Co-Ed Sports

The Screaming Eagles are friends year

round. In the spring and summer,

the team plays ultimate frisbee and

volleyball and members "always go

out afterwards." In the winter, they

take ski trips together. Like a number

of people in their late 20's to early

30's, they have taken up the sports

they loved in high school and

college, playing softball, soccer and

volleyball in coed leagues.

Neil McKinnon, who founded the

Sport and Social Clubs of Canada,

says when he moved to Vancouver

three years ago he was eager to make

friends and get involved in sports,

but could not find a mixed league to

join. So, he started one. "I wanted to

bring people together, and thought

this could be an opportunity to get

people to do so in a non-competitive

way" he says. The Vancouver league

started out with 150 men and

women playing on 32 teams in a

variety of sports. Now it is a nationwide

operation and boasts more than

10,000 members. There are 500

teams in Vancouver alone.

In the Toronto area, the three

branches of the Sport and Social

Clubs are divided into west, central

and east districts, and have been

running for only a year. Currently

they have more than 5,000 members.

The leagues run all of the popular

sports— volleyball, flag football,

soccer, basketball— as well as twists

on old favourites, such as beach

volleyball, ultimate frisbee and inline

hockey.

Some players have joined as singles,

while others sign up as couples.

Many use the league to complement

their workouts in the gym. For some,

however, it is their only exercise.

Teams play for an hour and a half,

usually at local high schools, or parks

& recreation facilities, and afterwards

often go out to socialize.

“People like it” says Sara Campbell,

who organizes Monday night beach

volleyball for the Toronto East Sport

and Social Club. “There is the

exercise, but the social atmosphere is

equally important”.

While the games are rigorous they

are not competitive, which

McKinnon says was a priority. “I

wanted to create an opportunity for

many people to participate in a

variety of sports and not feel

threatened,” he says.

Hugh Barnsley, who operates a 250-

member league, says his members

are interested in such leagues

primarily for the fitness aspect, but

they also enjoy the opportunity to

meet people with similar interests.

“You see people with no experience

playing the sport, to athletes that

have played continually through the

years, both enjoying themselves,” he

says. Barnsley also organizes mixed

golf games, volleyball tournaments,

camping trips and other social

outings. “We have a diverse range of

members,” he says. “For example

some of our members are actors who

get us discount tickets to shows that

we can go to.”

The cost per season is in the range of

$50–$100 for these leagues, and

while local parks and recreation

departments may offer similar

programs, usually less expensively,

“they do not offer the same social

aspect” according to Barnsley.

The question of who can best

provide these sport leagues is

debateable, as there are always

positives and negatives to be

considered. One fact however does

seem certain and that is, whether

you are a campus recreation

department, municipal recreation

department, a fitness club, a

community group, or an individual

sport entrepreneur, creating

programs that allow people to get

out there and mix it up is healthy

not only for the participants, but

also to the bottom line.