

Chris Bucci
ART 380
Assignment C

Imagine if you will, a sport that combines the skills of soccer, rugby, and wrestling. A game that requires all areas of physical prowess: strength, speed, agility, coordination. Now imagine that that game looks, to the average westerner, like a bunch of grown men playing Red Rover. I'm talking about the South Asian game of Kabaddi. It's popularity has spread from its origin in India to most all of Southeast Asia, Japan, and Iran, yet the game is virtually unknown in America.

Kabaddi is generally played by men, although women playing it is not unheard of. It is enjoyed by both children and adults. One of the main benefits of playing kabaddi is the lack of equipment required for game; all you need is an open area of flat ground about half the size of a basketball court. No special clothing is required and there is no ball, bat, net or any other type of equipment for the game. It is something a group of boys might get together and play after school or something grown men might indulge in on a weekend for some fun and exercise.

The setup of kabaddi is fairly simple: two teams of 12 players are chosen and a coin is flipped to decide which team gets to raid first. The play area is a field of 12.5 m x 10 m that is divided in half by a line. Each team sends 7 players to their side of the field and keeps 5 players in reserve. From there the game begins. The raiding team sends one of their players over as a raider in order to tag the other teams players, removing them from the game when the raider crosses back onto his side. The defending team must form a chain by holding hands and if it is broken and the raider makes it back to his side, then the defending team loses a player for that as well. The goal of the defending team is to wrestle the raider and prevent him from returning to his side. If a raider can't make it back to their side, they are out instead. There is one catch to all of this: the raider must complete his run on one breath. Once he crosses the line into the defending players side, he must repeatedly chant the word kabaddi. If he breathes again without making it back to his side, he is considered out and anyone he tagged that raid is still in the game. Thus the point of wrestling is not limited to subdue, but is also useful in order to delay the raider. Raids become very fast pace and exhilarating. The raider is racing against their own body and must be able to move quickly and efficiently. Any part of the raider may be used to tag defenders. Strategies include using your toes or your foot to try and tag the lower part of the body.

The game is broken up into two 20 minute halves with a five minute break at halftime where the teams switch sides on the field. The teams alternate sending raiders and you can't send the same person twice in a row. There is no pause between raids, so the player returning from a raid must get back to his defensive position quickly lest he be caught unready by the other teams raid. A good strategy for raiders is to plan your escape so that you end up close to where you need to be for defense. The players must remain within the boundaries of their side and any player crossing a boundary will be considered out. The one exception to this rule is when the raider and a defending player are touching each other, typically while wrestling, which is called a struggle. Being able to send one player out of bounds through struggling is a great tactic, provided you can do it without sending yourself out as well. There are many rules regarding what you can and cannot do while in a struggle. Most are reminiscent of the rules of wrestling and football. For instance, you cannot hit, kick or even slap. Head butting in any way is forbidden as well as violent tackling. Any form of strangling or gagging or restraining by holding a players clothes or hair are also not allowed. Struggles are also limited to being one on one to prevent the defending team from being able to use overwhelming numbers to subdue the raider.

The game is scored by using a simple point system. Any time you send a player from the other team out, you get a point. Any time one of your players is out, the other team gets a point. When an entire team is finally out, the remaining team gets a bonus of two points and all players called out on both sides return to play. Committing any sort of foul during a struggle will also award a point to your opponent. At the end of the second half, the team with the most points wins.

Due to its tremendous popularity and the broad range of cultures that play, kabaddi has developed many variations over the years. The 'Amar' version imposes a 30 second time limit for each raid and lowers the number of defenders on the field to 4. When a player is out they also remain on the field instead of being forced to leave. In the 'Surjeevain' version, when a player of the opposing team is out, you get to bring a player from your side back in. In the 'Gaminee' version, there is no time limit on the game and the first team to lose all their players loses.

Overall, kabaddi seems like a fun game for all ages. It requires a wide variety of skills and gives a good, well rounded workout. The British Army uses it to help maintain its soldier's physical fitness. Play is fast paced and tense, with one player having to face off against seven defenders at once. Despite often being shown as grown men wrestling each other to the ground, the game is quite civilized. Any sort of trash talking at all is heavily discouraged and considered a violation of the organized rules. There is a sense of teamwork that develops from defense since you must be able to move easily as one unit while holding hands. Its popularity is a testament to its versatile appeal, it is the national game of Bangladesh and the state game of 4 states in India. It was even a part of the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin. It is slowly growing in its exposure with kabaddi leagues emerging in the US and Canada. It is only a matter of time before it begins to become more well known across the country.

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