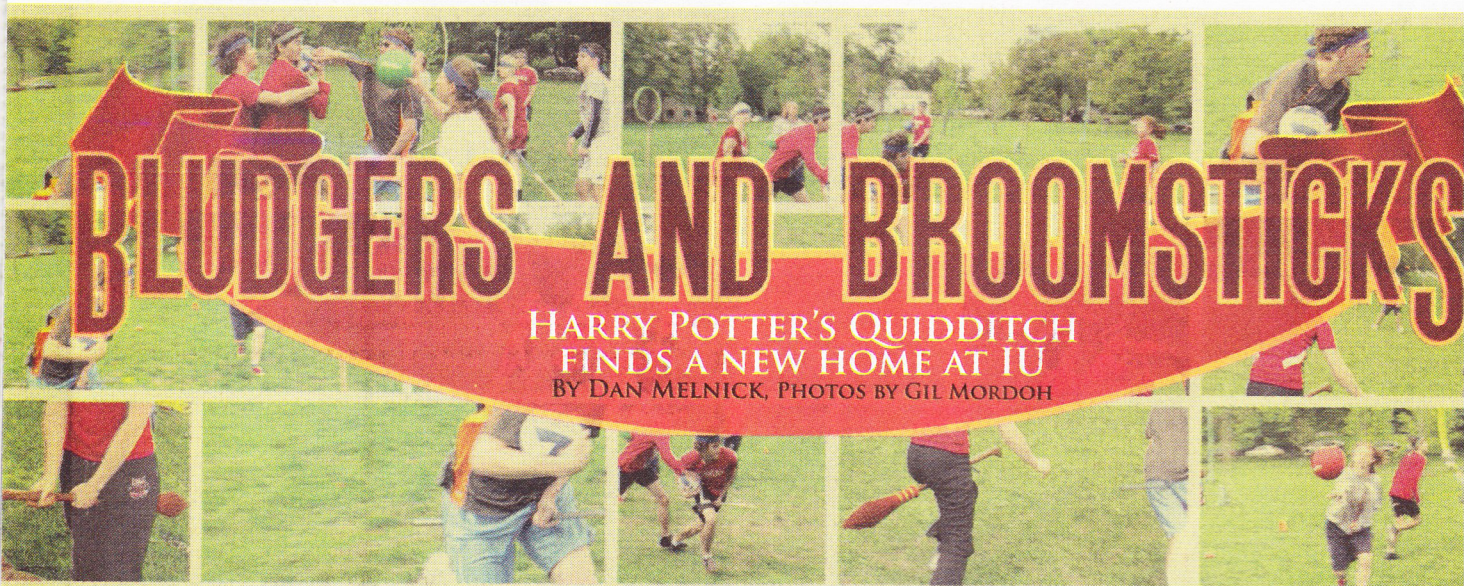


*The Harry Potter franchise has made the term "quidditch" a household name. The novels and later the movies have immortalized the fictional sport, depicting Harry and friends dashing, diving, and soaring on their flying broomsticks through the grandstands of the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. What was once a literal flight of fancy has since become grounded. Quidditch isn't just played at Hogwarts anymore; broomstick-wielding individuals can be found flying – well, running – around campuses nationwide.*



Chronicles of magic can trace the roots of quidditch back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but for us muggles, the magically disinclined denizens of the real world, the modern day version of quidditch began in the early 2000s. Ever since the fictional sport first appeared in the pages of Harry Potter, fans have been enamored with the magical game and have attempted to adapt it into a real world setting.

It wasn't until 2005, however, when a group at Middlebury College in Vermont started their own intramural club and set down one of the first versions of an official rules doctrine. Their club quickly grew into the Intercollegiate Quidditch Association in an attempt to coordinate a league for other campuses. In 2010, Commissioner Adam Benepe, incorporated the league as a nonprofit organization and officially renamed it as the International Quidditch Association. And it's been growing ever since. The league may be aimed at 18-22 year olds, but you don't have to be in college to play. The association acts more like a grand coordinator and provides an official rulebook, but anyone can start a team and join the ranks. Additionally, the IQA hosts a World Cup event every year to determine the best of the best. The latest World Cup, their fifth, was held in New York City, hosted 96 teams from 25 US states and four nations, comprising 1,600 athletes, and was attended by over 10,000 spectators. People can't get enough quidditch.

For those unfamiliar with the Harry Potter series written by J. K. Rowling in which the game as originated, quidditch is a sport played by wizards and witches on flying broomsticks. The goal is to score points by throwing balls through hoops and trying to catch a feisty magical object called a "snitch", while knocking, crashing, and bashing each other in the process. Rowling invented the game and its rules for her characters, but sport is so engaging, it's featured in many of the series' subplots and has now literally jumped out of the pages. The IQA's official rulebook states

"Quidditch is a fast-paced, fully co-ed contact sport with seven athletes on each team playing four different positions and using three different balls. Every player must have a broom between his or her legs at all times."

