

## Kolven

Kolven is a Flemish and Dutch game where players use a curved club (*klik*) to hit a ball between two poles in an indoor court.

Kolven stems probably from the medieval French *choule* or *choule à la crosse*, in which a bowl or ball was propelled with a curved stick toward a target, the target sometimes being located several kilometers from the starting point. A similar game was *jeu de mail*, which was played with metal hammers cross-country or on a course and entered England as *palle-maille* on the now famous avenue Pall Mall. Another related Dutch game was *beugelen*, where the ball was hit through a narrow gap on the course; it has survived in the southern Dutch province of Limburg.

From these roots, there developed the game of **kolf** where the ball is hit into a special hole, either as fast as possible or by as few strokes as possible. The name of the game was derived from the bat or club, **kolf** (in family with German *Kolben*). **Kolf** was also played on ice, and there were many local varieties. The game became very popular during the 16th and 17th centuries. Many Dutch and Flemish genre **paintings** from this period showed **kolf** players in action on icy rivers. Several local authorities reacted by instituting prohibitions against **kolf**, referring to broken windows among the reasons for the prohibitions. However, the frequency of these interdictions underlined the popularity of the game. But with the increasing population in Flanders and the Netherlands and with private and capitalist appropriation of landed property, the land became scarce, and the game began to vanish from about 1700.

Crossing the national borders, **kolf** may have stimulated the game of field hockey and—in Scotland—the game of golf. The Dutch game, however, developed neither toward a team game (like hockey) nor to an outdoor game (like golf) but instead transformed into the indoor game kolven. It was now played on a more reduced course, often roofed over and connected with a café or inn. In 1792, there were 350 courses in Holland, almost half of them covered. The sticks became heavier and the balls larger.

*jenever* (gin) and cigars (i.e., the traditional male life style), but since 1966 women are playing, too.

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### Further Reading

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## La Soule

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*La soule* or *choule* is a folk ballgame practiced in France. The game is played usually between two (sometimes more) competing teams representing different local identities, for instance, bachelors versus married men, uptown versus downtown, sometimes different villages. The point of *la soule* is to bring the ball—called *soule*—to one's own goal or to the goal of the opponent, using hands, feet, or sticks.

After giving up the ball, which sometimes happens ritually three times, the teams try to catch the ball and engage in a collective scrum. When one player succeeds in grasping the ball, the players run through the landscape, through fields and bushes, urban environment, and rivers. This can be interrupted by scrums and fights with the other teams posting at the way. When finally a goal is reached, the winning team is celebrated with a prize. If the goal is one's own, the winning place will be the starting point for the game of the following year. All this is accompanied by merriment, dancing, drinking, and eating pancakes and engages the whole local community. There is little or no restriction concerning time, space, or the size of the teams, which may vary between some dozens and some hundreds. Rules of the game are more or less implicit. There are two additional versions of the game. *Soule à la crosse* is played with sticks. And *melat* (in Brittany) is a more open and brutal form of the game.

In Breton mythology, the game is dated back to Celtic prehistory. But historically, *la soule* is recorded since the 12th century. The game is related to British Shrove Tuesday ball games and Cornish hurling the silver ball. It was chiefly played at ritual days, mainly around Shrove Tuesday, Easter, or the patron saint's day of the parish. In early times, clergy and nobility participated, noblemen generally patronizing the match. Between the 15th and 19th centuries, however, *la soule* was prohibited again and again by ecclesiastic and secular authorities, the official argument being its idle and violent character.

During the 19th century, modern soccer and rugby developed partly out of this type of folk ballgame, and the traditional *soule* became marginalized. In its traditional forms, *la soule* continued at single localities until 1930–1945. Since the 1980s–1990s however, a revival has been successfully tried at different places. This revival was sometimes connected with cultural (Breton, Celtic) regionalism, promoting Breton versus French identity.

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### Further Reading

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