

TIME TO PLAY BALL IN ADULT COMMUNITIES- By Marci Shatzman– Sun Sentinel

Stickball season starts Nov. 7 in the active adult communities, and this year about 160 guys in 12 developments will compete.

Although it's technically a sport, you won't find this New York street game in the Olympics. And the guys who run the Palm Beach County Senior Stickball League will be the first to tell you it's more sportsmanship, camaraderie and recapturing their youth than athletics.

"Every team makes the playoffs," said Alan Goldberg of Bellaggio, a league vice president. "At this age, most of us are playing for fun. It keeps us young and vibrant, and everyone looks forward to playing every year."

As another veep, Paul Lefkowitz of Valencia Lakes, explains the rules, "You must be over 50, there's no running involved and fielding is optional."

But don't make the mistake of thinking the games are just an escape, and the players don't take them seriously. Because this year, the senior leaguers won't play the Wycliffe Stiffs for the first time because of scheduling.

"The guys wanted to play more often, so we splintered off," said senior league president Marty Friedman.

"We'll see how it works out," said Mike Braksmayer, captain of the Bellaggio Blue Diamonds, one of two teams in that development.

But there are no hard feelings. Wycliffe's Marty "The Commish" Ross confirmed they're sitting out the 2008-2009 session. "This is because our hectic schedules in retirement living doesn't allow for two days a week for stickball," he wrote via e-mail. The Commish said he and his cohort Harry Klaff "wish them a great season."

The Wycliffe Stiffs Stickball League's four teams with 75 players will play Tuesdays. They kick off their seventh season on Nov. 4. The senior league's eight teams will play each other at 1:30 and 3:30 p.m. Fridays on a 206-foot field, allowing four teams to play at once.

Both leagues play at Village Park in Wellington, stickball central in Palm Beach County. There are painted bases, covered bleachers, and the village even put up a Stickball Boulevard street sign and provides jugs of water.

But that's not enough stickball for some people.

There are pick-up games twice a week in the Bellaggio clubhouse parking lot. Some of the guys also belong to an indoor league at the Hochman Jewish Community Center in western Boynton, where most of these developments are located.

Paul said the Hagen Ranch Gators, made up of players from Ponte Vecchio, Avalon Estates, Valencia Lakes, Venetian Isles and Floral Lakes, play Sundays at the dead end of Flavor Pict Road.

Buena Vida, Mizner Falls, Valencia Falls, Valencia Palms and Villaggio all have teams in the senior league as well. Marty Ross said he and Harry are working with Barry Schuler to develop a team in Cascade Lakes for the senior league.

For stickballers who didn't know the league existed and want to form a team in their development, this season of 14 games is set. But Marty Friedman said spectators are welcome, and he can expand the league next season.