

## Walking Football

Walking Football (every Friday) and its sister activity Skills and Drills /Fitness (every Wednesday) started at Sandbach Utd's excellent facilities in 2017. After a bedding in period these activities have thrived. There are plenty of vacancies available so after reading this why don't you join us and share in the benefits they provide or come and have a look at what we do first then join us!

I joined in 2018 and currently attend most Wednesdays, having also attended on Fridays for two years plus until a dodgy knee decided I had to back off a bit. The paragraphs that follow are purely written from my own perspective of the last four years, although many of my friends there could write something similar.

There have been three Group Leaders to date, Arnie Laing established the Group and forged a strong bond with Sandbach Utd, squeezing in the activity with Chairing the Sandbach U3a itself. He was followed by Mick Jackson who kept up the progress, and we were soon playing up to eight or nine a side games. Mick now spends most of his time leading Walking Cricket (another thriving activity), and our current leader is Alan Schofield. Alan has more smiles these days as Man Utd come out of the doldrums. These are three very different personalities, all of whom made/make for exciting sessions on both days.

After joining later in the first year of activity I soon got into the routines. As with all U3a activities I have established firm friendships with many fellow devotees. Although at the moment we are a male group, ladies are equally welcome. At one stage there were three regularly attending.

When I started, I realised that I had put my last pair of PUMAS (or where they Adidas?) boots in the bin about forty years ago, so how would my life weary body react to this new challenge. Well like many of my new mates, the answer is far better than expected. Yes, in the early days I felt a bit stiff the day after. Soon, however, you realise that match fitness is not a preserve of the young, it applies to us too. After a few weeks you wonder how it becomes so (relatively) easy. Nearly all of us brought niggles along, which mostly disappear, but even if they remain, they can be easily contained with expert advice. This advice often comes from your pals, but if you can find a doctor/consultant /physio these days, they can obviously help too.

Although there are written down rules for the game, we don't need a referee. We all understand what is and isn't allowed and we all support and help each other. On the rare occasions when someone hits the deck the game stops immediately, we all catch our breath and start again when the player is recovered.

I could say the results of our games don't matter, it's the taking part and all that. Alas (and I'm sure you'll understand) that would not be strictly true. Why shouldn't we retain that little bit of competitiveness? We have some young ones (as early as being in their fifties) and old 'uns like me playing. However, that bit of arthritis, or carrying just a tad of weight, or the various sprains and tears from our lives levels us all up. Young uns can be nutmegged too.! Earlier I mentioned match fitness, it's amazing how you want to try something clever on the pitch on one of your better days.

Team sports remain a great leveller for us all. That dressing room banter and spirit remains just as present and still a pleasure. You can't get away with anything and any ego is soon nullified if anyone tries it on. For all past sports men and women, the dressing room is a special place and remains a haven for chat on all subjects (acceptable and unacceptable ones).

On Fridays the focus is on a game of “normal” football, whereas Wednesdays although generally including competitive element, involves more of a focus on skills and fitness.

So, if you have sports in your background and appreciate all that it brought during your earlier lives, don't think you can't enjoy those feelings today and I urge anyone unsure/thinking about it to come along. Have a look first if you are really concerned and see what happens and meet some of the nicest people around. There are many outlets where boots can be bought very cheaply which do the job nicely. Just make sure you seek advice for the right ones to handle the 3G pitch. Playing on 3G for those who have not experienced it is interesting. You become very accustomed to those black bits (an essential part of the surface) which get everywhere, believe you me.

As with other U3a Groups the “on pitch experiences” are only part of it. I have established friendships that will probably remain for the remainder of my days. To enable re absorption of essential mineral levels lost during battle some of us had a digestive or two at the pub afterwards. Nowadays the open-air bar at Sandbach FC is excellent and heated in winter. Many of the day's goals, saves and passes are often promoted to a higher status in retrospect. At various times subgroups of friends have visited some interesting places. England's training establishment at St. George's Park Burton, a tour of Manchester City's fantastic ground and inner sancta, sitting next to a virtual Pep etc. We have been along to cricket Test Matches and the annual (minimum) curry nights and various quiz team nights out all add to the enjoyment.

If you feel you'd like to give it a go, get in touch with Alan Schofield:

<https://u3a.simplmembership.co.uk/Sandbach/Groups/walking-football> (Login to be able to use the online email facility)

He and all the rest of us will be glad to help you along, doing as little or as much as you are comfortable with. I'm 76 and been playing for four years now and can still trap a ball further than some can kick it.

My name is Haydn by the way.