

## Dandem Sleuk Chheu / Stealing the Leaves



### Site of Documentation

Phnom Pehn, Cambodia

### Description

*Dandem Sleuk Chheu* is a running game played by children living in suburban communities surrounding Phnom Pehn, Cambodia. In the game players have to try to beat their opponent by running into the game area, grabbing a small leafy twig and making it back to their team mates without first being caught.

### Who Plays?

The game requires a minimum of four players aged 9 years or older. Both boys and girls can play either in single sex or mixed teams.

### Accessories/Equipment

This game requires a small leafy twig, which can be picked from a tree or found on the ground nearby. Players will also need an object to mark out the game area, such as chalk, a stick or sharp stone, depending on where the game is being played.

## Time and Place

The game area needs to be around 10 x 5 meters in size. As it requires a lot of sprinting, a smooth, flat surface where players are less likely to slip or fall over is ideal. Although *Dandem Sleuk Chheu* is traditionally played during the Khmer New Year, it can be played throughout the year at any time of day, as long as it is cool and dry. Each round of the game takes around 15 minutes, depending on the skill of the players.

## Skills, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player

Players need to be quick, agile and alert to be able to 'steal the leaves' without being caught. The best players are those that have fast responses and good running skills. Those that have devised tactics and can work well as a team will always have an advantage over their opponents. Distracting an opponent so that a player can make their move or bluffing so that an opponent to grabs the leaves first, allowing the other player to catch them as they try to make it back to their team, are common strategies. The player that takes on the role of the Judge must be careful to be fair to both teams at all times.

## Popularity

This game is enjoyed by children living in suburban communities surrounding Phnom Pehn. It is played by both adults and children during New Year festivities.

## History of the game

This game was played by many members of older generations when they were young. Traditionally, one team of players was comprised of men and the other entirely of women. In Cambodia, tournaments of the game are played in temples or well known resorts and are even occasionally televised.

---

## Preparation

1. To prepare, a large circle needs to be drawn. Players can draw on the ground with chalk or use a stick or stone to drag a line in the sand.
2. Once drawn, a small leafy twig needs to be placed at the centre of the circle.



## How is the Game Played?

**Step 1.** All the players need to divide themselves into two equal sized teams. They can choose the teams themselves or play *Oulampe*.



**Step 2.** Each team stands in row, facing the other team, on either side of circle. There should be a distance of around 10 metres between the two teams.



**Step 3.** One player volunteers to be the Judge. Once chosen, the Judge gives each player a number. Players of the same number (in different teams) compete against each other in the game. One by one, the Judge will call each pair of opponents from the two teams to play. The Judge is responsible for deciding the winner of each round.



**Step 4.** To begin the round, the Judge calls forward the Number 1's. Both Number 1 players then have to race each other into the circle. The player who reaches the twig first, has to pick it up and quickly run back to their team.



**Step 5.** If they get safely back with the twig in hand they win the round. However, their opponent can try to catch them as they make off with the twig. If they do so before the player gets back to their team, then they win the round instead. Players gain one point for each win.



**Step 6.** Next, the Judge will call forward another pair of players (they don't necessarily need to be in numerical order), and they play again.



**Step 7.** Sometimes neither player wants to pick up the twig, to avoid being caught by their opponent as they try to run back to their team. When this happens the Judge can call another pair of players to help. These supporting players will either try to grab the twig or if too late, try to touch their opponent as they run off with it. To win the round, both team mates must make it back to their home ground with the twig and without being caught.

**Step 8.** Once each pair of players has taken a turn, the Judge calculates the scores and announces the winning team. Winners usually sing a victory song and as a punishment, get the losers to dance.

---

### **Rules**

1. The player that can grab the leaves and get back to their team without being touched by their opponent wins the round.
2. For each round won, a team wins one point.
3. Players can use any tactic they like (such as distraction or bluffing) to try to beat their opponent.
4. Players can request for help from the Judge. It is up to the Judge to decide whether opponents should have assistance from their team mates.