

**2016**

## **Awareness of Walking Soccer**

### **Seattle - First in USA to Introduce Walk Soccer**

Decades of chasing the ball across unforgiving surfaces, from the abrasive grit of Cintrex to the unforgiving bite of AstroTurf, had taken a toll on my Seattle Soccer Sisters. Many were sidelined, their bodies worn thin by years of high-impact play. We didn't just carry the ache in our joints and lower backs; we bore the physical souvenirs of the pitch: jagged bits of crushed brick, stone, and rubber pellets still lodged beneath our skin. In the relentless chill of a Seattle winter, those hard fields felt less like a playground and more like an adversary, eventually forcing us to admit it was time to change the way we played.

After 3 years of me being sidelined with a hip replacement, I felt such a loss, not only for the game, but for the friendships that were so healthy for me, for us. While we all tried other activities, nothing matched the same euphoria we felt playing soccer. The goals, the teamwork, the team huddles, the womanly support, the travel for national and international competitions and post-game celebrations. I so badly needed to get off the cloud of "just hanging" on the sofa.

When a soccer-loving friend told me that in the UK, they played Walking Football. My ears perked up!! What??? Was this a real sport? Do women play? How do you play it? What are the rules? Is there any walking soccer in Seattle, in the nation? The answer was NO. It seemed that while the sport was thriving across the pond, no one in the U.S. had the slightest idea that Walking Football even existed.

### **Early Days of Walking Soccer**

The birth of our local walking soccer community began in 2016, when I decided my hip replacement could no longer keep me on the sidelines. Driven by a desire to reconnect with the sport I loved, I recruited 12 local soccer buddies to join me at Robinswood field in Bellevue, WA, for our very first match. The experience was an instant success; we were all exhilarated to find that we could safely reignite our competitive spirits and enjoy the game some of us once thought we had left behind. Drawing on my extensive background in team management/coaching, I felt confident that we could turn these casual sessions into a sustainable weekly ritual. As word of our newfound joy spread, our numbers began to climb steadily, eventually transforming our small group into larger co-rec game.



**University of Washington supports Ultimate Walk Soccer Club, 2017. Sue and grand boys help record a video with the Papua New Guinea Women's National Team. Launch day for Walking Soccer in Seattle/the USA.**

[Video from Launch day](#)

I leveraged my ties with the Centre Circle program with University of Washington Women's Soccer to give the sport visibility. At my request, coaches Lesle Galimore and Amy Allman Griffin agreed to have the team try Walk Soccer so I could get some video to help introduce it to more people. At their invitation, two of my grandkids joined me to observe, where we were surprised to be joined by the Papua New Guinea National Women's Team! We effectively launched walking soccer in Seattle/the USA that day.



**2017, Sue and Eric Wynalda discuss the merits of walking soccer and equal pay for US Women's National Team.**

## **USASA INVOLVEMENT**

In 2018, I had the honor of being invited by the United States Adult Soccer Association to speak at the Region IV Adult Soccer Convention in Lake Tahoe, where I led an exhibition to introduce the concept of walking soccer to the attendees. It was an exciting environment, notably attended by US Soccer presidential candidate Eric Wynalda. I took the opportunity to plant the initial seeds for the sport's growth in the country. Following the event, USASA President Duncan Riddle asked for my help in drafting an official set of rules for Walking Soccer in the American market. Drawing directly from the foundational guidelines established by the Walking Football Association (WFA) in the UK, I developed what became the first official walking soccer rules to surface in the United States. These inaugural regulations ultimately served as the blueprint for my efforts in successfully developing the sport throughout the Seattle area.

## **Ultimate Walk Soccer Club / Seattle**



UWSC had 3 locations initially. Lakeview Elementary in Kirkland; Steel Lake, Federal Way; Starfire Sports, Tukwila. Grass Lawn Park in Redmond was added as the program grew.



**2018, Starfire Sports, Tukwila, WA**



**2019 Lakeview Elementary,  
Kirkland, WA**



**2019, Grass Lawn Park,  
Redmond, WA**



**2020 Tournaments were played at Starfire Sports, Tukwila, WA**



**2019 Starfire Sports, Tukwila, WA Alex and Christian Roldan were intrigued by Walking Soccer.**

**Harvard Health Publishing Article on the Benefits of Walking Soccer:**

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/exercise-and-fitness/exercise-trend-alert-walking-soccer>



**2020 Walk Soccer Players competed in the Washington State Senior Games in Lacey, WA. The first year for walk soccer to be a competitive division.**

**2025 Seattle KCPQ News Video of Walking Soccer**



## Walking Football Expands To Cities Beyond Seattle

Teammate Julie Thomer built our dedicated website, [UltimateWalkSoccerClub.club](https://UltimateWalkSoccerClub.club), which helped digitize our mission and spread the sport's reach. This online presence, the first of its kind in the US with a focus on Walking Soccer, combined with community connections, inspired Kate O'Malley to bring the game to Oahu. After playing with us in Seattle, she successfully advocated for the addition of a walking soccer division to the Mayor's Cup at the Waipi'o Soccer Complex in 2020.



**Two of the Hawaii teams with free agents added to fill the rosters. 2026 Walk Soccer Division at the Mayor's Gold Cup Tournament, Waipi'o Soccer Complex, Waipahu, HI**

## San Diego



**2024, Brandi Mitchell and Sue Boettcher strategize on how to promote women's soccer**

The walking soccer movement gained momentum in San Diego thanks to Brandi Mitchell, a dedicated advocate for active older adults. Leveraging her connections with San Diego Soccer Women and Kicks and Giggles, she successfully established a local Walk Soccer program. Now, residents and vacationers alike have a fantastic opportunity to join this accessible, inclusive sport and stay active while enjoying the beautiful coast.

