



TOUGH ACT TO FOLLOW

» Sports pundits say the toughest act to follow is replacing a legend as coach. Imagine what **Roberto Donadoni** must be feeling. The former midfielder was named the new Italian men's soccer coach, replacing Marcello Lippi, who resigned just a few days after guiding the Azzurri to a fourth World Cup title. The 42-year-old played in the 1990 and '94 World Cups.



Good start to second half

Bobby Kielty hitting third? due to injuries, that is where the seldom-used outfielder was as the A's opened the second half of their season. Good thing, too. Kielty came through with the go-ahead RBI single in the 11th and later scored a vital insurance run as the A's beat the Red Sox 5-4 in a showdown of AL division leaders. » PAGE 61

THE NEW GAME IN TOWN



Netball is a type of basketball — with no backboard and no dribbling

By Matt Elliser
Staff Writer

It's something Natalie Notaney thought she sacrificed when she left Australia for San Francisco, a game that produces national celebrities abroad but draws blank stares in the States.

But there she was Wednesday night on Treasure Island, laughing and sweating along with her teammates on the San Francisco Southernstars while playing netball, a kind of basketball hybrid as customary in Commonwealth countries as hoops is here.

The Stars draw netball players from Australia, Canada, England, Hong Kong, New Zealand and South Africa. And even some Americans have started showing up, slowly coming around to what team member Minette Viljoen calls "probably the most popular women's sport in the world."

For most of the players, it is the camaraderie as much as the competition that brings them out.

"I enjoy netball, but I enjoy the friends just as much," Notaney said. "Having something fun and familiar really helps when you're settling into a new country. It eases the culture shock."

Netball was created in 1895, when Louisiana gym teacher Calara Baer misinterpreted the rules of basketball. The game is played 7-on-7 using a mix between a basketball and a volleyball and attempting to score on a 10-foot-high basket that has no backboard. Players are restricted to certain areas of the court, cannot dribble and must pass or shoot in less than three seconds, with defenders forced to stay three feet away from attacking players.

The Stars have come a long way since Viljoen arrived from South Africa three years ago. Then, she was happy to find a tiny cluster as players who shared her passion. Now, the team has recently completed construction on the first official 100-by-50-foot netball court in Northern California at the Golden Gate Rugby



Minette Viljoen, right, takes a shot during a recent practice. — Jason Steinberg/Special to The Examiner

Club on Treasure Island and will host its first tournament this weekend.

Seven teams from around the country will compete Saturday, with games starting at 9 a.m., to be followed Sunday with an open instructional event. Admission to both is free.

"We're extremely excited," Viljoen said. "Netball is passed through the generations at home, but I thought I'd have to take up basketball when I moved here. We've worked hard to get more people playing netball."

Wendy Flynn had never heard of netball while growing up as a recreational basketball and volleyball player in Los Angeles, but got hooked when a friend from New Zealand brought her out to see the Stars practice.

"In the rest of the world, women in their 20s, 30s and 40s stay active with team sports, which isn't always the case here," said Flynn, 29. "These girls are a hoot."

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NETBALL FACTS

- » Invented in 1895 by Louisiana gym teacher Calara Baer, who misinterpreted the rules of basketball
- » Played predominantly by women
- » Extremely popular in Commonwealth countries, including Australia and New Zealand
- » Seven players on each team
- » Ball is a cross between a volleyball and a basketball
- » Court is 100-by-50 feet
- » No dribbling allowed
- » 10-foot goal with no backboard; rim is smaller than basketball
- » Each score is worth one point
- » Players are restricted to certain areas on the court
- » Players must pass or shoot the ball within three seconds of receiving it
- » Non-contact sport
- » Defenders must be three feet away from attacking players

For more information, go to www.starsnetball.com