

The Old Games Young People Play

By BARBARA STEWART

New York Times (1857-Current file); Aug 18, 1996;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2006)

pg. NJ8

The Old Games Young People Play

By BARBARA STEWART

Many of the games played at the Boys and Girls Club camp in Hawthorne — officially with counselors and unofficially, during free time — are literally ancient. Some can be traced back to the Middle Ages.

With variations of names and rules, they have been played in past decades and centuries throughout Europe, Canada and the United States, and, most likely, around the world.

Here are a few of the popular ones, as explained in "Children's Games in Street and Playground," by Iona and Peter Opie (Oxford University Press, 1969):

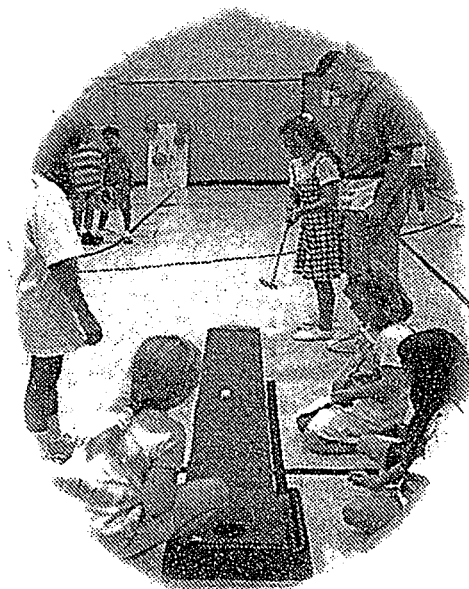
RED ROVER Method: Two opposing teams, facing each other, stand in a line linking arms. One side yells: Red Rover, Red Rover, let (child's name) come over! The child runs and tries to crash the line. If he does, he takes an opposing player back with him. If he can't, he joins the opposing team.

Rating: Loud, fast and rowdy — signs of a great game.

History: This game appears to have sprung up early in the century in the British Isles and North America. In Spain, it has been traced to the early 1800's, at least. There, young soldiers of the King of Spain and King of France try to break each other's ranks.

In Brooklyn, during the 1890's, it was called Red Lion. But today, throughout English-speaking countries, it is universally known as Red Rover.

RED LIGHT, GREEN LIGHT Method: One or



Dith Pran/The New York Times

Putting practice, in the gym, at the Hawthorne Boys and Girls Club camp.

more children try to sneak by a player — whoever is "it" — as that player, shielding his eyes, chants "green light, green light." When the player yells "red light!" and whirls around, anybody he catches moving loses. The winner is the player who has covered the most distance — or alternatively has gotten closest to the player who is

"it."

A variation has children running straight ahead. The one who runs farthest without being caught moving wins.

Rating: Relies on cunning and coordination rather than physical strength. Very adaptable — can be played while waiting for the school bus, for instance.

History: In England, this game is called "Peep behind the Curtain" — one of 30 names found in Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand, including Black Pudding, Creeping and Creeping Mouse and Policeman's Steps. The name "Red Light, Green Light" seems to be found only in the United States and Canada. The game was documented in the late 1800's in England but was probably being played long before.

CAPTURE THE FLAG Method: This game, a camp perennial, has existed long before summer camps. Here, children form two armies, claim spaces for home and for prison, and chase one another. The aim is to capture the other side's flag and carry it safely to home.

Rating: This needs at least 20 children and usually a counselor to organize them and rev them up. Once going, though, it can be engrossing, suspenseful, and very romantic, better than any war or battle computer game. Plus it's great exercise.

History: It was old in the 1800's. References to it appear in a 1611 French-English dictionary and in the 16th-century classic epic, *The Faerie Queene*. For centuries, children named their respective armies after their own country and the country it was at war with.