

## **BEST GOBSMACKER OF A BOCCE COURT**

By Deborah Giattina

Shaded by a small shelter and surrounded by a chain-link fence, the dusty, unkempt lanes at the Aquatic Park bocce courts may not appear inviting at first glance, and neither might the very serious pro players who practice here (San Francisco is home to two world-class competitors, Mario Cuneo and Benji Tosi). But the dilapidation is made up for by the marvelous waterfront view and the languorous game itself, which seems to have been invented for playing between bites of panini and slurps of red wine, and which finds its ultimate expression in sets overlooking a gobsmacking vista of the bay. Most afternoons you can learn the ropes by spying on a group of older Italian American players — the city's bocce roots are in its Italian immigrant community (the game was a pastime for ancient Roman soldiers). And the scraggly lanes, with their rundown clubhouse, still have the vibe of their 1950s heyday, when the courts were open to men only and "Little Italy" was a neighborhood rather than a star on a tourist map. But a proposed extension of the F streetcar line may require the courts to be razed or at least relocated. A final triumph, if it goes through, of old-timeyness over authentic history.

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Alcatraz and Angel islands seen off shore of Aquatic Park Bocce Club.



Italian immigrants playing bocce at Aquatic Park Bocce Club in San Francisco.



Benji Tosi (far left) & Marco Cuneo (far right) representing the Aquatic Park Bocce Club in an international club tournament in Tunis, Tunisia, April, 2006.

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