

## *Sepak Takraw, On Brief*

### **History of Sepak Takraw**


The origins of Sepak Takraw remains a matter of intense debate in Southeast Asia, as several countries proudly claim it as their own. There is, however, some agreement that the game was introduced to Southeast Asia through commercial contact with China, where an ancient form of the game originated. It is believed that many variations of the game evolved from an ancient Chinese military exercise, where soldiers would try to keep a feathered shuttlecock airborne by kicking it back and forth between two or more people. As the sport developed, the animal hides and chicken feathers were eventually replaced by balls made of woven strips of rattan.

### **Going Global:**

Standardising the Rules Almost every nation that played this game knew it by a different name. In Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei, it's called 'sepak raga', whereas in Thailand it's commonly known as 'takraw'. The same game goes by the name of 'sipa' in the Philippines, 'da cau' in Vietnam, 'rago' in Indonesia, and 'kator' in Laos. Since Sepak Takraw was played and enjoyed in several countries, there were a lot of inconsistencies in terms of how the game was played and judged. In 1960, representatives from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Lao and Thailand met in Kuala Lumpur to standardise rules and regulations for the game. And after a long and heated debate, consensus was reached that the sport would henceforth be officially called Sepak Takraw.

They also formed the Asian Sepak Takraw Federation (ASTAF), and translated the rules into English, setting the stage for the first international competition, held in Malaysia in 1965, at the Southeast Asian Peninsular Games, or SEAP Games, the predecessor to today's Southeast Asian Games (SEA Games). This chain of events set the stage for the international development of Sepak Takraw. However, it was the replacement of the natural rattan ball, which tended to splinter and warp, with the more standardised synthetic plastic ball that really kicked the game's popularity into high gear.

In 1990, Sepak Takraw was included at the Asian Games in Beijing. Women also got in on the action with the first women's championships in Thailand hosted in 1997. Today, more than 20 countries have national Sepak Takraw associations with representatives on the board of the global governing body, the International Sepak Takraw Federation (ISTAF).

Sepak Takraw Rattan Ball	Sepak Takraw Court
	



### How to Play Sepak Takraw

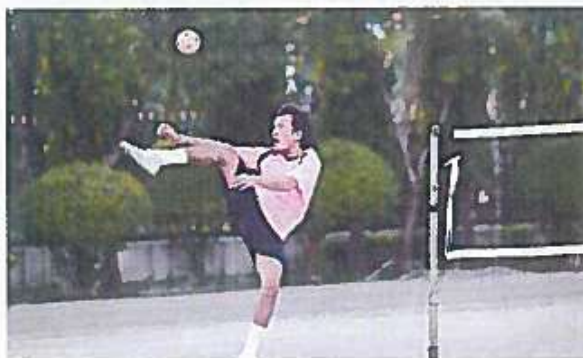
Sepak Takraw is played between two teams of three players; the left inside, right inside and back. The court is about the same size as a badminton court (20 by 44 feet) and the net is 1.52 meters high. Traditionally balls were hand-woven from bamboo or rattan, but most modern ones are synthetic. Basic rules and scoring are like volleyball. Each team is allowed a maximum of three touches of the ball to get it back over the net to the other side without letting it touch the ground.

The first team to score either 15 or 21 points, depending on the rules in play, wins the set. The team that prevails in two sets wins the match. Play starts when the server is tossed the grapefruit-sized ball by a teammate while keeping one foot in a small 'serving circle'. He then must kick the ball over the net with the other foot. After that, volleyball rules pretty much apply, except for the fact that the ball can't be touched by the hands or arms. Top takraw players must combine great foot-eye coordination with quickness, anticipation, power, flexibility, and acrobatic skills.



### Gravity-defying Moves

While there are certain basic rules to Sepak Takraw, the game varies according to the type of being played, as well as the place where it is being played. In a village, for example, there is often no referee. The winning player is usually the one who puts on the best show. The intricacy and speed of the methods used to send the ball aloft are sensational. The basics involve the sole kick (using the arch or sole of the foot), the instep kick, knee kick, shin kick, shoulder kick, or head kick. The more advanced manoeuvres are cross-legged jump kick, (crossing your left leg over your right and leaping up to kick the ball with the instep of the left foot). Another version is the cross-legged knee kick, for which the player crosses his left leg over his right above the right knee, and then leaps into the air kicking the ball with his right knee.



### Acrobatic Kicks

A spike is much more difficult in Sepak Takraw than volleyball, because slamming the ball down hard means getting your feet above the net. The movement required is a bit like a bicycle kick in football, jumping and flipping in the air to kick the ball. After a bicycle kick a footballer usually lands on their back, but professional Sepak Takraw players are athletic enough to execute a spike and land on their feet. A good spike or spiker is often referred to as the 'killer'. The most breathtaking and difficult of these feats are known as the roll spike, where the player leaps into the air to kick the ball over the opposite shoulder, and the 'sunback' or stingray spike, a similar scissors kick but over the same shoulder.

## **Game Variations**

### Net Takraw

Net takraw is played in a badminton-sized court. Lots are drawn beforehand to determine placement of the players and the first serve.

### In-tossing Takraw

With fewer rules to abide by, the point is simply to see how many times the ball can be hit aloft by the player. It is a means of training for a player. Some can hit the ball from positions which call for stooping or lying down. A good player should be able to keep the ball aloft for ten minutes and, if he is joined by others, the group should manage to keep it in play for close to an hour. Naturally, this is a skill which only the most adept players can manage: they have trained arduously, are able to concentrate for a long period, and are able to use their bodies dexterously.

### Hoop Takraw

Considered the most difficult version of the game is 'lawd huang', as it is known locally. Like circle takraw, but the goal is to put the ball into a basket-shaped net with three hoop openings in a triangular formation suspended some five to six metres above ground. Standing at the perimeter of a circle, each team is given an allotted time, usually 20 or 30 minutes, to put the ball in the basket as many times and as gracefully as they can. Points are awarded for difficulty and creativity, so players break out their full repertoires of such expert maneuvers as cross-legged jump kicks and other artistic kicks behind the back or with the sole of the foot, as well as strikes with the elbows, shoulders and forehead.

### In-scoring Takraw

Played with no nets or hoops, the ball rotates from player to player, and each is scored according to the skill displayed. After 30 minutes or ten starting throws, the highest score determines the winner.

### Takraw Wong (Circle Takraw)

The name says it all. The less acrobatic takraw wong consists of five to seven players standing in a circle, trying to keep the ball airborne if possible. Other than football, takraw wong is perhaps the most popular pastime among Thai people since no other special skills are required except for creativity of movement.