

Polo Carnage on the Tennis Courts

Who knew a crew of banged-up bikers wielding weapons and dirty insults could be so entrancing?



Wounds are the best trophies in bike polo.

Photo by Damon Rao

There's a clatter of mallets hitting the cement, echoed by the sound of bicycles racing into the tennis court. Two teams set themselves up on opposite sides, and with a call of "1 - 2 - 3 - KILL!" the race for the hockey ball in mid-court begins. With ski-poles-turned-mallets in one hand and handlebars in the other, only a fool would get in the path of these bike polo players.

It's been just over a year since bike polo found a home in our city, starting right here in East Vancouver, but after countless hours of practice, the polo-istas fly across the court with ease. Originally meeting every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday at the courts in Grandview Park, now you're more likely to find the polo players behind Britannia School, patiently waiting for the die-hard tennis players to call it quits before claiming the courts.

Bike polo is a distant, scruffy-looking cousin of old-fashioned horse polo. The rules are similar—guide the ball to the goal with your mallet without touching the ground—but every city has a slightly different style. Urban bicycle polo has been played elsewhere in the world for awhile, even beyond North America. Our version crept up via bikers from Portland and Seattle, who have been playing on asphalt for close to a decade.

The courts are a little longer here, the goals a little smaller, but just like other West Coast crews, it's a bit of a fight club, says Lisa Moffat. "Contact rules: bike on bike, body on body, mallet on mallet, but no combinations thereof! We want to keep this safe, you know!"

The DIY ethic is strong in the sport. Players make their own mallets, re-appropriate spaces to play in, and there are regular makeshift bike repairs off court, where players can fix new damage before the next game begins.

Unless it's a tournament, there are no set teams. Instead, mallets are tossed into the court for each game, then blindly divided into two. It's a way to invite anyone to play, newbie or expert, school teacher or bike courier, young or old. And appearances can be deceiving—a thirteen-year-old kid can easily take out older compatriots at weekly games. It is also a way of diluting cliques and potential animosity—the person you battled valiantly may well be your teammate in the next round.

Tournaments are almost as integral as the weekly jousts, and a tournament happens somewhere on the

West Coast at least once a month. This October, there was one in New York City and another in Seattle the following week, and some of the Vancouver players were at both. When Vancouver hosted a tournament in September celebrating their first year anniversary, people came from as far away as Victoria and Portland to play.

And now that winter is upon us? "We get wet," says Simon. Last year the crew found space below the Cambie Bridge. They're currently looking for a lit, covered space for this winter, though the game will go on no matter what. Simon remembers playing on ice last year. "We had to steal a bunch of sidewalk salt to try and clear the court a bit—there were a lot of funny bails that week," he says.

Wounds are the best trophies in this sport and every player is eager to show off their latest scars. Wipe-outs are rarely reason to put a game on hold—it's a sign of where the die-hard polo-ista's priorities lie. But if you're really curious about the grace of bike polo, come and check the sport out at the Cascadia Fall Classic tournament taking place November 3 and 4 at the Grandview tennis (polo!) courts. Chances are you'll want to make a mallet of your own.

How to make a polo mallet, Vancouver-style:

1. Find an old ski pole.¹ Remove the handle and cut off the bottom end.
2. Cut a 2" black plastic pipe to roughly a hand's length.
3. Drill two holes in the pipe, on opposite sides, to slide the ski pole through.
4. Secure the pipe on the end of the pole with a screw.
5. Finish the handle with a rubber table-leg cap and hockey grip tape.
6. Voila! Your fancy, personalised mallet, ready for play!

N.B.: Don't get too attached to it. It'll be trashed before too long. But now you know how to make the next one!

¹ Or a broomstick. Or golf clubs. Or bamboo. Something long, straight, cheap, and sturdy.

Mallet Making Workshops, alongside bike maintenance workshops on Wednesday nights at the PEDAL Bike Depot (<http://www.pedalpower.org>).

A BRUNCH REVIEW

Sunday Morning Chowdown

DUNCAN M. McHUGH

SLICKITY JIM'S CHAT 'N' CHEW
2513 MAIN STREET NEAR BROADWAY
604.873.6760

Recently, when some friends were visiting from out-of-town, I was asked where in the city is my favourite place to go for brunch. The answer was pretty easy: Slickity Jim's Chat 'n' Chew.

It's certainly not the fanciest place, and there are a handful of other brunch places with food that compares to Slickity Jim's. But something about the spirit of the place leaps out at me when I think of the ideal brunch locale.

In fact, I've avoided reviewing Slickity Jim's because it's such a shoo-in for a good review. Amazing name, check. Delicious food, check. Awesome atmosphere that's kitschy without being cloying, check. Agreeable hood, check. Chill but responsive wait staff, check.

Slickity Jim's sort of made the Main and Broadway neighbourhood (I missed the boat on the Good Jacket/Dysfunction Junction good times of the late 1990s). It was Slickity Jim's ostentatious name that drew me into the area and allowed me to discover its wonders.

And it's a good thing that the neighbourhood around Slickity Jim's has so much to offer; it makes for a pleasant walk whilst waiting for a table. Another reason I've avoided reviewing Slickity Jim's is that most weekend mornings it can take a while to get a seat. We managed to fit in a gander at the costume and novelty shop and a quick book purchase at Pulp Fiction during our 20-minute wait.

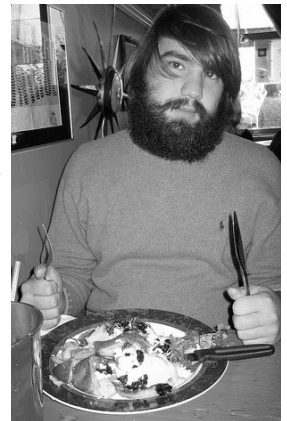
Once seated, coffee was served quickly and I was able to take in the room. They have a great menu that runs the gamut of desired brunch offerings.

Slickity Jim's specialises in bennies, and who am I to order against an establishment's strengths? I chose a chorizo benny with cheddar and roast garlic, and—let me tell you—those of you with a thing for the greasy, sausage-y goodness that only chorizo can provide will cream your jeans at first bite.

The poached eggs were just the right amount of runny (as they were ordered), the roast garlic was cooked just enough to take the garlic sting out of it and the hash browns were done to a lovely crisp, without being dried out. My companions had similar success with vegetarianian dishes.

All in all, it was the fantastic brunch I had expected.

NEXT ISSUE: I'm going to have to find a place to trash.



PRICE (including coffee and tip): \$15

LINEUP: 20 minutes

VEGETARIAN OPTIONS: Yes

SOY MILK? Yes