

Kolven

Kolven is a Flemish and Dutch game where players use a curved club (*kliiek*) to hit a ball between two poles in an indoor court.

Kolven stems probably from the medieval French *chole* or *choule à la crosse*, in which a bowl or ball was propelled with a curved stick toward a target, the target sometimes being located several kilometers from the starting point. A similar game was *jeu de mail*, which was played with metal hammers cross-country or on a course and entered England as *palle-maille* on the now famous avenue Pall Mall. Another related Dutch game was *beugelen*, where the ball was hit through a narrow gap on the course; it has survived in the southern Dutch province of Limburg.

From these roots, there developed the game of **kolf** where the ball is hit into a special hole, either as fast as possible or by as few strokes as possible. The name of the game was derived from the bat or club, **kolf** (in family with German *Kolben*). **Kolf** was also played on ice, and there were many local varieties. The game became very popular during the 16th and 17th centuries. Many Dutch and Flemish genre **paintings** from this period showed **kolf** players in action on icy rivers. Several local authorities reacted by instituting prohibitions against **kolf**, referring to broken windows among the reasons for the prohibitions. However, the frequency of these interdictions underlined the popularity of the game. But with the increasing population in Flanders and the Netherlands and with private and capitalist appropriation of landed property, the land became scarce, and the game began to vanish from about 1700.

Crossing the national borders, **kolf** may have stimulated the game of field hockey and—in Scotland—the game of golf. The Dutch game, however, developed neither toward a team game (like hockey) nor to an outdoor game (like golf) but instead transformed into the indoor game kolven. It was now played on a more reduced course, often roofed over and connected with a café or inn. In 1792, there were 350 courses in Holland, almost half of them covered. The sticks became heavier and the balls larger.

jenever (gin) and cigars (i.e., the traditional male life style), but since 1966 women are playing, too.

Henning Eichberg

Further Reading

- De Vroede, Erik. 1996. "Ball and Bowl Games in the Low Countries: Past and Present." *Homo Ludens: Der spielende Mensch* 6: 39–78.
- Gillmeister, Heiner. 1996. "A Tee for Two: On the Origins of Golf." *Homo Ludens: Der spielende Mensch* 6: 17–37.

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