

Tinh Ovleuk / Buying Watermelons



Site of Documentation

Phnom Pehn, Cambodia

Description

Tinh Ovleuk is a popular game played by children living in Phnom Pehn, Cambodia. A game that involves lots of lighthearted acting, *Tinh Ovleuk* tests the strength of all that play it. The aim is for a team of 'Watermelons' to resist being plucked from the ground by a relentless team of 'Buyers'. During the game the Buyers will pull each of the Watermelons with all their might, and when they have plucked one away they will 'eat' their juicy prize before moving onto the next.

Who Plays?

This game requires at least seven participants and can be played by both boys and girls, aged 9 years or older. Traditionally children would form two teams; one comprised of all girls, one of all boys and one solo player to take on the role of the 'Watermelon Seller'. Nowadays, teams can be mixed depending on preference and the availability of players.

Accessories/Equipment

This game requires a strong pole that the Watermelons can hold on to. A wooden pole is ideal as it is easier to cling to without causing harm to the player's hands and body.

Time and Place

Tinh O vleuk is most often played around the time of Khmer New Year in April. The game can be played indoors or outside as long as the game area has a smooth, flat concrete floor and a sturdy pole. The size of the space required depends on the number of children playing. For groups of between 7 and 11 players, an area of 3 x 4 metres should provide ample space. On average, each game lasts between 15 minutes and an hour, depending on the skill of the players.

Skills, Strategies and Qualities of a Good Player

Tinh O vleuk is primarily a game of strength. The best players are those that can hold onto their team mates (or the pole) for as long as possible while being pulled by their opponents. Players with the strongest arms will have an advantage over smaller, weaker players both when playing the role of the 'Watermelon Buyer' or as a Watermelon.

Popularity

Tinh O vleuk has been popular in Cambodia for many years. Loved by both boys and girls the game's physical nature provides fun for all involved. Often, children do not like playing the seller's role as it is passive and not involved in the tugging and pulling of the other players. The game should be played carefully as over enthusiastic pulling (or holding) can result in unintentional injuries. Teams can be unlimited in size and often the more the players, the more enjoyable the game.

History of the game

Although the history of the game cannot easily be traced in the local communities it is similar to a game played in the Cambodian countryside known as "Hugging (or picking) Watermelons". Many aspects of the game are very similar, so it is thought that *Tinh O vleuk* could have been adapted from it. The main difference between the games is that today, more than one player can help pick the Watermelons from the ground.

How is the Game Played?

Step 1. First the players need to divide themselves into two teams of equal size. The teams need to then agree on which will play the Watermelons and which will play the Buyers. One member of the Watermelons must volunteer to be the 'Watermelon Seller', while their fellow team mates sit one behind the other in a line behind the pole.



Step 2. The player that sits at the head of the line, next to the pole is called *Mey Ovleuk* (meaning 'Leader of the Watermelons') and their job is to cling as hard as possible to the pole during the course of the game. Each of the players seated behind them must hold onto their team mates by placing their hands around the waist of the person in front.



Step 3. One of the Buyers must then volunteer to be the 'Watermelon Buyer'. This player starts the game by asking the Watermelon Seller, "Are the watermelons ripe yet?" If the seller says, "The watermelons are not ripe yet" then the buyer must walk away and return a few moments later to ask once again, "Are the watermelons ripe yet?"



Step 4. The Buyer's questioning continues until finally the seller answers, "Go and check them yourself." This is the cue that the action is about to begin. The Buyer must approach the Watermelons one by one. They must knock on each players' back and ask, "*Muoy, pi, bei, chroluok teuk trei, tum nov?*" which means "One, two, three, dip into fish sauce, are you ripe yet?" Each Watermelon can choose how they respond, answering the Buyer with, "I'm raw" or, "I'm ripe".



Step 5. After asking each of the Watermelons, the Watermelon Buyer and his team of assistants begin to try to pull each of the Watermelons from the line, one by one. The Watermelons need to do all they can to remain firmly attached to their team mates for as long as possible.



Step 6. Each time the Buyers succeed in prying a Watermelon from the line, the Watermelon Buyer pretends to pay the Watermelon Seller and proceeds to 'eat' the plucked Watermelon right away. This should be done in a theatrical manner, with the Buyer making lots of crunching and slurping noises! After the Buyer finishes eating the first Watermelon, the team continues to try to pluck off each of the other Watermelons one by one. When only the Leader of the Watermelons is left, that player must let go of the pole, jump up from the ground and run away.



Step 7. The Watermelon Buyer must chase and catch the Leader of the Watermelons. Once caught, the Buyer can eat the Leader in the same way as they ate the other Watermelons.



Step 8. Once the last Watermelon has been eaten, the Buyers win the game. The two teams can then swap sides and the game begins again.



Rules

1. The Watermelons must hold firmly on to one another's waists. During the pulling process, the Buyers must try to pull the Watermelons from their waist, though they are also allowed to tickle and joke with the Watermelons in an attempt to get them to let go.

2. If the Buyers succeed in pulling all of the Watermelons from the line and catches the Leader of the Watermelons, then they win the game and the teams swap sides.
3. The player that takes the role of the 'Watermelon Seller' can either swap with the Leader of the Watermelons at the beginning of a game, or if they prefer they can continue playing the same role until the game is complete.