

This piece is a draft of something I wrote, which with many alterations and additions, developed into a small section in

- MERCHANT, J., GRIFFIN, B.L. AND CHARNOCK, A., 2007. *Sport And Physical Activity: The Role Of Health Promotion*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan

WHAT IF? (A study of the politics of alternative forms of physical activity)

- What if Maradona had been sent off for the 'Hand of God' against England in 1986?
- What if the English cricket team could call up anyone with at least one British ancestor?
- What if Hippies had invented all our favourite team games instead of the Victorians?

Talk about the first two in the bar later. (Though you might want the library to order 'What Didn't Happen Next: Nick Hancock's Alternative History of Football' to get his view on the Maradona question. [England and Hancock, 1999]) The third one may seem impossible but read on...

In 1966 anti-Vietnam protestors planned World War Four. It resulted in slaughter. Slaughter being the first activity of this peacenik event. Basically it was four balls, two baskets and forty people wrestling, laughing and making it up as they went along. Steward Brand, the organiser, felt that the pacifists needed to let out their own anger and aggression safely, rather than denying it existed (or by massacring 'gooks' as the US army was doing at the time.) It was a great success. Other games followed and they were dubbed 'soft war'. [FLUEGELMAN, A. (1976), *The New Games book*. New York, Headlands Press]

Try this now

One example of soft war is 'Sock Shock'. (My own name for it, as games are often passed from one person to another rather than written down.) As many people as want to play, sit on a big area of cushions. Take your shoes off and anything that might hurt other people or get broken. For example keys, glasses etc. Then it's a free for all. Try and get everybody else's socks off and thrown as far away as possible. If you become sockless, go and find them. Shout out three times 'Sock off' and rejoin the fun. Play until you've had enough. No need to all end at the same time. It helps to have a call like 'Stop' so no one gets hurt. If you hear this, repeat it loudly – and stop. Play awarley to avoid injury. If there are large numbers consider having onlookers watching out for safety too.

Health Warning: If you find people are ripping all your clothes off and not just your socks, you've probably wandered into another hippy invention, 'the love-in', by mistake. Remember to use a condom.

New Games

Soft War developed into New Games. Though soft war is still part of this, other non-competitive games were also introduced. The main focus is on altering the game, so that everyone could be included if they wanted to be. This is the opposite of traditional sport where you can only all join in together if you are all roughly the same age, can play to the same rules etc. Though often in New Games there is a referee

to look after safety, power is shared out as much as possible. Everyone is encouraged to contribute a game or create new rules. This last point also encourages people's creativity. In this sense, New Games is much more like children's play than traditional sport where the rules are set by an outside authority - often many generations ago. Perhaps because of this link with childhood, acting games are also part of the mix. This also allows a change of pace, if people need a rest.

What if Hippies had invented all our favourite team games instead of the Victorians?

Maybe then, we'd all be playing games ourselves rather than just watching other people do so on TV. The hippies did there best. The Open University brought New Games over to the UK in 1976. A body was formed to promote them, particularly with disabled groups. Though only a small organisation, they were part of a wider social movement that popularised things like parachute games for play workers, team-building exercises for youth workers and ice breakers for community workers. England may never win the World Cup again. There isn't one in New Games, but 1966 was the start of a challenge to Victorian ideals of physical activity. (Perhaps including questioning what it means to be adult, if grown ups enjoy playing so-called children games. An issue we haven't space to go into more fully here.) Who knows where it will all end?

Are you tapping me up?

There is no typical New Game. This one involves people pairing up and one, the robot, closing their eyes. The robot is then guided round the room by touch. A tap on the head means stop and on the back means go. Tap on the left and right shoulders to indicate direction. In emergencies, the robot will hopefully respond to a loud "Halt!" in their ear. Switch round roles when you want. (In itself, this isn't that physically active. However, as I said before, part of the philosophy behind New Games is creativity. So, if you wanted to make it more physically active, how might you do it?)

If you want to use New Games or Soft War in your work

You may want to promote non-competitive physical activity because you believe in it or simply because it meets the needs of a particular community group you are working with. To get some ideas try Sport Psychologist Terry Orlick's [1982] 'The Second Co-operative Sports and Games Book'. Read his suggestions and adapt them to meet your own needs.

References

- FLUEGELMAN, A. (1976), *The New Games book*. New York, Headlands Press