Chaij Nees / Horseback Riding

Site of Documentation

Ban Na Ouane, Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

Description

Horseback Riding is one of the most popular games played by Hmong children living in Ban Na Ouane, Luang Prabang. A team of ‘Horses’ must carry a team of ‘Riders’ on their backs. While being carried, the Riders throw a small ball or cushion to each of their team mates until one of them misses and it falls to the ground. Once dropped, the Riders have to quickly dismount and run away from their Horses, who in turn try to hit them with the ball. If the Horses hit a Rider, they win the game.

Who Plays?

The game requires 10 participants. Both boys and girls aged 7 to 12 years old can play. As the game is quite physical and requires the children to be strong enough to carry the other players, boys and girls usually play separately rather than in mixed groups.
**Accessories/Equipment**

To play the game you need to have a small object that will be thrown between the players. In Laos PDR, a small cushion that is used as a blackboard eraser is used, alternatively this can be substituted by a small ball or bean bag.

**Time and Place**

Players usually decide how long they will play the game for before it commences. During a school break they typically play for approximately 15 to 20 minutes, or if out of school, the game tends to be longer, lasting around 30 minutes. This game can be played either indoors or outdoors throughout the year as long as the weather is cool and dry. As it requires a lot of running, it is best played on smooth flat surfaces such as lawns or school yards where the children are less likely to hurt themselves if they fall over.

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

This game is very physical and requires players to not only carry their opponents but also to be able to run and dodge the ball or cushion. For all players, fast running skills, good hand eye coordination and an excellent aim are essential. As with many games, team work can be the key to a successful win. Teams that can work together to form strategies, will always have the advantage over those that do not. Often the Horses try to hide the cushion or ball, passing it secretly between them so that the Riders do not know who to run from and where the attack will come from.

**Popularity**

This is one of the favourite games for boys living in Ban Na Ouane. A great form of exercise, the game is played for fun and to improve the player’s aim and throwing skills. Most children were taught this game by friends, parents or teachers at school.

**History of the Game**

This game was been played by generations of children living in Ban Na Ouane in much the same way as it’s played today. Rather than diminishing in popularity over the years, the game has become even more popular than it once was.
**How is the Game Played?**

**Step 1.** First, all the players have to divide themselves into pairs and play *Rock, Paper & Scissors* to determine a winner and a loser. Losers gather together and form one team, while winners form the other. A volunteer from each team then competes once again in *Rock, Paper & Scissors* to determine the team’s roles. The winner’s team will be the Riders, while the losers become Horses.
**Step 2.** All the players form a circle, with each of the Horses carrying a Rider on their back.

**Step 3.** The Riders must then throw a small cushion or ball around the circle to each of their team mates.
Step 4. The Riders must keep throwing and catching until one of their team mates drops the cushion. When the cushion drops, the Riders have to quickly jump down from their Horses and run away.

Step 5. The Horses have to pick up the cushion and run after the Riders. Their objective is to now throw the cushion at the Riders and accurately hit one of them with it. If a Horse hits a Rider, they win the game and can swap roles in the next game. If they fail, the teams play again in the same roles. The game continues until the time runs out or they too tired to play on any longer.

Rules

1. Horses are not allowed to try to distract the Riders from throwing or catching the cushion.

2. Horses are also not allowed to intercept the cushion when it has been thrown by a Rider.

3. If a Rider has dropped the cushion, they are not allowed to try to push their Horse over on purpose when trying to dismount in an effort to give them a head start.

4. The game is played only for fun - there are no prizes for the winners or punishment for the losers.