

# GAMES

By James Collins

Games are contests. They exist for numerous reasons: training, fun, emotional developments, mental development, exercise, teaching, and they foster cooperation, friendship and skill and are often identified as sports. Every person will encounter games or contests over the entire spectrum of their life. As a baby, they are taught to clap hands and it is structured as a game. As they graduate to books, they are asked to point at pictures as a game to teach them the language and visual stimulus. When they are young and more mobile, they begin to play with balls, dolls, sticks, and cans. From this multitude of mundane items, they generate their own games. All this time they are developing skills, which result from the numerous games and the interaction with their friends. Later in life, they start practicing sports, which are games with rules – sometimes.

The number of players can vary with any game. It can be the person themselves playing a crossword puzzle, a game of solitaire, or any one of a hundred computer games where they are the only one in the contest. They are playing for themselves. Then there are many games, which require a minimum of two. For example playing with a Frisbee, having a catch using a baseball, or playing a game of chess. The Frisbee is interesting because this is one of the games, which involves a variable number of players. They can start with two and as people arrive, they can get involved in the game so the number of personnel playing at any time is a variable. In like manner, informal pickup games such as basketball street hockey or stickball can involve various numbers of players. In many of these games, the maximum number is limited because the sport has a finite number of players. Baseball is an example where the maximum number of players is limited to nine.

Now the types of games are without limit. There are hundreds of board games such as Monopoly, chess, Risk and backgammon. If we go into the world of sports involving humans, we see the Olympics with all of its panoply of winter sports and summer sports. Then we see the sports of individual nations. These includes football, baseball, basketball, hockey, soccer, hurling, rugby, fencing, archery and many others too numerous to list.

If we involve animals in our discussion, we see organized events such as the rodeo, horseracing, dog racing, foxhunting, pigeon racing, cockfighting, and other events involving animals where the humans are usually betting on the outcome.

Historically man has initiated many of these games as training for war. Lacrosse was invented by the Native Americans and a typical competition had one tribe against another. There could be more than 600 people on each side. The rules appeared to be primitive, and the contest went on for days and people died. The Aztecs had a competitive ballgame played in a field that appeared like basketball except that the basket was turned to be vertical. The rules have been lost to antiquity, but murals and some of the writing of

**the Aztecs indicate the outcome of the games. The captain of the losing team was decapitated and apparently, his head was used as the ball for the next team event. How long these events lasted and how many events there were are unknown.**

**Native Americans had an event identified as the gauntlet. Enemies captured in battle were placed into this game. Two lines of Braves and women with sticks and stones lined a path and faced each other about 6 feet apart. The captive was then brought to one end of the line. He was then released and he had to run through the gauntlet while of the people on either side struck him with clubs and stones. If he survived and came out the other end, he was allowed to live. Many of these ancient games sound barbaric but games in our century initiated by various groups are equally dangerous. Russian roulette is the use of a revolver with six chambers where a single bullet is loaded in to the rotating cylinder. The cylinder is then spun and the player places it against his forehead and pulls the trigger. He has one chance in six to die. This is violently portrayed in the movie Deer Hunter and I encountered it when a 14-year-old neighbor of mine lost the game.**

**Games have evolved to encompass nations. Prior to entering a war they engage in intimidation by marching large contingents of their troops, their vehicles, their planes, and their ships near a presumed enemy. This is pure intimidation but they justify it by calling these actions War Games.**

**Youths from their teenage to their 30s often get bored and create life-challenging games to prove their macho fearlessness. These include riding the back of trolleys and buses or riding on the roofs of speeding subway cars. They also do bungee jumping and freefalling parachute jumping. In all these cases deaths have occurred. The participants know the risks but sometimes they are intimidated into disregarding them and risk their lives. There is an old saying that captures this mentality,**

**“Remember if you go to dance with Death, Death wants to lead.”**

**Games have been created by men for a myriad of reasons. Most are good and useful and are to be enjoyed. However, man also has a darker side, and those games are to be feared and avoided.**

**THE END**