

Double Dutch & The power of play

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Jumping rope. It's not just for kids anymore.

In fact, if the 40+ Double Dutch Club's phenomenal growth is any indication, the former staple of childhood games might now belong to adults.

Local members of the club were featured performers at the Homewood-Flossmoor community's first Juneteenth celebration in 2021, putting on a vigorous display of rope jumping skill.

In spite of the hot sun, they took turns leaping into the middle of twin spinning ropes moving in opposite directions, found the rhythm and jumped in. They jumped fast. They kept jumping.

It was a workout — and it was the group's third appearance of the day.

As the name implied, all the women jumping were 40 years old or older. The oldest that

day, Phyllis Pelt, was 75.

When they jump, the years seem to disappear.

The beginning

The 40+ Double Dutch Club began five years ago with a meetup at the Homewood-Flossmoor High School parking lot. Today, it's an international movement.

The founder, Pamela Pelt-Robinson, believes God's hand guided the journey from a dozen women meeting to jump rope in a parking lot to an organization with more than 17,000 members in three countries on two continents that continues to grow.

In this case, God's hand took shape as emotional pain, some inert kids focused on their phones, an offhand remark and a supportive friend.

Robinson said she was going through a very difficult time in her life. Her children were grown. Her marriage had ended. She described herself as at a cross-

road, unsure which way to turn.

On Memorial Day in 2016 she went to a barbecue at a friend's home. That's where the idea was born that would eventually become the double dutch club.

The weather was fine, but the kids were all focused on their phones, just sitting. The adults noted how different things were when they were young.

"We were just talking about how back in the day we would've been outside playing, enjoying the sunshine and boys would've been playing basketball. Girls would've been jumping double dutch," she said. "And one of the ladies said, 'If we had a double dutch rope right now, we could really show those kids to show these kids.'"

As it happened, Robinson had ropes in her car. The game was on.

"During the 30 minutes that we jumped, um, it took my mind off of everything that I was going through," she said.

She had so much fun that later she consult-

ed with her friend and co-founder Catrina Dyer-Taylor and suggested they try a double dutch meetup. They decided to put out the call to see if anyone else was interested.

Robinson thought it might be play therapy, a way to get through the hard times she was experiencing.

"And, at least at the very least, it'll give me something to smile about," she said.

The first meetup was held in the parking lot of Homewood-Flossmoor High School, and the Facebook call out attracted a small group of women who also had fond memories of playing double dutch as girls.

What is double dutch?

The game of jumping ropes or vines may have started, variously, in Egypt, Phoenicia or China. Most sources online indicate the game was brought to the Americas in the 1600s by Dutch settlers, thus the name the game is known by here.

Thousands of women join club born in H-F that builds sisterhood from childhood games



Women from the 40+ Double Dutch Club perform during the Juneteenth celebration in 2021 at Homewood-Flossmoor High School, where the club was born in 2016.

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