



JUNKYARD GAMES

Bernie DeKoven

DeepFun, Redondo Beach – California (Estados Unidos)



RESUMEN:

Cooperative games and exercises have many advantages, helping children build community and develop positive social skills while building and developing their physical skills. However, creating their own games and exercises, even when the games and exercises are modeled after competitive activities, is a cooperative activity that leads not only to positive social values, but also helps children develop leadership skills, exercise creativity and make use of the scientific method.

The Junkyard Games model provides people of all ages and abilities with an easy path to game and activity invention. The Junkyard Game activity centers around a collection of “found” material (socks, pantyhose, tennis balls, brooms, beach balls) and a traditional game or sport (golf, soccer, volleyball), the activity being to invent a version of the traditional game that can be played with found materials in a given environment. Since emphasis is placed on inclusion (the game must be one that everyone can play and enjoy), the Junkyard Game activity is recommended for cross-age, cross-ability groups.

A PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

I had an opportunity to be instrumental in the formulation of New Games. As a co-director of the New Games Foundation back in the ‘70s, I was responsible for designing the New Games Training. I enjoy teaching and inventing, and especially teaching inventiveness, and the New Games Training was the perfect opportunity for me, and, it turned out, for the success of the New Games movement.

The one regret I have is that, despite the continued success of New Games, I was not able to successfully embody the spirit of invention that, to me, was the heart of New Games. New Games today are still new, but they’re still the same New Games that we played thirty years ago. What I had hoped to create – an invitation to play and creativity – was apparently too difficult to package. The games, which I really saw as invitations to the creation of more and newer games, became the unshakable core of the movement. The Junkyard Game concept is my attempt to take New Games to the next level. It is still very new, and has had nowhere near the needed exposure or opportunity to develop to make it into anything like a movement. But it is very promising, and effectively embodies everything I had hoped to accomplish with New Games.

In sharing it with you now, I am inviting you to participate in the development and refinement of this concept. I believe that because of your unique dedication to and interest in cooperative physical education, you will not only understand and appreciate it for what it accomplishes, but, through your expertise and efforts to put it into practice, contribute profoundly to its development.



THE IDEA

As physical educators, our interest in cooperative games is not as much driven by our desire to nurture cooperation, as it is by our understanding that physical education needs to include all children, to provide everyone, regardless of ability, with an opportunity to engage, physically, socially, spiritually, in active play. We are not against competition as much as we are against the divisive and exclusionary nature of competition. It was this understanding that led to the development and unprecedented success of the New Games movement.

Anyone who has played “New Games” knows that the games aren’t really new. What is new is the spirit in which they are played – a spirit in which it is clear that fun is more important than winning, the players more important than the game. Though many New Games can be seen as “cooperative,” the truth is that just as many of them involve competition – a competition that is held in check by the spirit of New Games and the overriding mandate for universal fun.

These competitive New Games (like Dho-Dho-Dho, Smaug’s Jewels, Tweezly Whop, Slaughter, Dragon’s Tail, Hug Tag, Lemonade and Ultimate Frisbee) were selected because they were not only fun, but also funny. They included silly names, silly rituals, silly noises, silly performances, because, as long as they were seen as funny, players would not take them too seriously, and hence be able to keep the competition in check and in appropriate perspective.

Perhaps the most successful strategy for keeping competitive games from being taken too seriously was the introduction of unorthodox equipment. It is difficult to take volleyball seriously when you’re playing with a six-foot-diameter “earth ball.” It is this strategy that is behind the concept of “Junkyard Games.”

Every culture has its version of Junkyard games – in the U.S., unofficial imitations of popular sports, broom hockey, stickball and halfball (as described on the Streetplay website - have, for many of us, become the very paradigm of childhood. Because these informal sports, by virtue of their informality, have no rulebook or body of officials, players are forced to make their own judgments about how a rule is to be followed or a violation to be dealt with. This requires a cooperative contract between all players, whereby, for the game’s sake, rules can be changed to accommodate the demands of the moment and the needs of the players.

The Junkyard Games concept is built on this precedent. But takes it several steps further. The goal is to provide any population with an experience of active physical and social play – one that is inclusive and engaging, one that is not taken so seriously as to cause anyone to be excluded or penalized for lack of physical abilities, one that is undertaken for the sake of sharing fun.

Junkyard Games are inventions. It is easier to invent a Junkyard Game than a New Game, because a Junkyard Game is merely an old game, played with found objects. That, in the process of reconfiguring the old game so that it can be played with junk, the old game becomes changed, adapted, new. Which is precisely the point.



A SESSION

A Junkyard Games session consists of at least four steps or phases:

- In the first, players select **game type** (soccer, hopscotch, badminton, etc.), **materials** (scrap materials like socks and panty hose, old tennis balls, blankets, towels, etc.), and **environment** (hallway, stairs, basketball court, auditorium).
- Next, players meet in small teams to devise a “Junkyard” version of the chosen game type, using selected materials in the chosen environment. During the first phase, teams may exchange materials as needed.
- Teams then test their games by engaging the entire group in a demonstration and testing session.
- Finally, teams meet to revise and refine their games. In subsequent sessions, favorite games are played and new games developed and added to the repertoire.

