

Sva Dandeam Ti / Monkey Steals the Seat



Site of Documentation

Phnom Pehn, Cambodia

Description

Sva dandeam ti is a running game played by children from suburban communities surrounding Phnom Pehn, Cambodia. In it, players have to keep swapping places with their team mates who stand at different corners of the game area. The players have to run as quickly as possible to make it to their new position, before the Monkey, who stands in the middle, steals their 'seat'.

Who Plays?

This game requires five players. Both boys and girls can play aged 7 years or older.

Accessories/Equipment

To play the game you only need an object to mark out the lines of the game area on the ground. This could be chalk, a stick or sharp stone, depending where the game is being played. Alternatively, objects such as bags and shoes can be used to mark out the corners and central position of the game area.

Time and Place

This game usually takes about 30 minutes to be play. It can be played at any time of the day as long as there is plenty of space and weather is fine. As the game requires a lot of running, it is best played on smooth, flat ground of around 2 x 2 metres in size. Traditionally, children in Cambodia would play in the area underneath a stilted house, as it was cool, shaded and the stilts provided defined corner points for the game area. These days it's more likely to be played in the school play ground during lunch breaks.

Skills, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player

This is a game of speed and mental alertness. The best players are those that anticipate the Monkey's movements and can beat them to the 'seat'. Players often choose the fastest runners to partner with to give themselves a better chance of staying in the game. For slower runners, one key strategy is for players to swap with their partners while the Monkey is distracted by other players. Players that work together as a team and take turns to bluff and distract the Monkey will always have the advantage.

Popularity

This game is most popular with children from suburban and ethnic communities surrounding Phnom Pehn. Played both in and out of school, in the absence of poles to mark out the game area, children sometimes utilize colourful floor tiles found in playgrounds and at home. Since the game requires a group of players, children sometimes find it hard to gather enough participants and therefore it is played less often than some others. Most children learned the game from their peers and older siblings.

History of the game

Sva dandeam ti has been enjoyed by generations of Cambodian children. Many adults in the local communities recalled playing the game when they were young under stilted houses. The game has not evolved significantly over time and is played nowadays much in the same way it was before, albeit using a smaller space. Many members of the older generations felt that since the local land had increased in value and been sold off, the space for children to play has been reduced and that games were often being adapted to suit smaller spaces.

Preparation

1. To prepare the game, lines for the game area need to be drawn on the ground.
2. Players can draw on the ground with chalk, use a stick or stone to drag a line in the sand or use markers, such as bags or shoes to define the area.
3. The players need to draw a large square which is at least 2 x 2 metres in size. The square has to then be divided into quarters by adding two lines that run from corner to corner.



How is the Game Played?

Step 1. First, the players must all play *Rock, Paper and Scissors* to determine a loser. The loser will play the 'Monkey' during the game.



Step 2. Once the Monkey is identified, the game begins. The Monkey needs to stand right at the centre of the game area (A), where the two diagonal lines intersect. Each of the other players position themselves at one of the four corners of the square. (B, C, D and E).



Step 3. Each of the players needs to choose a team mate to partner with. They can choose any player apart from the one standing diagonal to them. (B can choose C or E, C can choose B or D, and so on).



Step 4. During the game the player will have to exchange places with their first partner three times. After completing the three swaps, each player is free to partner with any of the other players. The players are allowed to run on any of the game lines to try to complete their swap.



Step 5. As the players try to make their swaps, the Monkey in the middle has to try to sneak into the empty place that the player has left behind, before their partner gets there. If the Monkey is able to beat the players to the vacant spot, they win the game. The losing player is the player left without a seat once the Monkey has made their move.



Step 6. The game continues with the losing players taking turns to be the Monkey until all the players are too tired to play on.



Rules

1. Each player must reach the safety of their new position before the Monkey steals their old seat.
2. Players can return back to their original position if they anticipate an obstacle blocking their path to their destination.
3. The game is restarted if the Monkey exits the square during play.
4. The Monkey can ask players for a short break if they become tired.