

New games

Unique sports emphasize cooperation

The cover photo may look like a prelude to group sex, but it is actually a revolutionary cooperative game called "Lap Sit."

Circled tightly together, members of the group turn to the right and hold the waist of the person in front of them. On the given command, all players begin to sit down, guiding each other. If the balance and cooperation is precise, everyone will have a lap to sit on.

One of many "New Games," Lap Sit is designed to promote cooperation in games rather than competition. It is also a very good way to get close to someone. Un-

like football, this closeness is one of friendship and camaraderie, rather than one of aggressive competition.

The only rules of the games are: play hard, play fair and nobody gets hurt. Aside from those basic rules, the games are an uninhibited interaction of humans who are just trying to have fun.

Too often, the importance of having fun in sports has been overwhelmed by the competitive urge to win. These cooperative sports provide an escape for the individual who wants to relax and be with people.

Children benefit the most from these games. Still molding their attitudes about sports and their bodies, children must learn that it isn't necessary to win in order to have fun.

The world is full of potential superstars who just miss the ball when they bat, or can't quite catch the ball. Everyone can picture the Little Leaguer whose strike-out cost his team the win. Often the picture is a real one, where a normal child feels abnormal — rejected, inadequate and disappointed.

Because children are taught to compete, they perceive that fun and accomplishment lie only in winning. This is a false and destructive idea. In his book "The Cooperative Sports and Games Book," sports psychologist Terry Orlick explains why.

"Pitting children against one another in games where they frantically compete for what only a few can have guarantees failure and rejection for the many," he says.

A few can win, leaving the vast majority as sports rejects. Perhaps this is oversimplified, but the obsession toward athletics and the deification of athletes in general suggests that most everyone is a frustrated athlete.

Orlick believes that now the games are beginning to destroy even the winners. "Children are encouraged to delight in others' failures. They hope for it, they help it happen, because it enhances their own chance for victory. Exposing young children to irrational competition does not teach them how to compete in a healthy manner; it merely pressures them into competition."

The psychological effects encompass more than just a poor attitude toward sports. A child can become conditioned to believe that winning is more important than "playing the game." Failures

at these games can condition a child into shunning competition for fear of losing.

This fear of losing accompanies a feeling of inadequacy and any motivation that the individual might have can thus be stifled. Says Orlick, "Failure at games may also 'teach' children totally unjustified 'bad things' about themselves."

This need not be the case. Cooperative games stimulate and challenge the individual just like competitive games, but the goal is different. In these new games, the goal is for everyone to win, so that no one loses. And everyone cooperates to achieve this goal.

According to Orlick, the nature of the games is such that children can have fun while learning the positive things about themselves, about others and about how they should behave in the world.

"Children play with one another rather than against one another. These games eliminate the fear of failure and the feeling of failure. They reaffirm a child's confidence in himself or herself as an acceptable and worthy person. In most games (new or old) this reaffirmation is left to chance or awarded to just one winner. In cooperative games it is designed into the games themselves," he says.

Four essential components are regarded in the creation of a new game — cooperation, acceptance, involvement and fun.

As the players work together, each a necessary part of the unit, they realize feelings of cooperation. "Cooperation is directly related to communication, cohesiveness, trust and the development of positive social-interaction skills. Through cooperative ventures, children learn to share, to empathize with others, to be concerned with others' feelings and to work to get along better," Orlick says.

Every child has a meaningful role in the game, and a feeling of acceptance is derived from this contribution. "Feelings of acceptance are directly related to heightened self-esteem and overall happiness — just as rejection is directly related to a decline in self-esteem," states Orlick.

Unless children have been conditioned to expect failure and rejection, they want to be directly involved with the action. Orlick says that being left out, eliminated or ignored is clearly perceived as a form of rejection. "Involvement is directly related to a feeling of belonging, a sense of contribution and satisfaction with the activity," says Orlick.

Providing fun is the goal of all children's games, and if the games do not suit the players (as is often the case with the traditional games) the games should be changed — not the players. "In cooperative ventures, the element of fun is enhanced as children are freed to play with others for fun, without fear of failure or rejection and without any need for destructiveness."

As these ideas are combined in games, the children are free to leave the games enriched by the experience.

Competitive games can also enrich one's life, but the need for children's games to be cooperative is imperative. Once a child learns how to deal with others in a cooperative manner (perhaps by age seven or eight) he or she can also reap the benefits of competition.

Traditional sports may teach the older child or adolescent how to strive for excellence. If the child tries hard, but knows it is just a game, it makes no difference who the winner is. What matters is how the game is played.

As the pressures to win are lifted, the individual can enjoy the



game. It is conceivable that one might be able to play better when free of pressure.

Competition is a necessary part of this society, and the institution of cooperative games won't change that. Therefore, it is also important that children learn the concepts of competition, but teaching competition before cooperation is wrong.

John Caine, University athletic director, feels that almost everything one does in life is of a competitive nature, and that athletics on the college level provide experience. "The athletes gain the opportunity to improve their skills, socialize, travel and to know the difference between victory and defeat," he says.

Basketball coach Jim Haney believes that competition can also be a motivator. "Anyone who is moti-

ivated has a greater chance of success than someone who is not self-disciplined," he says.