Emphasis is consistently placed on devising games that engage all players, hence the most effective Junkyard Game sessions are those that involve the greatest diversity of participants. Involving children of different ages, including the elderly, the infirm and handicapped, makes for an experience that transcends boundaries, that expresses the experience of community in its fullness. This truth was observed over and over again by noted folklorists like Iona and Peter Opie who observed children at play in their natural element – backlots, streets and playgrounds (see the Opies’ *Children’s Games in Street and Playground*)

AN EXAMPLE

In the following example, a team develops a game based on soccer, one that could be played in the hallway and involved several wheelchair bound players.

Because the hallway is narrow, the floor hard and slick, and because of the limited mobility of a few of the players, the concept of soccer would have to be severely modified if a playable, genuinely soccer-like game were to be invented. There happens to be a game called “Marble Football” (see also Boccerball). Marble football is itself loosely based on the sport of football, miniaturized and reduced to a football, an enclosed field, goals at either end, and, at either end, a device for aiming rolling marbles onto the field. The object is to drive the football, using your marbles, cross the opponent’s goal. Given the two goals at each end of the field, the objective of getting a ball to cross the opponent’s goal, Marble Football is close enough to soccer to make it a viable precedent.

The junk collection included, amongst other things like brooms and blankets, a great amount of socks and a few deflated beach balls. Clearly, one could make sockballs out of the socks and use them for marbles, a beachball for the soccerball, and blankets at



either end of the hall for the goals and endzones. The brooms could also come in handy. We'll get to that later.

The result may be a far cry from soccer or football, but it's definitely close enough in spirit and practice, and will prove to be as much fun figuring out how to play as it will be playing.

Let's call the game "Hall Sockball Soccer." There are still a lot of decisions made in order to keep this game fun for all: how many sockballs per player (five is a good starting number), what to use for the soccerball (if a beachball proves too temperamental, you might consider a volleyball or football or maybe even a ping pong ball), how much of the hallway to use for the field, how many blankets to use for the endzones, etc. Then there are rules to make about using the sockballs, like, can you throw as well as roll your sockballs? Can you kick them?

As for sockball supply, one nice thing about this game is that in the process of rolling sockballs towards the beachball, teams keep each other supplied.

There could be a problem about keeping the sockballs in play. Sockballs will have an annoying tendency to stay on the field or to roll across the boundaries. This is where the brooms come in. One player from each team could be assigned to a broom. This would be a role that could easily be played by the wheelchair bound or those with other movement restrictions. "Broomies" could be positioned in the middle of the playing field, each against the opposite wall. Should the team decide to try this game in a different environment, such as the playground or gymnasium, the role of Broomies would prove key to keeping the sockballs within the boundaries of the game.

MORE GAMES



Clearly, Hall Sockball Soccer, as described above, can just as easily become street soccer or ice soccer or pool soccer. If there are blind kids in the development team, then adding bells to the ball (there are charm-sized bells that can easily fit into a balloon or beach ball) would not heighten their opportunity to participate but add yet another possibility for the invention of yet another game. The same idea of rolling or tossing smaller balls at a bigger ball could be used to create a new kind of tennis or cricket or rugby. Could you invent a tennis game that's designed to be played in a hallway, using brooms and a ping pong ball? How about a game of golf with the entire building for a golfcourse? What if you stuff a ball inside a sock and fling it (a "Schmerltz" in New Games lore). Could you use that to make up a new kind of golf? Or cricket, perhaps? What kind of wrestling game could you invent with a sockball inside a pair of pantyhose, worn on your head?



PURPOSES

Junkyard Games can be based on any known game or sport, even board games, card games or arcade games. As seen from the above examples, even though they may be modeled after a game, there is no reason to adhere too strongly to the game as played. There could be three teams with two goals or two teams with three or even no teams with one goal (everyone playing for themselves). The only real goal is the invention of a game that is fun for all the players. And, even with that in mind, it's important to remember that the act of creating the game is, in many ways, as valuable as the game itself. Even if no playable game emerges, participants will have worked and played together, constructively, creatively, inclusively. They will have exercised leadership and collaboration skills. They will have made use of a scientific method of play and experimentation to develop their concepts.

PREDICTIONS

I think the worst that can happen as a result of this new initiative is that we will be left with a collection of newer games. Which is not such a bad thing. On the other hand, if we can include in our practice and vision the process of collaborative game invention itself, Junkyard Games can become a true, powerful innovation, leading thousands of children and adults to new levels of physical and social development. Because each game is designed by its players, the Junkyard Game format can bridge generations as easily as physical limitations, culture as easily as race. Junkyard Game events, similar in scope to New Games Tournaments, can become large scale community celebrations where locally produced scrap material becomes the very stuff of play. And, yes, compilations and illustrations of favorite Junkyard Games will inevitably be sought-after, and conveying the design process and potential for continued development will no doubt all too often prove sadly beyond the scope of the publication. However, if luck holds, and enough schools and organizations pursue Junkyard Games, there will be too many games to describe, and too many people who understand the joy of invention to fall for the lesser joys of collection.

Para contactar con el autor: Bernie@deepfun.com



ÍNDICE DE
COMUNICACIONES