



## Create Your Own Games

Play enthusiast Bernie DeKoven shares his tips for inventing your own “junkyard sports” **By Leslie Garisto Pfaff**

**A**SK ANYONE who knows him, and they’ll tell you that Bernie DeKoven has a genius for fun. For more than three decades, he’s been on a mission to inspire kids — and adults — to play creatively. This is, after all, the man who invented Really Big Pick-Up Sticks (16 feet long!) and established the Games Preserve, a retreat for the study of play. No surprise, then, that he’s also the brains behind what he calls junkyard sports, wonderfully wacky games designed to exercise not just bodies but also imaginations. (You can read all about them in his book *Junkyard Sports: Make Sports Fun Again!*) We asked Bernie to sit down — something he doesn’t do all that often — and share the magic of his creation with us.

### YOU CAN TEACH IT

#### 3 Games to Get You Started

Play these games by their inventors’ rules or redesign them to suit your needs — that’s the beauty of junkyard sports. (For more games, turn to pages 58 and 60.)

#### 1 Baggyball

**Players:** Two teams of 3 to 11 players

**Equipment:** 1 Bubbleball (see “Great Junk for Great Play” on page 60), 2 plastic shopping bags

**Where to play:** Anywhere — on sand, grass, even a basketball court

**Setup:** Standing at opposite ends of the playing area, one player from each team becomes his team’s “basket” by holding a shopping bag open; he can move the bag around to thwart the other team but must keep the bag open and one foot in place at all times.

**Object:** To get the Bubbleball into the opposing team’s basket. The team with the most baskets in 30 minutes of play wins.

**How to play:** The game is played like basketball, except that players dribble by repeatedly hitting the ball in the air, palm up. Players can either shoot or dunk the ball into the basket.

## Q *What inspired you to develop junkyard sports?*

**A** I was looking for a way to bring fun back into sports, because I think traditional sports tend to fail a lot of kids, which helps explain why so many lead inactive lives. I asked myself, when are sports actually fun? And that led me to the kinds of sports that seem almost to be made up as they go along — the kinds of informal games you see played in backyards and streets.

## Q *How would you define a junkyard sport?*

**A** Basically, it's any traditional sport played with nontraditional materials, with rules tailored to suit the players and the playspace. Imagine, for instance, a group of climbers and their Sherpa guides playing an improvised game of softball at the foot of the Himalayas, using a frying pan as a bat and a rolled-up sock as a ball. That really happened, and it's a perfect example of a junkyard sport.

## Q *What makes junkyard sports different from conventional sports?*

**A** In conventional sports, the game determines whether you're good enough to play. In junkyard sports, the players determine whether the *game* is good enough. Since the games are designed to suit the needs of all the players, junkyard sports tend to foster a feeling of community. They're supportive, inclusive, and ruled by a sense of fun.

## Q *What kind of junk makes for great junkyard sports?*

**A** I like soft stuff because it makes for safe play, but you can use pretty much anything. A couple of years ago, for example, my wife and I attended a conference for computer graphics professionals, where we helped the attendees invent Junkyard Bowling. For equipment, we used whatever we had at hand: paper cups, rolled-up posters, paper bags for pins, and a Rubik's Cube for a ball. Someone thought the cube looked like a die, so we added numbers to it, giving birth to a fundamental

## 2 Golf Baseball



**Players:** 1 or more

**Equipment:** 1 or more Wiffle bats, 1 Wiffle ball per player, 4 hula hoops

**Where to play:** A field or a large backyard

**Setup:** Place the hoops on the ground like baseball bases, in a diamond configuration.

**Object:** Using the bat, players must hit the ball into each hoop in turn. The first to round the bases wins.

**How to play:** Batters take turns standing inside the home-base hoop and "teeing off" (throwing the ball in the air and hitting it toward the first-base hoop). Each player takes one shot per turn and, as in golf, must pick up and hit the ball from wherever it previously landed. The ball must land inside the hoop before the player can tee off from there to the next base.