However, motivation and success can be derived from any of life's challenges. It should not be forgotten that sports are just games.

Cooperative games have been described as "the most complete kind of fun I've ever had." The "spirit" of these new games is one of togetherness that must be experienced to understand its "collective energy."

Those who have never been exposed to these games should keep these things in mind; play hard, play fair and nobody gets hurt.

Stories by Ken Sands.
Photos and cover by Keith Allen.

Games provide challenge

The games listed were originally designated for children, but people of all ages easily fit into the games. Appropriate challenges for the age group can be met with rule adaptations. Many times new games are created from other games, with only a few changes and the only concrete rules are to play fair and play hard so that no one gets hurt.

Cooperative volleyball: Played with the same equipment as regular volleyball, this adaptation suggests that both sides try to see how long they can keep the ball in the air. They can either keep track of the number of successful volleys, or drop score-keeping altogether. To stress participation, a rule could be instituted requiring all members of each team to hit the ball before it goes back over the net.

Blob tag: One person is chosen "it" and he or she begins to tag the rest of the group. As each person is caught, they become part of the blob by holding hands with the original chaser. Eventually everyone becomes part of the blob, and unlike regular tag, those caught at the beginning are not eliminated from play.

Lap Sit: The entire group forms a tight circle facing sideways. Everyone puts their hands on the waist of the person in front of them, and on the count of three, everyone sits in the lap of the persons behind them.

The more people, the bigger the challenge to coordinate the effort. Once 1200 new games participants successfully completed the lap sit.

Deacove Rounders: Like competitive baseball, there are two teams, and each team stays at bat until they score equal the number of players on their team. A grounder is a

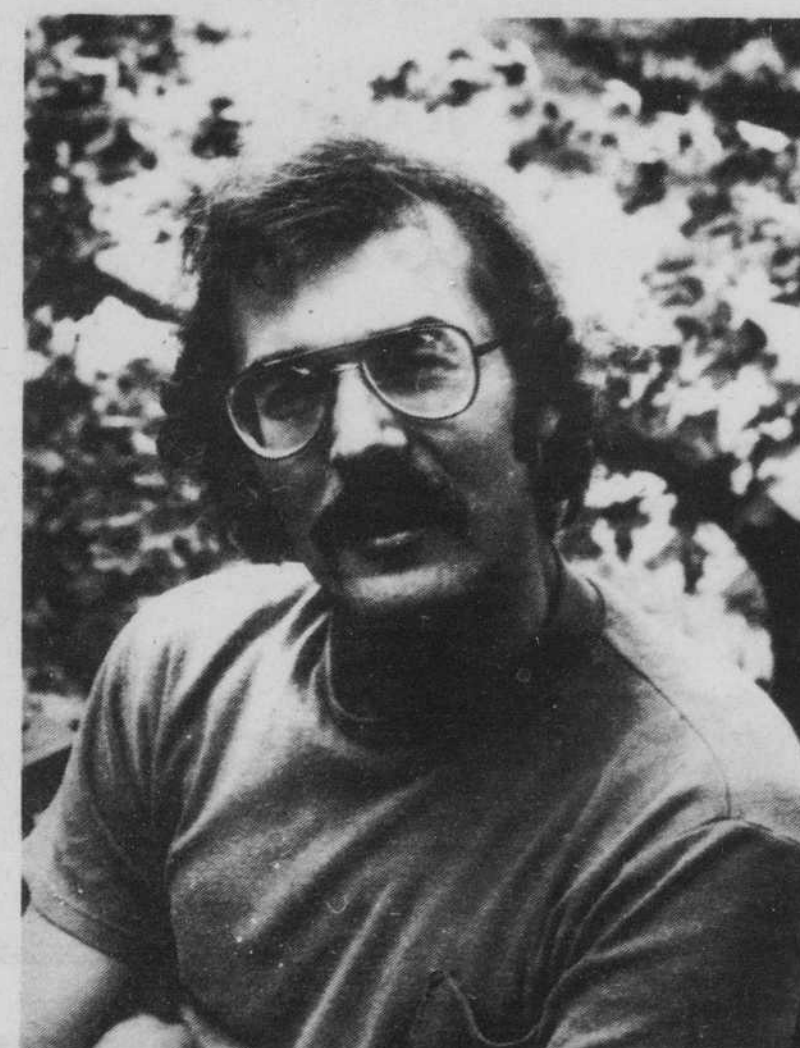


Photo courtesy Pantheon Books

Sports psychologist Terry Orlick believes that games that children play should emphasize cooperation. The games he and others have devised appear in his book "The Cooperative Sports and Games Book."

one-base hit, and infield-fly is a two-base hit, and a fly ball is a three-base hit.

In order for the hits to count, the fielders must stop the grounders, and catch the flyballs. The fielders are thus trying to get the runner on base, so the other team can score their quota of runs. Batters generally get three pitches and then rotate back into the order if they don't get a hit, but the pitchers have incentive to give good pitches.

This game can also be played with the ball resting on a chest-high upright tee, so that the batter swings until he or she hits the ball into play.

Esti-win: In this game, the "winners" are those who know their running abilities the best. Each person estimates the amount of time it will take to complete a distance, and then see how close the prediction was. Every time the runners try to improve upon their past estimates — and times.

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