

Rhinos, pigs, dirt bags have a blast at flag ball

By [Wesley Uno, The Oregonian](#)

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The football teams end their season, but championship games are Sunday



Photo by Kevin Zuercher/Hillsboro Parks and Recreation

Nick Bueter (center of the Man Bear Pig team plays flag football against Nate Mosier (No. 20) and Jim Hoffert (unidentified number) of the Rhinos. Both teams are part of the 2008 Hillsboro Men's Flag Football League.

HILLSBORO -- So, maybe they don't have the name recognition or fan support of the Vikings, Ducks and Beavers, but don't underestimate the testosterone levels of the Rhinos, Man Bear Pig and Brisson Dirt Bags.

"We play hard and we like to win, just like in any sport," said Nick Bueter, 27, captain of Man Bear Pig, one of eight adult flag football teams based in Hillsboro.

The squads are coming off a 10-game season and on Sunday afternoon, four of the best will compete for the league's first championship and, more importantly, bragging rights for the winter. Games are set for 3:45 and 5 p.m.

"Two of the teams are from Intel -- us and the Rhinos," Bueter said. "It's just our first year, but already we're developing a rivalry."

Each team fields 15 players and pays about \$400 to Hillsboro Parks and Recreation Department to participate in the city-run league. Fees mostly cover facility rental and maintenance, insurance and trained officials.

"If they play for us, we can save them some fairly substantial costs and make this a safe sport for everyone," said Kevin Zuercher, program supervisor. "For our first year, the turnout has been fantastic."

Park officials said Hillsboro offers one of the only city-operated flag football leagues in the state. For

participants, that means a regular schedule, consistent playing facility, well-trained officials and fewer bruises at the end of a contest.

"I've played in some pickup leagues in California on some rough facilities, where there have been more than a fair share of collisions and fights," said James Tagumasi, 36, Rhinos team captain. "This is much better."

The game field is 55 by 70 yards and for two 30-minute halves, offensive players, in matching jerseys and shorts, pass and zigzag through their opponent's lines in an effort to score touchdowns. Since no blocking or tackling is allowed, defensive players must try to stop play by snapping off one of the colorful flags hanging from a runner's belt.

Much of the league's enthusiasm comes from its players, especially those in their mid-20s and 30s with high school or college sports experience. They bring wives, girlfriends and buddies who, rain or shine, come out to cheer on the action in the spacious Hillsboro Stadium.

Afterward, everyone retires to one of the local pubs to relive the action.

Because of the noncontact rules of flag football, speed and strategy rule the day, rather than size and brawn.

"You can see a high level of skill sets with the better teams," Tagumasi said. "There's some defense played, but this is mostly a wide-open, offensive game."

Pahl Pagano, 24, formed the nucleus of his team from former football and basketball players who played for Century and Hillsboro high schools and are now in their early 20s.

"We played other rec sports together for a couple of years and wanted to try out flag football, but none of us really wanted to drive into Portland; so, we hit on the idea of starting our own league," Pagano said. "(Hillsboro) Parks had the same idea, and it's really worked out well."

Despite sore muscles, small crowds and an occasional snide remark or e-mail about wannabe athletes, players said flag football is a great stress-reliever and allows them to reminisce or fantasize over gridiron exploits.

"We'd like to get a sponsor and keep the league going on through the spring," Tagumasi said. "For some of us, it's a way to stay in shape and for others it's a way to get into shape. Either way, everyone's having a blast."

Adult Flag Football Championships

When: Sunday: Third-place game at 3:45 p.m.; championship at 5 p.m.

Where: Hillsboro Stadium, 4450 N.W. 229th Ave.

Who: Four best from a league of eight teams. Players are mostly men in their 20s and 30s from Washington County area. Noncontact rules keep injuries to a minimum.

Cost: \$420 a team. Additional \$5 for in-city and \$17 for noncity players.

Information: 503-681-6120 or <http://tinyurl.com/58ymmt>