

NYC adds double dutch jump roping in schools

NEW YORK (AP) — The popular urban street pastime called double dutch, in which competitors jump between two ropes twirled eggbeater-style, is getting more recognition, becoming an officially sanctioned sport in New York City high schools.

School officials say adding double dutch to the calendar should get hundreds of students participating in an enjoyable aerobic activity.

"We're always thinking, what do we need to do to get more kids playing?" said Eric Goldstein, chief executive of the Public School Athletic League.

Double dutch will be a spring sport this coming school year after basketball season is over and there is space in the gyms.

According to the National Double Dutch League, Dutch settlers brought the game to New York in colonial times — hence the name.

It has been a competitive sport in New York since the 1970s when police Detective David Walker worked with physical education instructors to develop rules and a scoring system.

The sport has spread beyond its base in inner-city Black neighborhoods and is especially popular in Japan, whose teams have won a number of recent tournaments. Teams from around the globe compete in tournaments like the Double Dutch Holiday Classic at Harlem's Apollo Theater.

However, it isn't an official sport in any other school district in the United States, Goldstein said.

"We're the first, and we like being first," he said.

The last sport the athletic league added was cricket, which was brought to New York by immigrants from the Caribbean and South Asia. Fourteen teams competed in the spring 2008 inaugural cricket season.

Ruth Payne, a retired drug-prevention counselor who coaches double dutch, was a major force behind persuading the athletic

league to add the sport to its roster.

"It's a great thing," she said. "Thousands of girls jump rope, but they do it as a recreational sport, just for fun. For it to be in the schools, that means it's getting good recognition as a sport."

Double dutch is scored on a point system, with compulsory, speed and freestyle components.

The compulsory section has several requirements.

"You have to do an aerial, which is like a flip," Payne said. "You have to do a rapid dance with some fancy footwork, you have to do a rope trick and you have to do a cheer, an ending that your whole team takes part in."

Double dutch will officially be coed, though the great majority of participants are girls. "Jump In!" a 2007 Disney cable movie, starred Corbin Bleu as a high schooler who defies gender stereotypes by forsaking boxing for double dutch.

School sports officials hope to start with 10 to 15 double dutch teams spread among the five boroughs.

Shani Newsome is excited about coaching double dutch at Bedford Academy High School in Brooklyn, where she is a teacher's aide.

"Double dutch is a sport that gets girls involved no matter what their condition is," she said. "It's something that builds stamina. You start out slow."

Newsome said that when she was growing up in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, "jumping double dutch was one of the requirements of being outside."

And when she asked for a show of hands at Bedford Academy, "90 percent of the young ladies" indicated that they would try out for a team.

Kunnuh Wisseh, an incoming junior at Benjamin Banneker Academy, also in Brooklyn, hopes to be on her school's team.

"I always looked at double dutch as a sport, and

for it to actually be in PSAL, now it's going to be even more competitive than it was before," she said.

Payne, who coaches Kunnuh in Brooklyn's Jammin' Jumpers double dutch team, said young people who participate in the sport learn skills that will help them succeed in life.

They learn how to negotiate," she said. "They learn how to talk, they learn discipline. And they learn to work together."



Elementary school girls participate in a double dutch jump rope practice session at the St. Peter Claver Gym in the Brooklyn borough of New York. Double dutch will become an officially sanctioned varsity sport in New York City public schools in the spring of 2009.

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