

Helen Zhang  
11/12/08  
McDonald - Games

### Pull (Chinese)

Pull is a physical schoolyard game played by young Chinese boys. According to my father, while the girls were playing cooperative games akin to jump rope, the boys were engaging in this competitive battle of strength and stability in the playground. The game is easy to learn, but difficult to master. It takes balance, strength, and finesse to overcome an opponent, making it an ideal means for young boys to not only challenge each others power and stability during recess, but to also expend pent-up energy. Like Push Hands, Pull may have originated from Tai Chi push hands exercises, which emphasize upsetting your opponent's balance through a controlled and gentle transfer of energy. Sudden, forceful movements are looked down upon in Tai Chi push hands, but in Pull, they can be a valuable strategy for victory. I haven't found online documentation on Pull because I'm not sure of its original title, so I've named it based on the primary motion of the game: pulling the opponent until he loses his balance.

Two players face off, while standing with their right foot roughly twelve inches in front of their left, aligned with and nearly touching the other's right foot. Everyone's feet should be in the same line, and knees should be mostly straight, to diminish overall stability. The opponents grasp right hands with their elbows slightly bent, as if about to arm wrestle. The emotions, too, are akin to those experienced before an arm wrestling. Only one will emerge victorious—the winner a triumph of power and stability, the loser defeated in frailty. Pull is a competition to dominate the weaker player, and losing several times in a row to the same person can be damaging to one's ego.

The rules of the game are simple and without specific definitions that the player needs to understand. The only equipment required is one's self, and a working set of arms and legs.

Winning condition:

The main objective of this game is to win by forcing your opponent to lose his footing. Victory and defeat are determined by who loses his or her balance first.

Boundary rules:

- 1.) It's best to take your shoes off for this game, to minimize any difference in traction between your opponents shoes and yours. If outdoors, wear similar kinds of shoes.
- 2.) Stand with feet aligned, the right foot about twelve inches in front of the left. Your feet should be in line with your opponent's, and your right foot should be almost touching his right foot. Aligning the feet creates more imbalance, adding to the challenge.
- 3.) Do not bend your knees excessively to gain an advantage in stability.
- 4.) Grip the opponent's right hand, with your arm slightly bent.
- 5.) You cannot grab any other part of the opponent's body aside from his hand. Your left hand cannot be used, and should be behind your back or at your side.
- 6.) Use your right hand to pull your opponent right, left, backwards, or push forwards.
- 7.) You may reverse sides, putting your left foot in front of the right, and using the left hand to pull.

There are a few implicit rules that I stated explicitly, such as wearing similar shoes (or not wearing any at all), but it should be obvious when your opponent is trying to gain a physical or tactical advantage through stance. The players need to agree on how bent their knees can be, what kind of shoes can be worn, and what kind of grip and stance they will both take. It's considered cheap to gain an advantage by bending your knees so low to alter your center of balance.

While Pull is largely determined by strength, a good strategy can help even the playing field when facing off against someone stronger than yourself. One strategy is to pull extremely hard to one side, then, as your opponent tries to neutralize your attempt, ease any force you're applying to your hand and allow them to fall to the opposite side. This strategy allows you to manipulate the other person's body weight and strength to your advantage. Another strategy is to let the opponent start the pulling first. If they pull to the right, you pull further to the right. Instead of trying to counter his attempt, you intensify it, which the opponent probably isn't expecting. It's important to mix strategies so it doesn't become apparent what you're trying to do.

A drawback of Pull is that if an opponent is immensely stronger than you, it becomes impossible to win, making it un-fun. It's best to be matched with someone of a similar strength so that the outcome isn't solely determined on strength, but also strategy and superior balance. The game is meant to be played multiple times, so if someone is obviously stronger than you (which you may find after the first round), you will probably not want to continue. If, however, it seems that you're about evenly matched, you may feel that you have a chance at beating them in another round and will continue playing. Pull is a meaningful game because players, who engage in the action of pulling each other, see their actions reciprocated in the outcome of the game: whoever pulls hardest, has the best balance, and uses the best strategy, will win by causing his or her opponent to stumble or fall.

The major strength of Pull is that you can play anywhere Ñ given there are no pointy objects nearby Ñ without any special equipment or preparation. It is not fun, however, to play against someone much stronger than yourself. Because of its nature, it is a game meant only for two people, and will not scale to fit more. There is a slight danger of injury when falling, so, while you aren't necessarily limited to where you can play, you'll want to make sure the surface you play on won't hurt badly to fall on. Don't play this on a bed of nails, or around things that may break, for instance.

My father brought up an interesting point that only young boys would play Pull with each other. They'd never play against girls, and girls would not play against each other. Girls would instead play games that required teamwork, like jump rope. Perhaps the game is social commentary on the expectations of Chinese gender roles, or perhaps the popularity of the game amongst a specific gender and age group was limited by how unchallenging it is to play against someone of unmatched strength. Whenever you have an open space and a friend about your size, Pull can be an extremely challenging and fun experience.