Maak Keaw / Marble Shooting

Site of Documentation
Tai Yai group, Mae Hong Sorn Province, Thailand

Description
*Maak Kaew* is a competitive game that tests a player’s marble shooting skills. Players have to shoot their marbles into a hole and also successfully hit their opponent’s marbles if they are to win. Also played by older generations, the game is still popular today with Tai Yai children living in the Mae Hong Sorn Province of Thailand.

Who Plays?
This game can be played with a group of three or more children, aged between 7 and 12 years old.

Accessories/Equipment
This game requires children to bring their own marbles, usually bought from local shops and markets. Relatively inexpensive and easy to find, marbles are usually made from glass and can range in size, weight, colour and clarity.

Time and Place
A game of *Maak Kaew* can last for anything from 30 minutes to 1 hour depending on the availability of time, the skill of the players and the amount of marbles the children have. At school, it is played during recess which limits time and shortens each game. Once school is out, a *Maak Kaew* tournament can last much longer. The game requires a large area of smooth, dry ground that is approximately 4 square metres in size. The ground must be soft enough for the children to dig small
holes from which they will shoot their marbles. In Asia, November through April are typically the best months to play, when days are warm and sunny.

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

The game requires the players to have excellent skill when using their fingers to shoot their marbles. Those who are good at judging distance, aiming and shooting the marble with accurate speed, will be the best players.

**Popularity**

Most popular among boys, the game is usually played during break time in the school playground. Many children also play and practice at home so they can improve their skills and win more marbles. The game encourages children to judge distances, formulate strategies and estimate probabilities.

**History of the Game**

The use of marbles in children’s games dates back hundreds of years and is widespread throughout many parts of the world. In Thailand, children used to play with Kong balls made from thumb sized balls of mud, which were dried out in the sun. Later on Kong balls were replaced by glass marbles. Maak Kaew was played by older generations much in the same way as children play it nowadays.

**Preparation**

1. To prepare the game area, players must dig a small hole in the ground which measures around 2 - 3 cm in diameter.
How is the Game Played?

**Step 1.** First, the order of play is determined. To do this, participants can play a game called “Up First”. All of the players draw a line in the sand around 2 metres away from the hole and stand behind it. One by one, they carefully throw their marbles at the hole. The player whose marble lands closest to (or in) the hole is the game starter; the next closest will be the second player and so on.

**Step 2.** All the marbles must be left in the spot they landed at during “Up First”. Each player must play the next stage of the game from this position.
Step 3. The first player picks up their marble and must shoot it at one of their opponent’s marbles. They can do this using one of two shooting techniques. The first technique involves picking up the marble, holding it steady with the tips of their fingers and flicking it using the thumb of that same hand. Alternatively they can place the marble on the palm of one hand, and using the middle finger of their other hand, flick it.

Step 4: If the player misses the marble they were aiming at, they are out the game and it’s the next player’s turn.
**Step 5:** If the player hits the marble, they can play again and again, continuing to hit each of their opponent’s marbles. Once a player has hit all the marbles, they then need to shoot the marble into the hole. The first player to achieve this earns the title of the “Tiger Cub”.

**Step 6:** The “Tiger Cub” now has to complete a special challenge. They must hit all of their opponent’s marbles and then shoot back into the hole. As a “Tiger Cub” they also earn a special advantage. Once they have hit all the other marbles, they can place their marble one hand’s length from the hole and shoot from there. If they complete the challenge, they win the new title of the “Tiger”.
Step 7: The “Tiger” has one final challenge to win the game. They must once again shoot and hit all of their opponent’s marbles and then shoot back into the hole. Again, they earn themselves a special advantage. This time when shooting for the hole, they are allowed to place their marble the distance from the tips of their fingers to the elbow from the hole. The first player to complete the challenge wins the game.

Rules

1. The order of play is determined by the distance that the player’s marbles fall from the hole. The player whose marble lands closest starts the game, the next one goes second and so on.

2. Each player keeps shooting until they miss the marble they were aiming for. Then it is the next player’s turn.

3. If a player hits every one of their opponent’s marbles they must shoot their marble into the hole to earn the title of “Tiger Cub” before moving up to title of “Tiger”. The “Tiger Cub” can put the marble one hand’s length from the hole before shooting into it, while the “Tiger” can place the marble the distance from the tips of their fingers to their elbow from the hole.

4. Before taking their shot, players are allowed to smooth the ground and remove small stones from to allow for an accurate shot.

5. Players are allowed to use tactics such as hitting the player’s marble who is closest to the hole, further away in order to beat their opponents.