

They may look odd to the uninitiated, but traditional Dutch sports are alive and kicking... not to mention swinging, springing and thwacking. Mark Smith gets the lowdown



"Foreigners often giggle at the sight of this sport, which involves jumping over a body of water with the aid of a very long pole," says Jan Kooijman of Polsstokbond Holland. "It originated as a way for farmers to navigate the drainage channels of their fields, and went on to become a much-loved Frisian activity; it's typically performed to celebrate market day. Between 8m and 13m long, the pole (polstok) has a flat round plate at its base to prevent it from sinking into the muddy river or canal bottom after it's thrust there by the jumper. A good leap can span up to 20m; the competitor sprints to the pole and grips it, before climbing to the top during its trajectory over the water, to maximise the length of the leap."

"A distant relative of golf, kolven is played with cannon-sized rubber balls and a wooden club – called a 'kolf' – on an indoor court measuring 17.5m by 5m," explains Mark Aberkrom, Chairman of Koninklijke Nederlandsche Kolfbond. "The game, which is relatively sedate and often accompanied by a drink or two, was originally played outside, sometimes on ice, but it really caught on in the 18th

century. There are three players, and the idea is to hit the post at the far end of the court, hit the post at the starting end, and then return the ball to the far end, all in three strokes. The highest possible score is 60 points, but an average of 40 points is considered pretty respectable, because playing kolven is more difficult than it looks!"

KLOOTSCHIETEN

"Many sayings and expressions in the Dutch language indicated that klootschieten ('road bowling') was already an extremely popular spectator sport around 1500," says Cees van der Sluis of the Nederlandse Klootschietersbond. "The two teams usually consist of four people each, but can increase to ten players under exceptional circumstances. A wooden or synthetic bowl containing a lead weight is thrown through the air along a country road or track that measures between one and ten kilometres [1]. The idea is to release the bowl when the arm has reached its lowest point [3]. On a good track, the bowl can travel up to 150m per throw. Sound dangerous? To avoid accidents, all eyes are fixed on the player who's bowling, and he'll shout to signify his intention to throw [2]." The point at which the ball stops is then used to mark the beginning point for the next thrower [4].

PAALZITTEN

Perhaps the most eccentric of all of the funny games in the Dutch kit bag is paalzitten. Actually, it doesn't require much kit at all; literally meaning 'pole sitting', it constitutes sitting atop a wooden stump for as long as possible, sometimes to raise money for charity, sometimes because it can get you onto television and requires no discernible talent apart from being able to stay awake. Participants are allowed toilet breaks every few hours and, although records are pretty unreliable, it would seem that 92 hours is the figure to beat.