



moved to L.A. about the same time for a UCLA post-doc and was heavily involved in those early games.

Mike Hammer said the Virgil, or (323) game, was originally “a way for people at the Bicycle Kitchen to get together outside of the Kitchen.” There’s also a Wednesday game in Palms, near Cargill’s LA Brakeless bike shop, known as the (310) game. Dash recently started a Monday (818) game in North Hollywood.

Mecredy originally played bike polo according to equestrian polo rules, on grass. In Madison, they play on grass using a zero-sized soccer ball. Vidal says, “That’s a completely different thing than this hard-court bike polo, which has more of a hockey style.” Linzmeier adds, “When you’re on the grass you don’t hesitate to get physical and wipe out. Out here playing on blacktop, it’s more about precision than risk.”

Three types of contact are allowed in bike polo: body on body, mallet on mallet and bike on bike. There’s never supposed to be a mix, and players don’t allow T-boning. Beyond that, the rules are simple. First team to five wins. There’s no time limit, and no such thing as out of bounds. Vidal adds that if your foot hits the ground, “get the fuck out of play immediately” and tap one of two spots on the center line to re-enter action. You can’t pass the

ball backwards through the goal or possession switches to the other team.

Teams are chosen randomly. Riders who want to play throw their mallets into the middle of the field, then somebody mixes them behind their back and randomly pulls three mallets. Hammer says, “You could have teams that are equally matched, or teams with three new people who get murdered.”

Vidal thinks there are two keys to bike polo: bike-handling skill and ball-handling skill. He considers Cargill the most skilled L.A. polo player: “Dave can pretty much shoot from anywhere and he’ll make the shot.”

There are no set roles on the field. Vidal says, “Certain people play offense more, others are cautious and stand back.” Hammer tends to play back; he rides a fixed gear, which is good for tending goal because it’s low to the ground, with fat tires and maneuverability. When less experienced players show up, he and Vidal move up front, to ensure scoring.

Vidal said most players in L.A. ride fixed gear bikes. With fixed gear, if the bike is going forward, the pedals move forward and vice versa. Free-wheel, you can coast, and pedaling backwards locks the brakes.

When it comes to mallet preference, Hammer says, “People that tend to like the golf club are more of a striker position. They’re really light, really

maneuverable, you can change the direction of your swing at the last minute, but they’re not as good for defense. Somebody who would play a middle position, to use a lacrosse term, would use a heavier ski pole.”

#### AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY GAME

Bike polo is an equal opportunity game. Mike Hammer says, “If you can ride a bike, you can play polo.” Of course, you also have to be able to afford a bike, and preferably have a back-up bike. “You want to have a polo bike you’re not totally attached to,” says Hammer. “It’s gonna get messed up and that’s a problem because there’s a requirement of having a certain amount of capital.” He suggests a steel or aluminum frame, which bend and “bounce back easily.” Carbon fiber frames snap.

The players are primarily men. Hammer explains, “We’re not trying to be exclusive, but it is self-selective...You have to want to ride and be okay with getting knocked off your bike. If you hear about polo, [that means] you know somebody who has played it, and there are only 24 people here.”

There are exceptions. Melanie Rodriguez has played since October, but was forced to take a two-and-a-half-month hiatus after injuring her finger. She believes few women play because,

“It’s aggressive. You get hurt.” Not that she’s worried. “I like to take people out. I play a little dirty. It’s fucking fun,” she adds. “It’s a really good group of guys. It’s great camaraderie. Monday through Friday, there are a lot of rules and regulations. You can cut loose here.”

“In Madison there were girls who’d kick my ass,” says Linzmeier. However, he understands that “Women are more hesitant to involve themselves in a sport where they can get cut or bruised.”

Linzmeier thinks the barrier is primarily financial. “Young cyclists who have the financial freedom to be able to play recreationally and put money down for new parts” dominate...You should probably have more than one bike, at least one or two nights off a week, which means you have a job that pays to do that.”

Vidal is about to move to London, but he’s convinced the Virgil game is in good hands. In fact, he already referred to it as “Mike’s game,” adding, “I don’t want to take too much credit for this scene. It’s a bunch of dedicated individuals and groups that make it happen, all cool, all L.A.” [NA](#)

#### L.A. Bike Polo

Virgil Middle School,  
152 N. Vermont Ave., Los Angeles,  
[www.labikepolo.org](http://www.labikepolo.org)  
Saturday nights at 6:30 p.m.

