



DODGEBALL

ALSO KNOWN AS
Battle Ball, Death
Ball, Ga-Ga, Kill Ball,
Mash, Monster Ball,
Prison Ball, War Ball

A facetious historian might place dodgeball at the top of the list as the oldest game on the planet. Presumably, cavemen would have had no qualms about picking up a rock and whipping it toward another caveman who possessed coveted food, shelter, or companionship. That dubious perception may be why certain people consider this game practically barbaric, as if launching a ball at another human being for the sake of pleasure has no place on the playground. In fact, in many communities, dodgeball is banned.

THE SETUP

BASIC IDEA

Be the first team to eliminate all the opposing players by hitting them with a rubber ball

PLAYING AREA

A smooth, open area (paved or grassy) with boundaries to keep the ball from rolling off

EQUIPMENT

- 5 to 10 balls
- Boundary markers

AGES

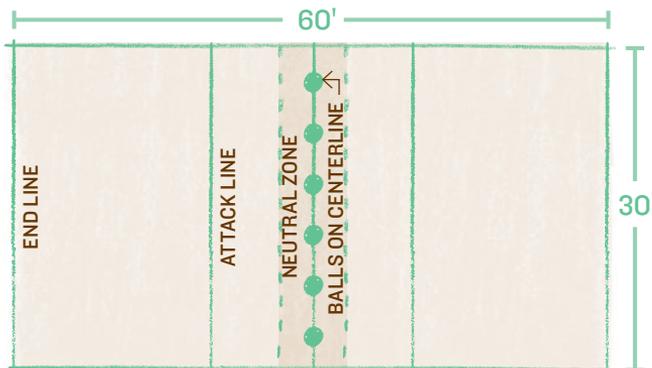
5 and up

PLAYERS

At least 3 on 3

“Dodgeball is just not a game that has values that we should be teaching to our children,” said Neil Williams, a professor from Eastern Connecticut State College who has been the unofficial leader of a crusade to rid playgrounds of the game.

We’re here to say, loudly, clearly, and respectfully, that dodgeball, like British bulldogs (page 33), Red Rover (page 158), and tug of war (page 176), deserves a continued place among the cherished games of the past and future. Absolutely, use the right kind of ball and realize that games may need to be overseen by an adult. Bullying, which is certainly possible in this and so many other children’s games, should never be tolerated.



Initial setup

“LEARN THE LINGO”

One of the mistakes inexperienced players make is to throw balls aimlessly. Here are a few key phrases to help you improve your percentage of hits.

The shinsplinter A low ball that is more difficult to catch

The look-away Looking at one player, but throwing it at another to catch them off guard

The boomerang Throwing the ball at an opposing player who has just wound up to throw and is momentarily defenseless

Benefits of the Game

With common sense and some restrictions, dodgeball can teach all sorts of beneficial skills, from throwing and catching, spinning, twisting, and balance to tactical consideration of risk/reward strategies — or what military and sports leaders refer to as “situational awareness.” In other words, do you stand near the front of the line where the action is, or hang back and wait for your opening?

Rules. Dodgeball is usually played with two to six large rubber balls, the kind used in kickball, inflated to a low pressure of about 1.5 pounds per square inch. Foam-core balls with a soft rubber coating can also be used. Thrown from a reasonable distance (many rules call for at least a 10- or 20-foot minimum) by players of similar age and size, the ball should not inflict bodily harm.

The field is usually broken into equal halves.

- **Games usually begin with all the balls on the centerline, though they can also be evenly divided between the teams.**

- **Players line up along the end lines and sprint toward the balls to gather as many as possible for an opening advantage. They may roll the balls back to their teammates but may not begin throwing at opponents until back out of the neutral zone.**
- **The goal is for one team to eliminate all the players on the other team. A player is “out” if:**
 - **He or she is hit by a thrown ball from the shoulders down**
 - **A player on the other team catches a ball thrown by the player before the ball hits the ground**
 - **A ball bounces off a teammate and hits the player**
 - **The player steps out of bounds**
- **Players can re-enter a game either by catching a thrown ball while standing on the sidelines or by getting called back in by a teammate who has just caught a ball inside the court.**

Strategy. A key strategy is for multiple teammates, each with a ball, to pick one player to throw the ball at; it’s difficult to dodge or catch more than one ball at a time. It’s that gang-up strategy, of course, that gives the game its negative reputation in some circles; however, given safe balls and a proper distance, it’s all in good fun.

Variation: Spud

In this simplified American version of dodgeball, one player tosses the ball straight up into the air and calls out another player’s name. While

the ball tosser and other players scatter, the named player must retrieve the ball and holler “Spud!” The running players must instantly freeze in place.

The “it” player then throws the ball at another player; if the ball hits the player, he or she gets an “S”; however, if the player catches the ball, the thrower receives the “S.” The last player to reach S-P-U-D is the



Clearly, teachers in the 1930s were less concerned with playground safety than they are today. At least the windows are open, reducing the chance of broken glass.

winner. Defending players are not allowed to move their feet, but can contort their bodies to avoid getting hit.

In a variation that is considered safer in some circles, the “it” player must roll the ball at the other players’ feet. That eliminates the risk of bruises or bruised egos, especially if the sizes and ability of players vary.

Variation: Ga-ga

A playground version of dodgeball from Israel is played inside a circle of people or within an octagonal court made especially for the game. Homemade courts can easily be constructed with fences, benches, woodpiles, sheets of plywood, or picnic tables turned on their sides.

The ball is batted off the wall or toward other players with an open hand or closed fist and a player hit by the ball at or below the knees is eliminated. In this game, though, a player may simply bat the ball in a new direction with his or her hands and many of the “hits” happen on caroms off the wall. No player can hit the ball twice in a row, unless only two players remain. This can be played as a team game, but usually it’s an all-for-one free-for-all!

HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

We couldn’t find dodgeball in any references of children’s activities in the 1800s, but author Emmett Dunn Angell did include the game in his landmark book, *Play: Comprising Games for the Kindergarten, Playground, Schoolroom and College*, published in 1910.

Angell described a dodgeball game played in a circle, with a single stiff leather basketball. One team’s players played within the circle, trying to dodge throws from the players who were forming the human ring.