



Cey Cey Green, center with blue jacket and black pants, gives her kickball team, Alphet Mafia, a pre-game pep talk.

Social sports leagues: building community in DC

By Samuel Lee

On a chilly Sunday afternoon, nearly 100 people gathered at West Potomac Park in Southwest D.C. to play kickball as part of the social sports league, Stonewall Kickball DC. Even amidst the blistering winds, cheers rang aloud with competitive fervor with every run and strike.

But the chance to play kickball wasn't what brought all these people together. Instead, it was the chance to build camaraderie with others, especially now after the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are plenty of social sports leagues in the city that offer multiple different sports, including kickball. However, as one of the few [LGBTQ+ sports leagues](#) in the district, Stonewall Kickball DC offers an environment for these players like no other to build community.

The importance of having that sense of community, which so many people have been struggling to reacquire since lockdowns ended, is not lost for any of these players, especially Cey Cey Green, 36, who captains her own team, Alphet Mafia.

"Every week, I am reminded of why I love this organization and this community," Green said.

Uprooting her life from California to D.C. in 2014 was hard as there were more questions and doubts than answers and sureties. And like most people moving to a new city, Green struggled to find a place where she felt like she belonged and where people truly cared for her.

Feeling growingly isolated and alone without a solid support system, Green began seriously contemplating moving back home to California despite having just left.

"I learned that making friends as an adult is hard. I tried hanging out in LGBTQ+ spaces, like bars, clubs, and even some community spaces not centered around nightlife and drinking. But I was not developing relationships or community from these experiences," Green said.

Unfortunately, Green's story is not unique for many young adults, and even more now after the pandemic.

During the pandemic, [61%](#) of young adults experienced high levels of loneliness, and [59%](#) of adults have continued to find it difficult to form relationships with others since the start of the pandemic.

For the LGBTQ+ community, [56%](#) of youths reported poor mental health in 2022 due to the pandemic, and symptoms associated with loneliness like anxiety and depression also increased from 2020.

But Green's life completely changed after being introduced to Stonewall Kickball DC in 2015 by an old friend. It was in joining this league that Green was finally able to make D.C. truly feel like her home.

"It means that I have a space where people are important to me, and I'm important to them. A space where we love and encourage each other," Green said.

Green's community at Stonewall Kickball DC was also instrumental in her process of coming out as trans-feminine. Green said that she always struggled with her identity because she never felt like "one of the boys."

And while coming out as gay did help her, it wasn't until 2016 that she was finally able to embrace herself completely. And through her entire journey, her Stonewall Kickball DC community was there to support and affirm her, giving her confidence and strength.

"They loved me, they supported me, they see me for who I really am, and that's probably the gift I'll always treasure," Green said.

Green is now paying all the support she has received forward. Green wants everyone to know that they are not alone, and that there are people who will support and care for them.

"Cey Cey and everyone at Stonewall Kickball has really allowed me to just find a sense of family. I live by myself here in D.C since all of my family still lives in Panama," said Andrea Carles, a member of Alphabet Mafia since the Spring of 2022.

Green has also grown more confident in herself, growing into a true leader. In captaining Alphabet Mafia from the sidelines to a 9-3 victory, Green barked instructions to her teammates as well as cheered them on louder than everyone else.



Green could be seen pacing the sidelines with paper in hand, like a coach in the NFL, as she led Alphabet Mafia to a 9-3 victory over their opponents, the Swallows.

“My favorite memory with Cey Cey was my first game. Just seeing how invested she was not only into the game, but everyone else and making sure that everyone was feeling comfortable,” said Eduarda Serafim, a first-year member of Alphabet Mafia.

While competitive during the game, Green is not one to exclude her opponents either. After the game, she and her teammates posed with their opponents, The Swallows, for a group photo. The league also hosts various events to foster that sense of community amongst its players.

Green also recently joined Stonewall Kickball DC’s executive board as the director of diversity, equity and inclusion, a position her teammates all said she is perfect for. Stonewall Kickball DC is predominantly comprised of cis white gay men.

Her role is to improve access and participation as well as to uplift all voices of the LGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities in the league. Even the team’s chant is all about diversity and inclusivity, “Lesbians, gays, transgender too. The Alphabet Mafia is coming for you.”

“She’s been so involved in this community. She encompasses what it means to be a director, she makes everyone feel welcomed and seen,” Carles said.

Green’s experience with social sports leagues isn’t limited to just Stonewall Kickball DC either. She also plays in DC Fray’s kickball league, and recently started volunteering as a referee. Her reason for joining another league is to continue meeting new people and building relationships.

Unlike Stonewall Kickball DC that focuses specifically on the LGBTQ+ community, DC Fray is more for the general public and offers more sports than just kickball. Because of this, DC Fray approaches building community in a different way.

However, Green said that the most important similarity that has allowed both organizations to successfully build community is that they have people who are actively seeking out relationships with others.

“If you put something into it, you can get a lot out of social sports. Even if you don’t feel like ‘the athletic type,’ there is room for you out there,” Green said.