

HEALTH & FITNESS

Now you can keep fit with a lark in the park

Lucy Fry

Living the active life

Whether you run 10km a day or usually stay on your couch, our columnist will put you through your paces. This week: Rabble



I'm going to be honest from the start: I hate organised fun. Most of what I do, especially when it's exercise-related, has a defined purpose and objective. My comfort zone involves organisation, goal-setting, and endeavour. So when I found out that increasing numbers of Londoners were meeting in parks, not to perform sets and reps of specific exercises, nor to hit boxing pads, nor even kick a football into a goal but to play games, I shuddered.

Yet where does life begin, but at the edge of one's comfort zone? With the clear and firm objective of getting better at recreation (I'm trying!) I decided to book in for Rabble.

Clearly there's a demand for the pseudo-competitive fun that Rabble offers. It sits in a vacant space in the fitness market, somewhere between military-style boot camps and a friendly game of Frisbee. Since it was founded by Charlotte Roach, 26, and

Rosemary Pringle, 27, more than a year ago, Rabble has gathered a membership of 900 and looks set to expand beyond London into other major cities.

"After I stopped training as a professional athlete and got a regular job I began to dread going to the gym," says Roach. "All I wanted was to play in the park each day with my mates, and that seemed impossible in London.

"Either I didn't have the skill to play different sports, or I didn't have the money to join lots of clubs. Or I couldn't commit my time to doing it. So I decided to set up a club where you can turn up when you're able to, and where the aim is to make exercise as fun, enjoyable and accessible as possible.

"We play games, purely games. Nobody else does that. The reason we do that is to take your mind off the exercise and help you enjoy it. It also means that if you have a professional netball player alongside lots of people who've never played before, nobody really has an advantage."

The big day comes, and it's



Fun and games: Lucy Fry joins in one of the Rabble sessions in central London

raining. Not just a little bit, but chucking it down. I hope it might be cancelled, but "we play in all weathers" comes the response, accompanied by a wicked grin.

Besides, by the time our motley crew meet, it seems the God of Play has spoken: the shower has finished, leaving the kind of slippery ground that humiliates even the most cautious of runners.

Already mud-soaked, I commit to 60 minutes of pure fun, as the class begins. It's clear these sessions are more about giving one's inner child a workout rather than any specific body part, yet our tasks are surprisingly similar to those a trainer might ask of a client: catch this ball and throw it back, or run up that lung-busting hill, again and again.

Everybody is friendly and seems genuinely thrilled to be here. Some are pure players and others use Rabble as part of a broader weekly activity schedule. Notwithstanding its insistence that you don't need any sporting background to join, there is clearly a strong carry-over, in terms

of the skills we try to master during rounds of "dodge ball" and "storm the castle", to other sports like football, rugby and even dating (the whisper is that a few romances have been kindled amid a game of what I can only describe as "bib grab").

Darting around to avoid or tag others will undoubtedly build agility and co-ordination, just as charging up a hill repeatedly will make you a generally fitter human being.

I'm unsurprised when one woman on my team, a regular at a north London rugby club, tells me that when she attends regular Rabble sessions she gets faster on the pitch.

Essentially, this is training in disguise. If you miss the energising endeavour of school team-games and find running on a treadmill boring, Rabble could be for you.

Could you recreate the conditions with a group of friends? Probably, yes. But you'd need to research a lot, as the Rabble founders have done, to ensure you're continually coming up with fun new games, and buy some basic kit, including two large, inflatable pink balls.

With Rabble, you just turn up when it suits you, pay a reasonable amount and play. Come to think of it, that sounds like a fairly efficient and purposeful use of time to me. Perhaps this does suit me after all.

• Sessions take place in London at Finsbury Square, Monday and Wednesday 7pm; Clapham Common, Tuesday 7pm and Sunday 11am; and Finsbury Park, Saturday 11am. £7.50 per session, £50 for 10 or £25 a month. Visit joinrabble.com for more.

GAME OF THE WEEK

How to play 'storm the castle'

- 1 Find a small hill, or at the very least a noticeable gradient, preferably where others aren't lounging.
- 2 Split into two teams and make them recognisable in some way. Bibs, napkins, T-shirts versus jumpers? Any obvious feature will do.
- 3 Mark out your "castle" and, about 50 metres away, beyond the bottom of the gradient, the start line. One team must defend the castle, while the others retreat down the hill. They must then try to break through this circle of defenders to reach the castle. Once an attacker is tagged by a defender he or she must return to the start line and make another dash. If an attacker breaks through, they win a point for their team.
- 4 Set a timer - your phone's stopwatch, say - to three minutes. Make a suitably rousing and furious noise as you press start, then...Play!
- 5 Switch around after three minutes, so defenders become attackers and vice versa. Compare team scores at the end and celebrate.



Q I want to explore different types of exercise this year. What can I try without being committed to a monthly membership fee?
JN, 39, Liverpool

A **LUCY FRY WRITES:** Bespoke fitness schedules, where you can build a varied weekly plan that's flexible and works for you, are becoming increasingly popular, and it seems that now exercise providers have realised this too.

Spinning and yoga are two areas where it's particularly common to pay for a drop-in class. Clothing brand Lululemon (lululemon.co.uk) even hosts free yoga sessions at its store in London (38-42 Kings Road).

Project Awesome meets for free fitness training, Wednesday and Friday, 6.30am, at the top of Primrose Hill, north London (twitter.com/Proj_Awesome_UK).

Running groups are also often cheap or free, and require no promise of attendance. See Home Run (homerunlondon.com) and the nationwide Park Run (parkrun.org.uk) for local details.

• Email your questions to lifecoach@telegraph.co.uk

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