Dern Ka La / Coconut-shell Shoes

Site of Documentation
Bangkok, Thailand

Description
*Dern Kala* is a game played by Thai children living in Bangkok, Thailand. The game utilizes a traditional toy that is made from a pair of coconut shells. The aim of the game is for players to compete to see who can move fastest while standing on the *Dern Kala*.

Who Plays?
This game requires a minimum of one player. It can be played alone, in pairs or teams. Both boys and girls can play aged 7 to 14 years old.

Accessories/Equipment
To play the game, players need to have a traditional toy called *Dern Kala*. The toy is made from the shell of a coconut, which is cut in half, drilled with holes and threaded with string.

Time and Place
Dem Kala can be played whenever children have free time, as long as the weather is cool and dry. Often they prefer to play during their lunch break at school or at home on the weekend. Players should be careful when playing after rain, when the ground is wet, as it is easy to slip and fall over. Ideally players need to have a large, flat game area that is free from obstructions and measures around 5 x 10 metres in size.

**Skill, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player**

This is a game that tests the player’s coordination, strength and balance. The best players are those that have strong legs and arms, and excellent coordination, so they can control the movement of the coconut shells while they run.

**Popularity**

Walking on Coconut-Shell Shoes is extremely popular among the children over 6 years old and is played frequently for fun. The game is most enjoyed when it is played as a race with a small group of participants. Mon children living in the Pak-kret Community played the game in a slightly different manner to their Buddhist and Muslim peers.

**History of the Game**

Although no one is sure of the exact origins of the game, it has been played by generations of children throughout Thailand.

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**How to Make the Toy?**

1. First, the players need to cut a coconut shell into half. At the centre of each half (on the dimple of the shell), a small hole needs to be drilled.
2. Next, they need to pass a long string (approximately 1.5 metres long) through the holes of both coconut halves. The end of the string should be tied securely to a small stick inside the shell to stop it from slipping back through the hole.

How is the Game Played?

**Step 1.** Each player needs to place one foot on the top of each shell. The string must be pinched between their big toe and the toe next to it and the string held tightly with both hands. The player must now try to keep their balance, by pulling the string taut enough to keep the coconut underfoot, while walking around.
Step 2. If racing, the players have to draw a start line and a finish line on the ground. They can drag a line in the sand using a stick, or use makers such as bags or shoes to determine the track. All the players have to line up at the start line, and when the starter shouts, “Go” they have to race towards the finish line. The first player to cross the finish line wins the game.