[San Diego Soccer Women](#)

[Just Kicks and Giggles](#)

## Beyond Seattle / Nottingham Forest

Drafting rules for walking soccer led me to an invaluable connection with Gary Parker, a referee from Nottingham, England. This collaboration blossomed into a historic journey for our 19-player Seattle co-rec team. Guided and coached by Danielle and Andy Pritchard, we competed spiritedly against experienced local teams. Though we finished third in our final round-robin, the well-officiated, challenging matches marked a proud milestone for the first American walking football team to cross the pond to compete in the UK.



**2025 Seattle Walking Football players toured Nottingham Forest's stadium and played friendly matches in England.**



**2025 Seattle women who represented the USA/ Seattle Team**



**2025 UWSC with friendly competitors in Nottingham, England**



**Sue holds a “press conference” to explain strategy tactics for the Seattle Teams, “Win”!**



**Our hosts, Danielle and Andy Pritchard, Gary Parker, and Seattle players get a photo op seated at the media table. 2025 Nottingham Forest Stadium.**



**March 2026, Chrissy Vaughn was asked to play on the International Team for the Walking Football International Tournament played in Devon, England. Chrissy is second from the right, back row. The “Scoring American”.**

After recovering from a 2022 Achilles injury, Redmond’s Chrissy Vaughn became the first American to compete in an International Walking Football Tournament in Devon, England in March 2026. Chrissy thought her soccer playing days were over when she suffered her Achilles injury. I convinced her to give Walking Soccer a try and the rest is history! A former standout at Redmond High and Whitman College, she dominated the pitch in England by scoring four of her multi-country team’s seven goals. She became known as “The Scoring American!” Chrissy remains a

dedicated competitor, currently playing in Seattle Women’s Soccer... Modified Safe Games.



**Current Walk Soccer Women are now the:  
Seattle Women's Soccer...Modified Safe Games (SWS)**

In 2024, Chris Hovind and I launched a women's-only soccer format to foster a safe, supportive environment for our soccer sisters. With Helga Schmitt's help, we aimed to reclaim the female camaraderie of the past. Our goal was to create a space where women could connect both on and off the field, sharing experiences and strengthening bonds within our community.



[seattlewomenssoccer.com](http://seattlewomenssoccer.com)

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**2025 Helga Schmitt, Sue Boettcher, Chris Hovind**



**August 2025: SWS has a Special Event celebrating the Queens of Seattle Women playing Modified Safe Games. Brandi Mitchell and Kaissa Gurvine join us. Bellevue, WA**



**March 2026: Chris Hovind and Sue Boettcher talk with Lauren Barnes (Seattle Reign) regarding Seattle Women's Soccer...Modified Safe Games**



**December, 2025: SWS Tournament Arena Sports, Redmond, WA**

While Walking Soccer is the standardized term used to align with international football formats, the specific concept can be challenging to promote locally. Consequently, we play Modified Safe Games, which utilize rules nearly identical to traditional walking soccer. This rebranding effort helps us reach a wider audience by focusing on safety and accessibility while maintaining the core excitement and health benefits of the original sport.

- **Low impact Pace**
- **No contact**
- **No heading** to prevent injury. No concussions, please!
- **Inclusive play:** Small-sided games (3v3 to 8v8) that emphasize connection.
- **Ball height restriction**
- **No Blasted Balls** (high velocity restriction, player avoidance)
- **Kick-ins**
- **Indirect restarts**

## **Our SWS Expanded to Tucson**

Invited by Kaissa Gurvine, our SWS posse expanded to Tucson for the Inaugural Legendary Women's Tournament in December 2025. Over four days, we demonstrated Modified Safe Games with original 85er player Denise Boyer Merdich participating with us, marking a significant milestone as we brought our unique mission and passion for the game to Arizona. Soccer legends Denise Boyer Merdich, Ruth Harker, and Linda Gancitano led clinics and shared invaluable historical insights. It was a very well-run tournament and we are looking forward to participating again in December 2026.



**Denise Boyer-Merdich gives instruction to participants at Legendary Women's Cup Soccer Tournament in December 2025.**



**December 2025: Seattle players at the Legendary Women's Cup Tournament, Tucson Arizona**



**SWS Special Event with Denise Boyer-Merdich. Starfire Sports, Tukwila, March 2026**

**Denise instructed on skills and discussed tactical ideas.**

**Denise is front row, 2<sup>nd</sup> from left.**

## **2026 Walking Soccer in Seattle**

- **Seattle Women's Soccer...Modified Safe Games / Women Only**
- **Big Foot Walking Soccer Club / Co-Rec**
- **SCASA - Everett / Co-rec**

### **Out of State:**

- **Oahu, Hawaii / Co-Rec**
- **San Diego, California / Co-Rec**
- **Tucson, Arizona ... Modified Safe Games / Women Only**
- **Vancouver BC / Co - Rec**
- **Toronto, BC / Co Rec**
- **Los Angeles, Conestoga Park / Co- Rec**

### **Fun Facts:**

- **Over 2000 teams in the UK play Walking Football.**
- **More women in the UK play walking football than the running game.**
- **Walking soccer has the same benefits as the running game without the stress that running puts on the body.**

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