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PickUp

Organizing a leisurely game of football, volleyball or any sport isn't as easy as it sounds. Often times it's hard to find a time when all or even a sufficiently large number of your friends are available, let alone feel like playing the same game. And trekking to a park just hoping you can find other people playing your favorite game, or any game, is usually a waste of time. It would seem that applications like Facebook or Craiglist could help to both get out the word about a game and help eager players to find it. However, Facebook's events are centered only around your friends which often isn't a large enough group to find available and willing players. Craigslist could theoretically work but because there is no section dedicated to pick up games, no one that I can tell posts or looks for games there.

The gap that I believe should be filled or closed is between the highly organized and monetized intramural and club sports, and the completely unorganized, impromptu games that are formed between friends and even strangers on a sunny afternoon. Intramural and club sports are very enjoyable and reliable in terms of teammates, opponents, and equipment; but they require both money and commitment to an entire season of games. On the other side spontaneous pickup games require no money or commitment, but are hard to find or create. So if pickup games could acquire some of the organization of intramural and club sports without the cost and commitment, people might be encouraged to play outside and live happier, healthier lives.

I believe a mobile phone app is needed that can renew local pickup games and help communities to self organize games of all types. Such an app should allow users to both create and search for game announcements. Games should be described by a minimum of three parameters, game type (i.e. Football, basketball, etc.), location, and skill level. While game type and location should seem obvious and straight forward, skill level is more involved. It requires first the development of some scale, which should be chosen carefully so as not to scare people into thinking they should play at a low skill level and at the same time not embolden people into over classifying themselves. Matching people correctly based on skill level, I believe is very important to people's experience, as the extremely skilled and serious, will be unhappy if this app attracts less skilled to their game; and visa versa the shy less skilled will not want to try going to another game if they are embarrassed or feel unwanted. Allowing for the creation of profiles that stored a user's home location, skill level and favorite games would allow for many other features, as well as eliminate steps for recurring users. With profiles the application can allow users to give feedback about one another that could alert users about an overly aggressive user, or about excellent organizers. Profiles also allow for an alert system, which could notify users if a game of their favorite type is being planned near them, or remind a user that a game they planned on attending is happening soon. This leads to another feature, the ability to rsvp or announce that you are either thinking about or are planning on attending a game. Having an idea

about how many people will show up even if it is rough can help make sure that, no one is left out if too many people want to play and no one wastes their time if not enough people want to play. In my experience pickup games that get started quickly last longer and have a lower rate of breaking up than those which slowly develop as people shy from making decisions like how to pick teams. In an effort to accelerate the start up time of games the application should allow for teams to be chosen online before people show up to play. An interesting idea that might help motivate people to compete is allowing users to issue challenges, that are either directed at a specific group of people or open to anyone who thinks they can win. The challenge system should also be designed to match up groups if they have both made a challenge in the same sport within the same region. I think that both the online team formation, and challenges will allow people to feel more comfortable playing a game with strangers, as they can at least plan who will be on their team ahead of time. Another thing to consider is that some games might require special equipment or the rental of space in which case the planner should be able to post such information, hopefully leading to people pitching in for said costs.

A model user of this proposed application might have wanted to join a club or intramural team but either couldn't find enough teammates that could play at the specified time or he himself couldn't commit to the specified time. Without the proposed application this person might give up on organized games and end up playing only off the cuff games of catch. However, with this application this person could either create or join games in his or her area and decide when he can play and who he wants to play with, either based on other users feedback or his past experiences. Or he could put together a team of friends and submit a challenge that can be played around their schedule rather than the schedule of an intramural referee. And hopefully this person will get outside more, and have fun in a competitive environment that suites him best.