

Babes in the Fields



ANDREA WING

Is this a soccer festival or a radical party for queer women?
by Maria Callahan

After five goals are scored on a team, the winning ladies must remove one article of clothing for every additional point scored.

With sidelines packed with rowdy, sunburned spectators, 14 sweat-soaked women rally for the final plays under the midday September sun. Whoops and hollers emanate from the now tipsy-to-totally-crunked fans as a midfielder of the defending team hooks the ball from an oncoming forward, sprints through a hole left by the advancing defenders and takes a straight shot at the goal. For a split second, it seems the tie may be broken until the keeper spots the oncoming ball and hurls herself in its general direction. Cheers erupt from down the field as the goalie snags the ball and clears it with a thud. The score is frozen, 5-5.

While seemingly similar to any run-of-the-mill Sunday afternoon soccer game, this is not your common club side scrimmage. The quick-footed midfielder is a high femme from San Francisco sporting gold, jewel-encrusted cleats and matching lamé hot pants. The goalie? A Canadian bulldyke who happens to be dressed as Captain Jack from *Pirates of the Caribbean*. The crowd? All lesbians. Or close approximations thereof. And how is this arduous battle concluded? With a rousing game of Spin the Bottle, special smooches reserved for the ref.

For every one of us who lingered a little longer than normal in team showers, or found being tackled by a teammate surprisingly stimulating, this type of athletic endeavor is nothing short of a dream come true. For the past 16 years, this has been the case for the droves of women who attend the annual Festival of the Babes.

Having found its roots in San Francisco during the summer of 1991, Festival of the Babes is a seven-a-side soccer tournament for

lesbians. More specifically, it is for lesbians or any woman who is eager to be actively mistaken for one. Inspired by the 1990 Gay Games in Vancouver, British Columbia, Festival of the Babes (FOB for short), was birthed by a small group of dedicated soccer dykes, working tirelessly to kick off an event focusing not only on soccer but also on community building. The first FOB hosted eight teams on two modest fields, establishing the framework for a tradition that, almost two decades later, is still building momentum.

Millie Supple, one of the founding mothers of FOB, describes the growth of the event: "With little more than word of mouth, it grew year by year into what it is now: almost a Halloween, Gay Pride, Burning Woman, soccer event that now turns teams away."

Indeed, the growth has been remarkable. FOB now caps its entry

at 24 teams and hosts two solid days of soccer played by approximately 300 women on four fields. With such growing enthusiasm, why cap the event at 24 teams? Jane White, an FOB enthusiast of many years, explains that the organizers "made a conscious decision to keep it smaller and more intimate," even though this means occasionally turning teams away.

Festival of the Babes differs in many ways from traditional soccer tournaments in both theory and practice. However, as many veteran FOB women will attest, a love of the game remains integral to the spirit of the event. Rather than maintaining an unrelenting emphasis on competition, FOB is a place for athletes of all skill levels and experience. For those women who do enjoy a healthy dose of competition, the tournament is divided into Competitive, Semi-Competitive and Recreational divisions. For those who, perhaps, are more interested in the assemblage of a flawless outfit and slide-tackling that devastatingly dapper defender, the recreational division might be the best option.


Through the years, FOB has developed some innovative idiosyncrasies that really do set it in a league of its own. Initially instated to prevent one team from running up the score against another team, a rule was laid out deeming that after five goals were scored on a team, one article of clothing must be removed by each player on the winning team for every additional goal scored against the losing team. Needless to say, the threat of public nudity in a sea full of dykes playing a contact sport did not elicit the planned inhibitory effect.

Longtime FOBer Julie Johnson fondly recalls the first time this new

"It was about challenging homophobia in sports and creating an environment for a soccer tournament in which lesbians could be comfortable expressing themselves."


—Alexa Wilkie





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