Rowling may have invented quidditch, but she has nothing to do with organizing the league. In fact, both Warner Brothers Entertainment and Rowling are very protective of the Harry Potter brand, challenging Benepe to jump through a few hoops of their own in order to make the International Quidditch Association a reality. "I established it as a non-profit so as not to threaten them," Benepe says, "and also raised money for one of J.K. Rowling's favored charities, Book Aid International. We do book drives and youth quidditch programs, and in general find ways to make quidditch a positive force in society, which are principles near and dear to Rowling's heart." The organization has also opened a dialog with Warner Brothers and are in talks with them regarding a license. Rowling has, through her agent, confided that she is "surprised and delighted" that people are playing a real-life version of the fictional game she wrote about. Nevertheless, she apparently has no interest in becoming the league's first commissioner, despite the prestige that would come with such a position.

At current count, there are over 950 teams registered for free on IQA's website. The majority of teams come from the United States, but there are multiple squads from Africa and even Australia. Of those, 150 are official members which means that they pay dues and will compete for the quidditch World Cup the organization holds every year. In the past, the massive tournaments were open for general admission. Anyone who wanted to compete, could, as long as they paid their membership fees. With the upcoming 6<sup>th</sup> annual World Cup going to be held in Kissimmee, Florida on April 13-14 – just a magical express train ride away from Universal Studio's Harry Potter World amusement park – this will be the first year that teams

will have to win their place to compete. In previous years, the World Cup events were open to any team that wanted to pay the admission price, but with the rise in popularity, this practice is no longer feasible. There just isn't enough space. So instead, for the first time, teams will have to earn the ability to compete based on their overall record. And that's just what Indiana University senior Emily Deckard plans to do.

A longtime fan of the book series, Deckard eats, sleeps, and breathes quidditch. She has seen the spectacle of the quidditch World Cup



**Elizabeth Morgan modeling her Scarlet Falcon.**

first hand, having visited the event last year and meeting with Commissioner Benepe about how to start her own club. After months of planning, meetings, and logistics, Indiana University can now boast about its first quidditch team: the Midnight Snipes.

Although creating an official club through IU proved to be more difficult than Deckard imagined. "They were really nervous about us starting a club," she said. "It's a very violent sport. There's physical contact. IU was concerned that we weren't taking ourselves seriously enough. We had sheets of paper that people would sign that said 'if I get injured or killed today, I won't blame anybody but myself.' "

Quidditch is a rough sport and its rules are complicated. The game is played in a "pitch" which can be any oval-shaped field that is 48 yards long by 33 yards wide. Like a soccer field, it has designated zones at either end for scoring opportunities. Instead of a goal, there is a formation of three hoops. And like soccer, these hoops are guarded by a "keeper." With teams of seven, the object of the game is to score the most points. In order to do that, certain members of each team, called "chasers," must throw a "quaffle" (a volleyball) through an opposing hoop to score a 10-point goal. The keeper tries to stop them. The keeper gets defensive help from two "beaters" who use "bludgers" (dodgeballs) to hurl at opponents, stunning them and forcing them to retreat to the other side of the pitch. Amidst all of this chaos, a "seeker" tries to catch the snitch, for an extra 30 points and the signal to end the game.



In the Harry Potter series, the snitch was a winged metal sphere that zipped around the pitch with lightning fast speed. As no such object exists, the snitch is played by a runner, who tucks the object onto a belt like a flag football player. The runner doesn't belong to either team and is forced to stay on the field while being hunted by the seekers. Because the game only ends once the snitch is caught, particularly wily snitches can cause the game to go on indefinitely. According to the IQA, the average quidditch match should be around 22 minutes long. There are various clauses to prevent the snitch from being caught too quickly, but the game is intended to fluctuate wildly on time length. Quidditch players must be constantly aware of what's happening around them. And everything is going on at the same time. If that wasn't

(Above) Elizabeth Morgan chasing Daniel Greenberg as he runs towards the hoops with the quaffle. Left to Right Background Abby Koop, Glen McCracken, and Max McLennan.

(Right) Glen McCracken tries to steal the quaffle from Steven Figgins. (From left to right in background, for ID purposes, are Mary Wright, Tisha Banks, Steven Whyte and - actually we're not sure who the girl on the right is!)

enough, all players are required to run with a broom between his or her legs at all time.

