

Steven (left) and Jared track the action down court in a recent game between the Black team and the Green team.

Opposite: Jared and John P. defend against Riley and John H.





UPPER VALLEY FLOOR HOCKEY

A LITTLE FRIENDLY COMPETITION

When I first moved to the Upper Valley from Western Massachusetts nearly seven years ago, I had big plans. In the summer, I would plant and maintain my own vegetable garden and swim in local watering holes on the stickiest, most blistering days. In the fall, I would hike every weekend, alternating between the White and Green Mountains, in search of the summit that would top the one before. And in the winter and early spring, I would snowboard, snowshoe, sled—all the best snow activities—until my knees gave out.



While heeding the call of the outdoors was easy enough in the summer and fall months, I found it much more difficult to check off my winter activity goals. As a writer, there's nothing more appealing to me in the winter months than nestling myself within the walls of my cozy, dimly lit Victorian home with a good book and flannel pajamas.

Stay Active, and Warm!

It was on one of those aching cold, do-not-want-to-do-anything January nights when I saw an advertisement for a local hockey league looking for new players. I had played field hockey in high school, but this was different. This was floor hockey—the version I was quite sure I played during my middle school physical education classes. Four players, a ball instead of a puck, an indoor court versus an ice rink or a field.

“Looking for a way to stay active this winter?” the posting read. I nodded to myself. “Join Upper Valley Floor Hockey. No experience necessary!” Well, that was a good start, I thought, since I hadn't played since I was 10 years old. Seeing the league as an opportunity to stay active without having to endure the cold, I quickly responded expressing my interest.

A week later, my husband Steve (whom I had convinced to play as well once I realized the league was coed) and I were at the CCBA in Lebanon with sticks in hand. Our first game was intense—I was one

Below: Members of the Green team strategize at halftime.

From left: Jared, Laura, John, Chrissy, and Bryn.

Opposite, top: Goalie Phil stops a shot from John H. Low-scoring games are rare. Author Justine Kohr is at right.

Below: Every game ends with handshakes and high fives.





of two women on our team, so I played the entire time—but I left thrumming with adrenaline and the kind of high you get only after a full hour of sprinting up and down a court until you feel like you’re going to pass out.

That game awakened something in me I hadn’t known was asleep: a love for competitive team sports. I had played sports all through high school and thereafter, but that dropped off as soon as I left college. And as an adult, you’re left with few options. Golf is stress-inducing and expensive. Softball is fun but can be slow. I wasn’t a soccer player and I didn’t know rugby. But somehow, with this oddly casual-sounding sport, I sensed a renewal of that old competitive spirit I’d experienced years ago. And just like that, I had found my number-one winter activity—and one that would become a beloved all-season sport.

Launching a Lifetime Habit

Upper Valley Floor Hockey launched in the summer of 2014 with the help of founders Becky and Jared Rhoads who, like me, were looking for a fun, competitive way to stay active and engage with peers in the Upper Valley. Becky and Jared were





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ACTIVE LIFE

Members of the Red team assemble prior to their game against the Purple team. From left are Mary Beth, Vicky, Alessandra, and Tiffany.




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living in Boston when they happened upon the Boston Floor Hockey League and decided to join.

While Becky has played hockey all her life, including playing women's ice hockey at the University of Vermont, Jared had no formal hockey experience. That didn't stop him from falling in love with the sport. "We started playing year-round," he says.

Looking for work and to start a family, the Rhoads eventually moved from Boston and relocated to the Upper Valley. But the hockey itch persisted. "Honestly, we really started to miss playing," says Jared. "At that point, we realized that we needed to either find a floor hockey league somewhere up here or create one."

When Becky and Jared started the league, there were just four teams. In the past couple of years, through word of mouth and promotion, interest in the league has increased greatly. Today there are eight teams with an

average 10 players per team. Individuals of all ages and skill levels are welcome to play. The age range begins at 20 and ends with folks in their 50s. Skill levels range from no hockey experience at all to, like Becky, years of playing ice hockey at a very high skill level—and that's one of the exciting things to witness at any given game, says White River Junction resident Jason Gramling, a former ice hockey player.

"What I love about it is that it's a lot of fun and we can be very competitive, but there are also many different skill levels," says Jason, who joined the league looking for a way to stay healthy. "It's a very open activity that anyone can join, no matter your experience. It's one of the better organized adult activities in the area, in my opinion."

Becky and Jared are not without things to do—they have two small children and full-time jobs at the



Vermont Veterans Affairs and the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice. Yet they've always made time to keep this much-loved local activity going strong, and it's been gratifying for them to see it grow.

"Getting to know a whole new group of people who share a love for this activity has been enormously rewarding," says Becky. "We now have friends from all over the Upper Valley, not just our little neighborhood in Lebanon or the people we happen to know from work. The sheer process of creating something out of nothing more than an idea and seeing it come to fruition has been wonderful." ❶

For more information on Upper Valley Floor Hockey or to join, visit uvfloorhockey.com.

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