...All these guys were playing soccer looking at us like what the hell are you doing?" Vidal



Women of Los Angeles

2 for 1

Introductory Classes
(regularly \$80, now \$20 pp)

come for the fun
stay for the workout
be amazed by the journey

CALL (323) 965-9685
FOR BOOKINGS.

5225 Wilshire Blvd., Suite B
Los Angeles, CA 90036
www.sfactor.com/LA

Sheila Kelley's
SFACTOR™

Are you ready...?



Change Your Body. Change Your Life.®

Start Today
and get

3 MONTHS FREE!

Some restrictions may apply. PPF memberships only. See club for details.

AARP Special Discounts Available

HURRY! Offer Expires 9/01/08

5 AREA LOCATIONS TO SERVE YOU INCLUDING

Downtown LA • 735 South Figueroa Street • Los Angeles, CA 90017
213-984-4666 • www.goldsgym.com

43 YEARS | 600 LOCATIONS | 3 MILLION MEMBERS | ONE GREAT NAME