"It's incredibly difficult to run with a broom because you're holding onto it," Deckard says. "It feels really awkward and I make every guy on the team wear a cup. When you dip down to pick up the ball you're so limited it's like trying to play rugby with only one hand." The coach of the Midnight Snipes, Steven Figgins, a sophomore at IU, agrees. "It's pretty tough. Quidditch is described as a mix of rugby, tag, and dodgeball. There's tackling and you can run through people. It's a very difficult sport." Harry and friends play in their school robes, but as of yet, there isn't an official IQA quidditch uniform. The Snipes play in t-shirts and shorts, and recommend shin guards and cleats. The only stipulation IQA enforces is that each position must wear a specifically colored headband so players can easily recognize each other and their role on the team.

Deckard has relegated herself to the position of team director, not captain. She enjoys playing recreationally rather than



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# QUIDDITCH LEXICON

**QUIDDITCH** - sport played by witches and wizards on flying brooms

**MUGGLE** - the name of a nonmagic user

**PITCH** - the field in which quidditch is played upon

**CHASERS** - the goal scorers

**QUAFFLES** - the balls used to score goals

**BEATERS** - the defenders

**BLUDGERS** - the ball used to incapacitate other players

**SEEKERS** - the position responsible for finding the snitch

**SNITCH** - a fluttering object worth extra points and catching it marks the end of the match

competitively. "I'm not violent enough to play this sport," she says, jokingly. "I make it possible for them to play and I try to keep their brains five years in the future as well as on the field." She means that her goal is not just starting a quidditch team, but ensuring its longevity. Deckard will be graduating soon and will eventually have to leave the Snipes, so she wants to make sure that the team is left in good hands. There's nothing stopping a club from scrimmaging whenever they want to, but if a team wants to stay competitive, they must participate in various tournaments and league matches to increase their record.

Currently, Deckard is in charge of recruitment, while leaving the technical coaching matters to Figgins. "For drills," Figgins says, "I try and see what would work to help build the fundamentals such as passing. For strategy, I try and see who works well together, so when we do end up playing games, the people who mesh well end up on the field at the same time."

The team practices twice a week on the "IU Quidditch Pitch," the grassy area behind the Jordan Avenue parking garage. Most of the equipment is distributed amongst team members to foster shared responsibility and everything meets IQA regulation sizes and shapes. Brooms for instance, have to be 40 inches in length, but there's some

leeway as to what constitutes a broom. "The Harvard team plays with Swiffers," Figgins says. "Everybody plays with something different. Somebody just brought a feather duster the other day that was just long enough to qualify."

Bludgers and brooms aside, perhaps the most appealing aspect for quidditch-philes is the camaraderie and friendship the sport fosters. It's one of few competing athletic disciplines that is coed. The IQA rulebook states that at least two members of a team must be of

**Maddie Jeffers launches a bludger as Steven Figgins and Daniel Greenburg fight Glen McCracken for the quaffle. (Left to right background: Tisha Burks, Mary Wright, Steven Whyte, and Jacob Neidlinger)**



the opposite sex. The rulebook states, "We believe that if men and women learn to compete equally, they will learn to respect and value each other's abilities regardless of gender." This goes



**Tisha Burks is about to beat Daniel Greenberg with the bludger as he runs with the quaffle. Glen McCracken in background.**

hand in hand with Deckard's philosophy toward the sport. She's a strong proponent that anyone who wants to sign up can play, athletic ability notwithstanding. A roster spot on The Midnight Snipes is open for anyone willing. The playing roster may change when it comes to league matches and competing for the world cup. The Snipes will want to field their best, but "so far everybody has this eagerness to learn and participate," Figgins says in response to training teammates who haven't played sports in the past.

Right now, the Snipes are still building

developing their strategies and finding their stride through regular practices and scrimmages. They recently competed in their first invitational tournament in South Bend and won, 240-40. The IQA hosts specific regional games in which participation is mandatory; other than those qualifying matches, it's up to the individual clubs to find matches and other opportunities to play. Most have turned to the online community and have created group facebook pages to attract attention and opponents. It's everyone's hope to increase their record and make it into this year's World Cup event. As the league is far too large to create a season's worth of games for every team, they instead hold sanctioned matches and tournaments and record only those standings, but only the 150 membership paying teams are treated in such a fashion. The World Cup is invitation only. If your team wants to compete, then it must abide by the league rules and win the correct games to qualify.

Quidditch may be a recent phenomenon but it's here to stay. There have already been talks about further ways to popularize the sport. One of these involves doing away with the brooms altogether, but the quidditch community has rejected this with a resounding "no." "We are the Harry Potter generation," Deckard says. "It stands for so much more than just a book series that people liked. It's a way of thinking creatively. Thinking about things a little more whimsically. Quidditch is more than just competition. Its creativity and community combined to give everyone a chance to get involved and express themselves entirely."

**QUIDDITCH IS MORE THAN JUST COMPETITION. IT'S A WAY OF THINKING CREATIVELY.**

—EMILY DECKARD