

WHAT IS BOCCE?

Bocce is a precision sport closely related to lawn bowling.

Developed into its present form in Italy, it is played around Europe and in countries with Italian immigrants. The sport usually becomes popular with the wider community as it is picked up by the second generation.

The aim of the game is to place one's balls as near as possible to a target ball called the jack. The opponent attempts to place his/her balls nearer to this jack or move the bocce balls sitting in the way.

— www.seattlebocce.com,
<http://en.wikipedia.org>

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Staff Writer

They play on warm, sunny days and when it snows, sleets or rains.

In Vaughan, they are drawn to recreational facilities like the Father Ermanno Bulfon Community Centre, Chancellor Community Centre, Maple Community Centre and Dufferin Clark Community Centre.

In Richmond Hill, they visit the Rouge Woods Community Centre.

What attracts them to these places are a series of 90-foot elongated playing courts layered by a synthetic surface.

Their game is indoor bocce.

Bearing a strong resemblance to lawn bowling, bocce can be played on a social level or in a highly competitive manner, in which participants often raise their voices or use expressive body language.

The sport can even build team morale.

Domenic Colalillo, program manager at the Father Ermanno Bulfon centre, says there's no question bocce's huge following is concentrated in one ethnic group.

"Any bocce facility is 110 per cent Italian," Mr. Colalillo said with a smile.

And Vaughan has a massive Italian population.

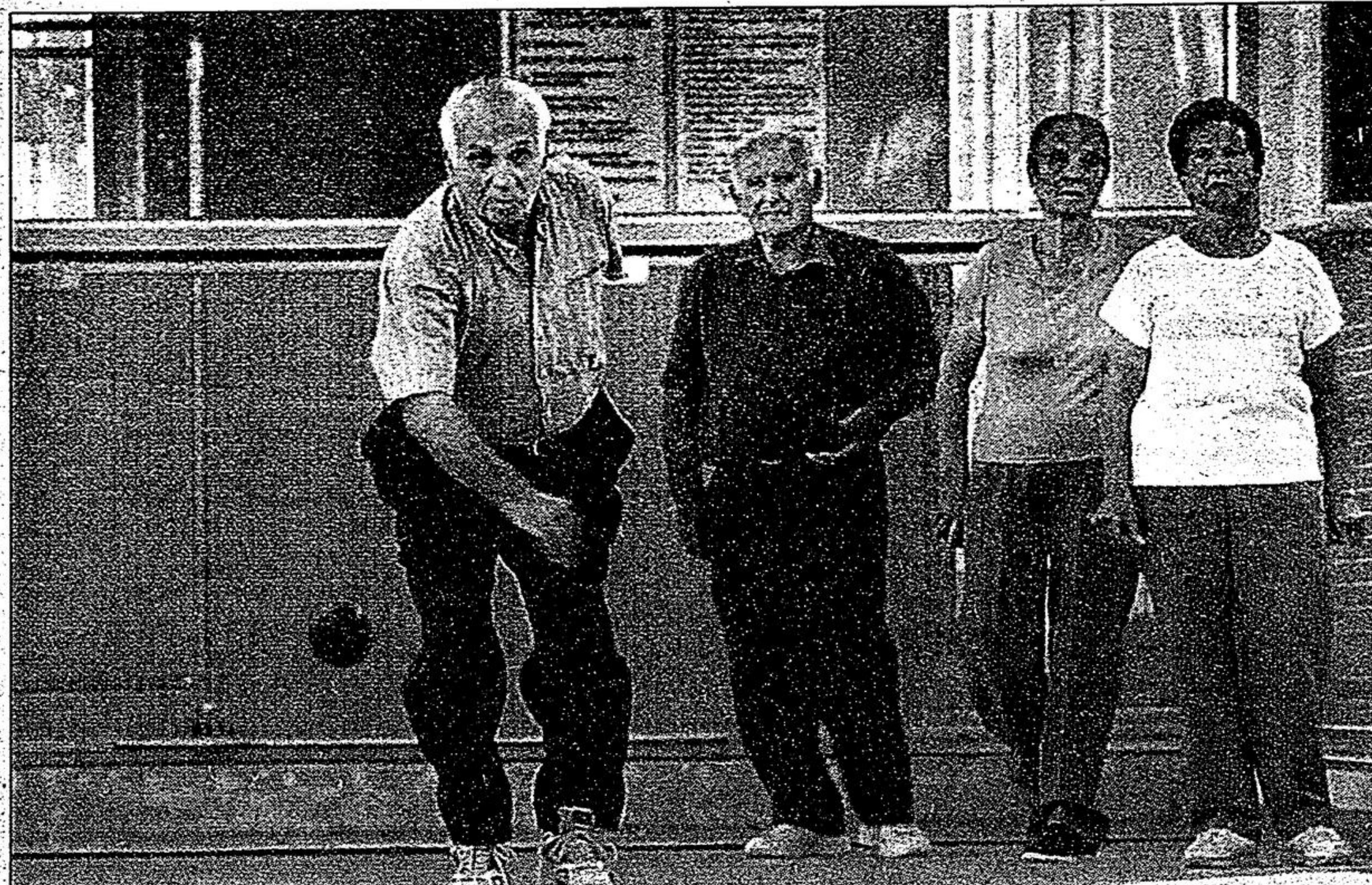
Not only do these courts fill a void during winter months when the game can't be played outdoors. Even on the hot, muggy days of summer, players sometimes head inside.

