

INTERVIEW NILESH PANDIT



WELL PLAYED: Shepherds Bush football fan Nilesh Pandit has set up five-a-side leagues at the Linford Christie stadium

PICTURES BY LEIGH QUINNELL

Companies compete in kickaround clash



● Real Akabusi: Mike Condon, Guy Chapman, Uzzy Hussain, Jonathon Hopper, Jake Lawton, Nathan Tyson



● Siemens: David Allen, Amar Mann, Malcolm Carpenter, Leighton Williams and Andy Kaeshammer



● Friday Chiefs: Chris Tangye, Chris Barnes, Chris Maslin, Ronnie Bullen and Phil Watson

► Football on a smaller scale is an ideal way to let off steam after a deskbound nine-to-five day, as the organiser of a borough competition tells **Tim Harrison**

FIVE-A-SIDE fever is sweeping Hammersmith & Fulham with a string of firms fielding teams in keenly fought leagues.

It has snowballed since Nilesh Pandit, 23, of Ellerslie Road, Shepherds Bush, unearthed an extraordinary level of interest during an internship at the Walt Disney Corporation in Hammersmith in 2007.

Frustrated by being deskbound nine-to-five, and concerned that he was piling on the pounds, he decided to find out if others would be interested in a kickaround.

A pinned-up flyer in the canteen eventually led to a dozen teams playing regular five-a-side games after work.

Nilesh, a former QPR youth team centre back, had studied management strategy at university in Birmingham but was finding it difficult to land a full-time job.

So he began standing outside the headquarters of different companies in Hammersmith, handing out flyers and chatting to anyone who would listen.

A three-week stint outside the

BBC's revolving door in Wood Lane eventually led to the creation of a dedicated league, with the exotic team names including Late N Disorient, Ordinary Batteries and Real Akabusi.

"I started with volunteer referees, and the leagues expanded to include L'Oreal, Siemens, Yonex, AOL and the BBC," said the born-and-bred west Londoner.

Nilesh started the website www.playfiveaside.com to co-ordinate the leagues, with comic football reports of the matches gaining their own following, and intriguing lists such as 'bad boys',



Five-a-side seems to be the next big thing

listing the players with the worst disciplinary records.

Now Nilesh also runs leagues in Aston, Birmingham (he set them up at university), and the five-a-side bug is spreading.

"The difference between my five-a-side leagues and others is that the match reports add something different," he said.

"People say they find them entertaining, and I also do spreadsheets with the results.

Other five-a-side leagues are money-hungry businesses but I want people to stay happy and fit, and people always know they can contact me."

Matches are played on Wednesday and Thursday evenings at the Linford Christie stadium in Wormwood Scrubs. Games in Chiswick are also possible.

For Nilesh, it's an interest that has turned into a living. But he's keen to stress the benefits for individuals and companies. Getting staff together from 6-8pm after work is great for team bonding.

"How far can it go? Well, the sky's the limit," he said. "There's a great corporate togetherness in five-a-side. People who work nine-to-five are often not motivated to go to gyms after work because they're usually so packed. Fitness should be fun, without that feeling that you really should be going to the gym."

Nilesh is also looking to set up student leagues, with agreements being struck with Hammersmith and West London College and Latymer Upper School.

"Five-a-side seems to be the next big thing, with quick, electric and sexy football," said Nilesh. "I want to engulf the entire borough of Hammersmith & Fulham in five-a-side fever."

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