



area Italian restaurants, vicariously trying to recreate the warm, exuberant ambience of Italian homes. We also enjoy an unparalleled competitive camaraderie in our quest for a trophy awarded annually. Two of our *circolo* are recognized "international champions." The *circolo* now plays a pre-Christmas mini-tournament at Washington's Holy Rosary Catholic Church against visiting professors from Italy and conducts an annual awards dinner in conjunction with the International Lodge of the Order Sons of Italy in America in January at the Tivoli restaurant. Our *soci* would, indeed, prefer to play weekly, if only our wives would consent!

*Enrico Dàvoli is a pediatrician. He is also the president of the Circolo della Briscola and a very active member of the Italian community in the Washington area.*

## Soccer — The Beautiful Game

by Walter A. Roberts III

I have been playing soccer since I was six years old. When I graduated from DeMatha Catholic High School in 1993, though, I thought that my soccer-playing days were essentially over. I enrolled at the historically Black Morehouse College, which at that time did not have an NCAA soccer team. But it did have a club team that competed at a high level, and I joined the team my third day at school. I became team captain, manager, and assistant coach. I also spearheaded the team's efforts to become an NCAA Division 2 team. We had players from all over the globe, from the Caribbean to West Africa; that was my first experience of the international nature of the game.

After completing college and returning to Washington, D.C., from Atlanta, I began to look into the amateur game in the metropolitan area. In my efforts to find an adult team to play with, I was amazed to learn how significantly soccer had grown over the short time of four years. In just a few brief searches on the Internet and a few pick-up games on the Mall, I came across all types of contact names and leagues. I found ethnic leagues, men's amateur leagues, co-ed leagues, women's leagues, embassy leagues, recreational leagues, and I was stunned to find out that the youth leagues that I had grown up playing in had almost tripled in size.

Seeing this growth and also having been armed in my college experience with the passion not only for playing but also for coaching and teaching the game, I decided to find a career in soccer. I am presently the athletic director for DC SCORES, a non-profit organization that operates a soccer league along with creative writing workshops

in 16 elementary schools throughout the District of Columbia. With my mother, I coach the Washington soccer club, Isis, an under-12 urban girls' travel team. I also coach an under-12 boys' recreational team, comprised of children from the DC SCORES program.

I particularly enjoy coaching these youth teams because each reflects a special piece of the future of soccer in this country. Soccer is a unique sport in that it has few limits or boundaries; it is similar to a universal language, spoken by all who have ever touched their foot to a ball. It is undoubtedly the most popular sport in the world. On both of my teams, the cultural representation is a mirror

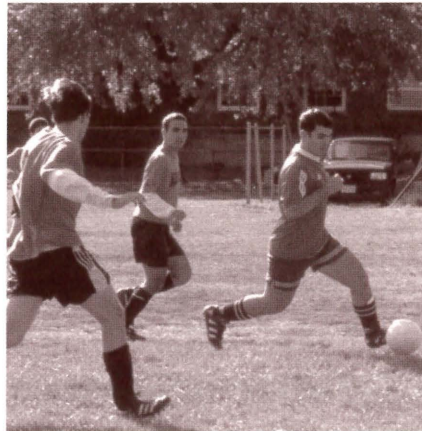


Photo: A spirited game of soccer takes place on the field at Jefferson Junior High School in Southwest D.C.

Photo by Harold Dorwin



of communities throughout the District. Isis and the DC SCORES team both bring together children of Black and Latino descent, which has the positive effect of erasing fears, combating prejudices, and uniting families.

The sport of soccer has given me more than I ever expected in return, and I can only imagine where it will lead me in the future. I have kept my need for competition alive by playing with a Peruvian amateur team called La Univarsitaro, which, like my former college team and the two teams I coach, is extremely diverse and dynamic. I am also a proud fan and season ticket holder of DC United, the Major League Soccer champion three out of the past four years. To my delight, the sport of soccer is thriving in this country and is alive and well in Washington, D.C., at all levels transcending age, ethnicity, race, gender, and class.

*When not on the soccer field, Walter A. Roberts III lives in Northwest D.C.*

## Who's Got Next? Pick-Up Basketball in Washington, D.C.

*by Tom Blagburn*

The competition is always intense, the rhythm almost hypnotic, the jukes and bounce of the ball practically non-stop! On playgrounds across America, and in Washington, D.C., in particular, the first yell is “who’s got next?” Who is choosing the next pick-

up basketball team? The game, frequently called “b-ball” in D.C., is an asphalt theater of jumpers, blocked shots, sweaty T-shirts, fast breaks, and awesome dunks. Players have been known to shovel snow off the court to start a pick-up basketball game. Over the past 30 years, I have shoveled off a few courts myself.

Pick-up ball is a highly competitive training sport where skills are developed and refined. Some of us progress; others seem to be able to go no further with their talent — a slice of life. A game is comprised of two, three, four, or five players. Nothing energizes the play like the chat-

ter and critiques from the sidelines. Shouts and screams such as “shoot the ‘J’” and “D-up” drive the play to new heights. Great performance is always rewarded with a boost in game reputation.

The game’s rich history is full of legendary players whose playground heroics often transcend the game itself. Elgin Baylor, John Thompson, Ernie Cage,

James “Sleepy” Harrison, “Monk” Milloy, Bernard Levy, Dave Bing, Jerry Chambers, Frank Williams, “Chicken Breast,” Ray Savoy, “Biggie” Cunningham, Bill Gaskins, Lonnie Perrine, Austin Carr, James Brown, Aaron Covington, and Melvin Middleton are just a few of D.C.’s finest. I remember clearly the rainbow jump shots of Joe Carr, the keen shooting accuracy of Art “Bunny” Perry, the adroit cross-over of Reggie Green, the bricks of seven-foot Art Beatty — each representative of so many players who loved the game. Ask anybody across the city, these players were the “b-ballers” of summer in their day.

Endless captured moments of play can be debated and disputed. Post-game analysis is part

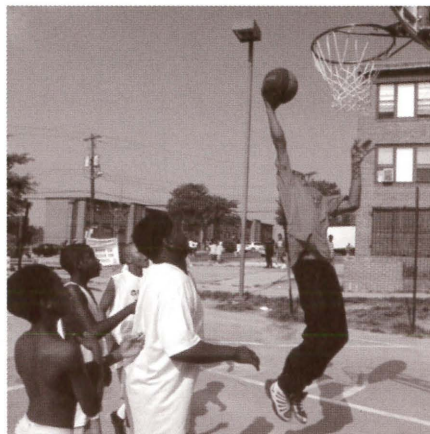


Photo: Young athletes enjoy a pick-up game at Lincoln Heights Day block party in Northeast D.C. Photo by Harold Dorwin