

## DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME

*When I decided to write a column describing all the stupid, dangerous games we invented as kids, I assumed I was writing for an audience solely of my childhood friends, because who else would care? Well, I was wrong about that. The response was overwhelming, with readers chiming in about all the silly things they did as kids, with all of us marveling that we're still alive. It turns out making up ill-advised endeavors is a surprisingly universal experience—just one more way “sports,” broadly defined, binds us.*

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I want to discuss the smallest sports of all—the games no one seems to play anymore: the games we used to make up.

You see, when I was a kid, we didn't spend our summers in a van going to travel team soccer games. The only rule our parents gave us was to get home when the streetlights came on. We took full advantage of this lack of parental supervision by inventing an array of unapproved entertainments.

Take the Baloney Game. This became popular when my friend's mom started working. We would go to Dave's house for lunch, where each of us would grab a slab of Oscar Meyer and whip it toward the kitchen ceiling. Whoever's slice stayed stuck the longest was declared the winner of Phase One.

But even the best tosses had to fall to earth sooner or later, which brings us to Phase Two of this lunch-meat biathlon: The Catch. As the baloney peeled off the ceiling, we craned our little necks skyward and opened our mouths to take a bite out of the falling pink disc. If we failed to sink our teeth into the baloney, our ceiling time, no matter how long, was disqualified. That's why all the kids whose baloney had already fallen would surround the last player still standing, and scream at him to miss his slice of baloney before it came down. We were not there to learn sportsmanship.

We played this game for months, until Dave's mom noticed a constellation of dark circles on her newly painted ceiling.

Fortunately, at about the same time, Scotty's folks bought an automatic garage door opener. It was amazing! You just pushed a button, and voilà—the garage door went up by itself! Can you believe it? We couldn't. Our little nostrils flared with the possibilities of something far more dangerous and parentally unacceptable: The Garage Door Game.

The rules were simple. See how far away from the open garage door you could push the remote control, take off running, and still make it under before the massive metal sheet cut you in half.

No cheating, no ties, no crying. As we moved farther from the door, we thought we had reached the limits of our abilities until Scotty himself pulled off a James Bond under-the-door roll on the concrete driveway. We were very impressed—certainly more so than Scotty's mom. The Garage Door Game was also short-lived.

But not long after that, Scotty's parents thought it was a great idea to give him a few BB guns. They must have been on drugs.

The catch was, none of us could shoot accurately enough to do any real damage, so we did what any twelve-year-old boys would do: invent the Triangle of Death, which entailed taking turns shooting the kid to our right. It went like this:

*"Ready?"*

*"Ready."*

*Bang! "Ow!"*

*"Ready?"*

*"Ready."*

*Bang! "Ow!"*

*And so forth.*

Incredibly, three decades later, two of us have jobs. Or all three, if you count whatever it is I do as a job.

Next came the Sour Milk Game, the Evel Knievel Game, and the Let's Make a Towering Inferno Out of the Oreo Package On the Coffee Table Game. But the Triangle of Death pretty much marked the zenith of this golden era.

Today these same friends put fruit in their beer, use "gift" as a verb, and insist their four-year-old sons wear OSHA-approved protective helmets to ride their tricycles up and down the driveways of their gated communities.

Yes, our games were totally unorganized and unsafe. But here's a stat for you: We all survived.

So, as for me, Give Me the Baloney Game, or Give Me the Triangle of Death.