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AT THIS CAMP, CRICKET ISN'T CHIRPING KIND

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The Northern California **Cricket** Association has 36 teams. For details, visit nccricket.org. For more information on the Mashal, visit www.mymashal.org and Bay Area **Cricket** Club, visit www.mybaycc.com

Leena Khan has played **cricket** once, but the San Ramon 11-year-old's friends know even less about the game.

They think it's an insect," Leena said.

The Bay **Cricket** Club and Mashal are hoping to change some of that. The club, which plays at Monarch Park in San Ramon's new Dougherty Valley housing developments, held its first youth summer camp this past week, with the collaboration of Mashal, a non-profit organization in the tri-valley area.

Club members, most of whom come from Pakistan but also include natives of India, US and other Asian subcontinent countries where the British-rooted sport is popular, said they wanted to make sure the sport wasn't lost with their American-raised children. The club hopes to eventually have a regular youth league competition.

The Northern California **Cricket** Association said more youth camps are forming with the same goal. "For us, it's easy," said Bay **Cricket** Club President Shahid Saghir, 44, of Danville, who immigrated from Pakistan to the United States in 1987. "But for our kids, they haven't been exposed to it." The weeklong camp for 6- to 16-year-olds reached full capacity at 50 campers, with about a dozen others turned away for space, Saghir said. More than two-thirds in the camp did not have previous familiarity with the game, which has similarities to baseball.

Participants, both boys and girls, spent three hours each evening learning fundamentals of the game. On Wednesday, they were divided into three groups by age and rotated between lessons. There was bowling, a full-arm pitch in which the ball bounces on the ground before reaching the batter. Batting lessons included learning the different stances and swings, which can help aim where the ball is hit. Campers also received lessons in fielding, which is done barehanded, though tennis balls were substituted instead of the hard balls typically used in games. The camp was to end this past Saturday with a competition among the participants.

Saghir said **cricket** has been growing in the Tri-Valley as many South Asian immigrants have moved into the newly developed area. The Bay **Cricket** Club started as friends getting together to practice on concrete at Coyote Creek Elementary. That was before Monarch Park, which has a **cricket** field, was built. When the club was formalized in 2002, it was the only one in the area, he said. Now there's about a dozen, with the club boasting 46 members.

Ganesh Sanap, president of the Northern California **Cricket** Association, said the sport was growing, though the bad economy has leveled that out with fewer workers coming from overseas. There are currently 36 teams in the association, which at most has had 38. He said other youth camps have also started, such as one this year in Santa Clara with 55 participants. Another camp, with 30 youngsters,

started two years ago in Union City. He said the hope is to gather enough players to start a youth league. Currently, older kids play with adults.

Some camp participants said they hope a youth league will form.

"We could play the coaches, the uncles, but they're too good," said Sulayman Jawaid, 15, of Danville. Altamash Azam, 15, of Danville said other sports are more familiar to American youth.

"Not a lot of people play this sport," said Altamash, a wrestler at San Ramon Valley High. "It's not as popular a sport as basketball and football,"

Yumna Azizuddin, 13, of San Ramon, never played before.

"My mom's a big fan, and she wanted me to learn," Yumna said. "I thought it would be kind of boring and hard."

Yumna, however, who did not know anyone from the camp previously but has made friends, said she likes the many physical aspects of the game.

"The movements, it's pretty interesting," she said.

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