

badminton

A huge lawn sprawls to the south of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Mo.

On any given afternoon, families picnic, art students toss the Frisbee and babies aplenty frolic. You will also see two nearly 10-year-old shuttlecocks — or 18-foot tall sculptures by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen of them, which the museum commissioned in 1994. When the museum installed the sculptures, some rather crusty folks complained the shuttlecocks mocked the high-brow museum and its collection.

Such snobby types didn't know that the sport descends from an upper-crust lineage, taking its name from the lovely grounds of Badminton, the estate of the Duke of Beaufort. In the middle of the 19th century, the good Duke introduced the British royals to the game of poona, a variation of a game called "jeu de volant," (enjoyed by well-heeled Europeans).

That game, in turn, came from "battledore (a fancy name for a flat paddle) and shuttlecock," whose roots stretch into first-century China, Japan, India and Greece and were an outgrowth of an ancient Chinese game called Ti Jian Zi.

In short, those folks bemoaning

THIS SPORT OF KINGS
IS A GREAT WAY TO GET
A LOW-IMPACT AEROBIC
WORKOUT **BY MARK LUCE**

the "common" sculptures in front of Nelson-Atkins need to study both their "art" and their "history."

Currently, badminton boasts nearly 100 million players around the world. It's an official Olympic sport (and a very hot ticket), there are world tours and the game's best players not only make serious coin but are also hailed much the same way that we treat Brett Favre or Alex Rodriguez.

The game is the fastest of the racket sports, with birdie speeds approaching 200 miles per hour in professional matches. In the United States, there are 503 high school badminton programs. Next month, Anaheim hosts the World Championships, which includes nearly 800 athletes from 40 countries. But the great thing about badminton is that anyone can play.

To get started you need a net, rackets and shuttlecocks. Often, you can get a decent set for around \$50, but make sure you buy one that has four rackets, as doubles remains, well, double the fun. Set up is easy,

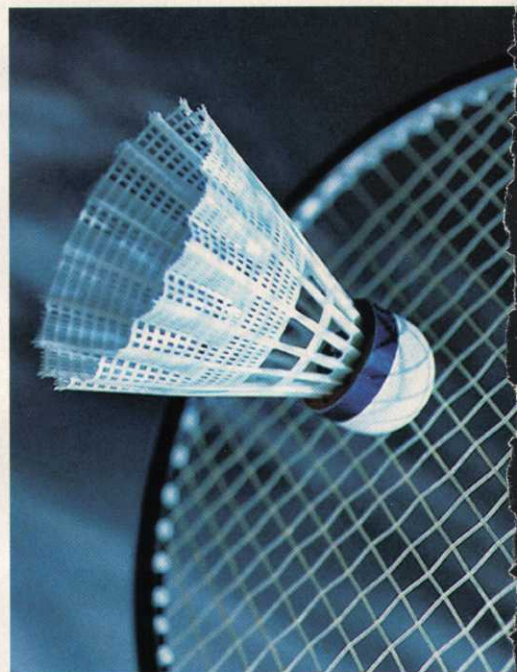
assuming you can push sticks in the ground and connect a net between the posts.

You can go official and mark off a 17-foot (20-foot for doubles) by 44-foot court in the yard, or you can pull a page from wiffle ball and say, "Anything past that rock is out on this side, and anything past the tree is out on your side."

The rules are simple: You must serve to score, and serve to the diagonal. Games go to 15, and the best of three games wins a match.

To be a decent player, you will need agility, footwork, good hand-eye coordination and, most importantly, the ability to place your shots. Badminton, if played vigorously, provides an excellent, low-impact aerobic workout.

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