### SUCCESS STRATEGIES

## Play by Your Own Rules

Take any activity (soccer, tennis, tag), add some creative kids and a few twists to the rules, and you have the makings of a great junkyard sport. Move it up to the majors with these tips from Bernie for making any game more fun:

- ◆ If the sport you're starting with calls for two teams, try adding another team or taking one away.
- ◆ If there are turns involved, try taking them together (as in "One, two, three, go!").
- ◆ If there's a score, keep playing until you discover who the second winner is, or the third, or the last. Or give each other points, or play without points.
- ◆ Add another ball or another goal or another rule. Or take a rule away, or borrow a rule from another game.
- ◆ Challenge yourself: Try the sport with the "wrong" hand or hold hands with somebody else.

rule of the game: you roll the die and multiply the number of pins knocked down by the number on the die. [Check out “Great Junk for Great Play,” below right, for more tips on improvising your own equipment.]

**Q** *If you want to invent your own game, how do you get started?*

**A** You always start with the givens: who wants to play, where you can play, what you have to play with. Then you pick the sport, because everything comes together around that, and the rules, which you can make up as you go along or borrow from another sport. [See “Play by Your Own Rules,” page 58.]

Let’s say your family’s sitting around the living room waiting for the rice to cook. Maybe you see a wad of paper and you bunch it up and start bouncing it in the air to one another. Then you invite the kids to create a goal for the game, or suggest one yourself: Want to see if we can toss the paper into the trash can over there? Hey, maybe you can hold the can and move it around! Allow it to evolve, and all sorts of questions will come up: This is like basketball, but how are you supposed to dribble a paper wad? Well, you can’t dribble it down, so how about dribbling it up by bouncing it on your hands? But we can’t run in here. Okay, so how about sitting on your bottom and scooting around? And there you are — you’ve invented your own game. 😊

HEALTHY WEB SITE

## Bernie Wants Your Games

Bernie DeKoven is looking for a few good sports — junkyard sports, that is. If you’ve come up with a cool one, go to [junkyardsports.com](http://junkyardsports.com) for details on how to submit your idea. If the sport you’ve invented hasn’t appeared in the book or on the Web site, you may see your creativity celebrated on the site’s Junkyard Sports Hall of Fame.



**Players:** 2, plus a moderator

**Equipment:** A sheet of newspaper

**Where to play:** Pretty much anywhere

**Setup:** Place an open sheet of newspaper on the floor.

**Object:** To push your opponent off the paper with your rear end.

**How to play:** Players stand on opposite edges of the newspaper with their backs to each other.

The moderator asks a question (“What year were you born?” “What’s the capital of Oklahoma?”).

The first player to answer correctly takes a half step back. The moderator continues to ask questions until the players’ heels are touching. When the moderator says “Go,” the players use their rear ends to try to push their opponent off the newspaper — without turning around or using their hands. The first player off the paper loses.

### GET IN GEAR

## Great Junk for Great Play

Junkyard sports can be played with (almost) anything that’s lying around. But for sheer versatility, nothing beats these simple toys:



**Old socks and panty hose.** They make great balls. “You can make a baseball-size ball out of ankle socks, and a volleyball-size ball out of knee-highs stuffed with socks,” suggests Bernie.



**Plastic grocery bags.** Use them as basketball-type baskets or make a ball by filling a bag with other bags, then wrap or tie the handles around the bag. Or make a Bubbleball: a plastic grocery bag wrapped around a chunk of bubble wrap. (Use it for Baggyball; see page 57.)



**The Schmerltz.** Put a tennis ball in a knee-sock and tie it in place, then grab it by the sock end, spin, and release. “A well-launched Schmerltz can travel at least twenty feet in the air,” says Bernie. His tip: use it as a ball or as a club for whacking other balls. (Make sure an adult is on hand to supervise.)