**Sic ’em, wizards**

*Baylor students form competitive “quidditch” team*



**DOWN TO EARTH—**Playing an earthbound version of Harry Potter’s quidditch is great exercise, participants say. Baylor student players are, left to right, Bekah Burroughs, Chris Rhodes, Tim Brestowski, Paul Williard, and Alicia Wallum.

The team gathers on a chilly night to practice on what is left of the Minglewood Bowl outside the Brooks dining hall. They shiver as a cool wind blows across their makeshift stadium. At each end of the field are the goals—three colorful hula-hoops connected between two standing poles, which are held up by cement-filled buckets.

“Who’s got my broom?!” yells Paul Williard, a sophomore film and digital media major. Nobody responds to his question—everyone’s too busy choosing what position he or she will play. Williard grabs a plastic toy broom, likely a novelty item sold for the release of a Harry Potter installment. He throws a leg over and holds on to the broom with one hand. A game of “quidditch” is about to begin.

The Baylor Quidditch Association gathers twice a week to bring the world of J. K. Rowling’s Harry Potter novels to life. In Rowling’s books, quidditch is a magical sport played by witches and wizards zipping around on flying broomsticks in a sort of aerial soccer match.

Teams playing real-life, earthbound quidditch games have sprung up all over the country, especially on college campuses. The Baylor team follows an extensive rulebook for the sport, which is a cross between rugby, dodge ball, and tag. Quidditch for muggles (Rowling’s word for the merely human) is designed for rough play, but no padding or protection is permitted with the exception of mouth guards.

Baylor’s intercollegiate quidditch team, chosen through a tryout process, competes against universities across Texas and is quickly advancing in national rankings.

Williard coaches the team a bit before the game starts. “Work on moving the quaffle around,” he says seriously. (The quaffle is the ball used to score.) Tonight, it’s guys against the girls, he announces.

The rest of the intercollegiate team members have picked up their respective broomsticks for play. Some are traditional broomsticks with thick wooden handles and a head of stiff straw bristles. Others are improvised from hockey sticks, wooden rods, or nearby tree branches.

The girls kneel down on their side of the field, and the guys follow suit on their side. “This is a bad idea,” Katie Rader says, eyeing the brawny men’s side. Rader is sitting out this week due to an injury from Baylor’s recent game against Texas A&M. Baylor lost by only ten points, and the team is proud of their almost-victory. The Aggie quidditch team ranks eleventh in the country, and Baylor proved, despite its recent formation, that it is a team to be reckoned with.

“Brooms up,” Williard yells. Each player abruptly mounts a broomstick and sprints with one hand holding onto the broom to the center of the field.

“The hardest aspect of the game has to be holding a broom in between your legs at all times,” Williard says. “Having to ‘ride’ your broomstick is what makes quidditch unique in comparison to other sports, and it’s a tough transition to make when you first start playing.”

Williard says the response from the campus community has been supportive—usually. “For the most part, students and faculty alike are very interested to hear more about how muggle quidditch is played,” he said. “Other than the occasional jeer, we usually have cars honking and cheering us on.”

Williard has the tall, lean build to be a great quidditch player and is the current captain. He founded the Baylor Quidditch Association in spring 2011.

Each team’s players include three chasers, two beaters, one keeper, and one seeker. The chasers play offense and try to throw a slightly deflated volleyball through the hoops to score. The two beaters are purely defensive players—they try to hit the opponent’s players with dodge balls and to protect their own players from being hit. When a player is hit with a dodge ball, that player has to tag up at his own goal before returning to play. The keeper is basically the team’s goalie. Each ball thrown through a hoop is worth ten points. But capturing the “snitch” is worth thirty points.

In Rowling’s quidditich, the snitch is a small winged sphere that flies around the pitch eluding capture. In the collegiate version, the snitch is a yellow tennis ball that is tucked in a tube sock and tied around the waist of the snitch runner. The seeker’s only job is to find and capture the snitch.

As players on the field try to score and defend their respective goals, the snitch runner takes off running every which way. He belongs to neither team, and his only goal is to avoid capture. He can hide in trees, ride a bike, wriggle into the audience, or grab a cup of coffee at a nearby café. During this practice, the snitch runner has the advantage of night. The sun has set and the darkness effectively hides the snitch runner from view. He evades capture for an impressive amount of time.

Although the snitch runner is free to roam, he must return to the playing field every ten minutes. And if the seeker gets a little too close, the snitch runner is ready to block and tackle. The game ends only when the snitch is caught.

The match is fast-paced and exhausting. The chill breeze is now a welcome relief. Sweat-drenched players begin subbing out after ten minutes of play, while those who are resting cheer rambunctiously from the sidelines.

“Run ’em down!”

“Clean his clock!”

“Bludgeon him in the face!”

One player falls dramatically to the ground, while a perspiring girl on the sidelines shouts, “Don’t hurt each other!”

Before anyone can say “gulping gargoyles,” a breathless player returns to the field with the captured snitch. The game is over! The men win by sixty points.

The team reunites as one, highfiving and congratulating one another on a good practice game. The players slowly pack up their broomsticks and head home.

The Baylor Quidditch Association’s intercollegiate team practices every Thursday night. They are training for the Quidditch World Cup Tournament, which will be in 2013. But for those who are merely curious, there is a pick-up game of quidditch on Sunday afternoons, when any interested student can play.

***—Kimberly Drake***