

THE SPORTSMAN

Sporting Sam was pretty good at baseball and soccer and particularly good at ice hockey. But his father was a diplomat and the family had to travel around the world. When he was nine Sam's family went to live in a country where they played Bike Hockey. At first he kept falling off his bike. But he soon mastered the game. Then his daddy moved to another country where the national game was Throw The hamburger. You had to hit the face of a clown called Macdonald. You got three points if you hit him on the nose, two points on his mouth or face and one point for anywhere else. If you missed, you get thrown out of the Macdonalds! Sam scored sixty-three points and had just been declared national junior champion, when his father was moved again to another country.

Here, the national sport was called Garamesque. It is an interesting team game: You cover pillows with jam or marmalade, throw it at the opposing team and dodge the incoming pillows.

Sam had become a leading Garamesque player when his father moved yet again to a rather rainy place called Toscland. Here, the national sport is called Glof. It is played with umbrellas turned upside down. You can only play the game when it stops raining, which in Toscland isn't very often. The object of the game is to hit a series of lampposts with a glof ball, which is a kind of cross between a golf ball and an egg. If you manage to hit the lamppost it sprays it with yellow custard. The custard tastes very smooth and mellow. So much so that some players spend more time licking the lampposts than playing Glof. Sporting Sam however, even though he loved the taste of custard, resisted the temptation, He was determined to become national champion. Eventually, thanks to his ceaseless and untiring practice he was entered for the Junior Glof Olympics. But as soon as he had won his place on the team his father was posted to another country.

The Gobi desert consists of thousands of miles of empty sand interspersed by a few isolated towns with mosques and minarets. The people here, fierce tribesman, have invented a game the name of which is unpronounceable. It is played on horseback with a dead sheep. You have to grab the dead sheep from the opposing team with a special kind of net on the end of a pole, gallop off and throw the carcass into the goal which is about fifty miles away from the stadium. Needless to say, Sam became exceptionally good at this sport. During one game he tirelessly

fought off three tribesman who were trying to recapture the dead sheep. He galloped over the sand, riding like the wind over undulating sand dunes, swerving and jinking as his opponents hit him with their nets. He succeeded in pulling one opponent from his horse and as the others approached him, stopped suddenly and forced his horse to lie down. His opponents, unable to pull up in time, tripped over his horse. Then he rapidly remounted, set off again with the hot sun beating down on his head and eventually found the "goal", which was actually a hole in a dried-up river bed. He returned triumphantly to be applauded by everyone and told that he could keep the dead sheep, which was considered a great honour. He took it home to his mother and informed her proudly that not only was he national champion but she would be allowed to cook the carcass for dinner. His mother took one look and threw it into the dustbin. She consulted his father and they both agreed that playing with a puck was a much better idea. So they all flew back to back to Canada.

It took a little while but Sporting Sam practised hard at ice hockey and soon won a place on his local team. He says there is no other game in the world like it.