

Lessons from Tchoukball

By Jennifer Pustz | MIT Health and Wellness Intern

See the game in action: <https://youtu.be/f1srcs9vOx0>

When Pedro Acosta arrived at MIT in June 2017 for the Interphase EDGE program, a two-year scholar enrichment program that begins with a full course load during a seven-week summer session, a Physical Education class was part of his requirements. Although he'd never heard of tchoukball before he signed up, he was intrigued by the concept of scoring points using a trampoline. By the end of the summer, Pedro had learned much more than how to play this unusual game. He applied the communication and collaboration skills he developed on the court to his work in the classroom.

Tchoukball is played by two teams of any size that combines elements of ultimate Frisbee and basketball with a trampoline. Swiss biologist Hermann Brandt developed the game in the 1960s and 70s as an alternative to contact sports with a high incidence of injury. In the "Tchoukball Charter," Brandt described the game's goal as "the avoidance of conflict, with one main goal in mind: fair play that does not compromise the level of play but rather links the two teams together in common activity." Matt Breen, Physical Education Assistant Professor, learned about the game through a conference and thought it would be a good addition to MIT's Physical Education offerings. Tchoukball was piloted at MIT Quarter 4 of 2016 and it has been a popular course ever since.

Pedro was interested in games that require mental concentration in addition to being a source of physical exercise. As a high school student in New Jersey, he played recreational table tennis to enhance his physical and mental fitness. He found similar benefits in Tchoukball. "Both my focus and relaxation improved through table tennis. I learned this summer that Tchoukball also requires a strong mental aspect to the game." Like most students in the class, Pedro was new to Tchoukball. Although he observed that the basic physical skills required for the game, throwing and catching the ball, were familiar to him and to his classmates, the more challenging aspect was learning the rules in order to develop an advantage over the opposing team.

As an Interphase EDGE student, Pedro also appreciated the break break during a very busy summer term. "Tchoukball was one hour after classes and I initially thought physical education would limit my time for studying. However, I began to learn that exercise is necessary for a healthy mind. Tchoukball kept my brain and body active and acted as a break from the mental challenges in class."

Pedro learned that the value of Physical Education classes like Tchoukball goes well beyond the mental and physical benefits. To play the game well, players need to communicate with each other well to develop their strategy to prepare for the game. Generating the strategy alone isn't enough. Collaboration and teamwork is necessary to win. Pedro likened the development of these skills in Tchoukball to those needed in other parts of the MIT experience. "Both communication and collaboration are extremely important in requesting help for problem sets or understanding concepts. Also, communicating with others leads to more rapid results and working in a group can lead to solving problems more efficiently."

For more information about Physical Education courses at MIT, mitpe.mit.edu.