"The buildings with indoor bocce these days are climate controlled and court surfaces are all synthetic. You don't have to deal with crushed gravel or stone or dust. The courts are user friendly and clean," Mr. Colalillo said.

Noting there's a demand for the courts year-round, he said peak playing hours are from 12:30 to 4 p.m., when retirees are out in force.

As popular as the game is, Mr. Colalillo sees disturbing trends.

"Close to 90 per cent of the players are in the 60 to 65 age bracket," he said. "It's a small group, but the small number that we have they use the courts regu-



buying into BOCCE

*Organizers of popular sport
aim to attract younger players*

STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Salvatore Lombardi tosses the bocce ball while competitors Vincenzo Santarangelo, Angelina Genua and Antoinette Desanto look on during a game at Father Ermanno Bulfon Community Centre in Woodbridge. The pallino and an opponent's ball are in the foreground and are a target for his throw.

larly and they are vocal about their game."

Lauren Steckley, manager of the Rouge Woods Community Centre, concurred.

"We do have a steady group of around 200 members who are mostly first generation people and our membership really isn't growing that much," she said.

Shifting ethnic populations are also having an affect.

"At Dufferin and Clark we had four courts that were popular years ago. But with the population now changing there are fewer players," Mr. Colalillo said.

He fears the game could go the way of the dinosaur unless measures are taken to preserve it with new blood via a youth league.

He also thinks bocce enthusiasts must try to do a better job of promoting the sport.

"The game is very relaxing. It's a friendly way to kill off a few hours. You won't get hurt per se. You can walk up and down and there's a lot of socializing and kibitzing among players."

Costs are low, too.

A set of balls, which Mr. Colalillo said will last a long time, might cost about \$70 to \$80.

The only other piece of equipment required, he added, are shoes, necessary to avoid tracking outside debris on to the court.

In some areas of York Region, efforts are being made to heighten the awareness of indoor bocce.

In Markham, the Markham Bocce Association and town joined forces to construct an indoor court at Markham Centennial Arena.

The 10,000-square-foot facility is part of the second phase of the arena's expansion. It will host four, regulation-sized indoor synthetic courts.

Carolina Moretti, an association

WHO TO CONTACT

- Markham Bocce Association: 905-472-4171
- Father Ermanno Bulfon Community Centre: 905-879-8732
- Chancellor Community Centre: 905-265-0097
- Maple Community Centre: 905-832-2377
- Dufferin Clark Community Centre: 905-905-832-8554
- Rouge Woods Community Centre: 905-787-1441

spokesperson, is optimistic the indoor courts will entice more people to take up the sport and add to her group's 125 members.

For 10 years, the association has encountered problems promoting the sport because of its location in the north end of Markham.

As well, the court is in a converted industrial warehouse that is not large enough to house full-sized courts.

"Being in the location that we were, we weren't attracting as many members as we'd like," she said.

"The community centre is more viable and has easier access. We want to introduce the sport to the entire community and even get people from Thornhill."

Once the facility is in place (fall of 2006 is a tentative completion date), Ms. Moretti said the association hopes to recruit younger players. She notes some youngsters are already taking to the game.

"In doing research, we found special needs youngsters are being bused from Brother Andre Catholic High School and Father Michael McGivney to Vaughan to play the sport indoors," she said.

"Bocce is a great social interactive sport and the kids like it. We would like to introduce it to the schools and into their gym programs."

The association will also be working with other groups, including the Markham Lawn Bowling Club, to recruit players.

"Once people play bocce, we find it's a great team builder because there's lots of interaction. And it can be very competitive," she said.

"Not everyone can play basketball, soccer or hockey. Bocce is a sport everyone can be a part of. Once people play it, they find it's a great game because there's lots of interaction."

"But without the proper exposure, it's hard to do."

Mr. Moretti even goes out on a limb to predict once the facility is up and running, the demand for bocce will grow.

"It could be similar to what soccer experienced 20 years ago," she said.

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