

TUMBLING

FOR

AMATEURS

or

*A Brief Account of
Tumball History and Conduct*

by

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CLAY AUTRY'S TUMBALL REGIMEN



Two Tumbleweeds
Two Wind Machines
Three 6' x 6' Goals
9 Wind Ribbons
Two Rivals
One Arbiter



METHOD

1.
There must be two tumbleweeds of equal girth and lightness.
2.
Each Rival shall select and use only one tumbleweed to score.
3.
Goals shall be set at equidistant points separated by five paces.
4.
Tumbleweeds shall be secured in the center of all goals.

MANDATES

1.

Rivals shall negotiate boundaries during the pre-tumble Gentlemen's Agreement.

2.

To begin, a Rival takes position behind their tumbleweed and faces the other Rival.

3.

Regimen begins when Arbiter hollers "Blow-up".

4.

Regimen ends when a Rival gains three points or at the conclusion of three minutes.

5.

If three minutes pass, the bona fide honor goes to the Rival with the highest score

6.

No Rival may score consecutive points at the same goal

7.

Rivals may blow the tumbleweeds of other Rivals

8.

There shall be no direct contact between Rivals, leaf blowers and tumbleweeds

9.

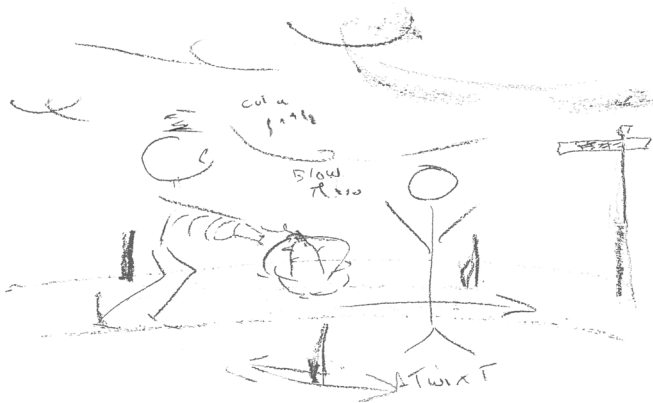
A time penalty (Bilk) of ten seconds shall be levied against a Rival for unlawful contact

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TUMBALL



Early estimates place the advent of Tumball circa 1904. Though evidence, miniature “blowing balls” found in tin cups at the famed Emery Canteen, suggests that the sport may date back as far as 1860. Tumball’s folk status signifies an oral tradition; therefore, few written records exist. The *Shucknee Manuscript* is widely considered the first written account of the sport that would become modern Tumball. The *Manuscript* itself, a crude charcoal diagram recorded on grocer parchment, was uncovered in the 1985 restoration of Hill Top General Store in Colton, CO. Carbon dating on the parchment’s charcoal and dried pig entrails places its origin during the 1904 ozokerite rush.

THE SHUCKNEE MANUSCRIPT 1904¹



¹ Facimile of the Shawnee Manuscript designed and interpreted by Mr. Stanely. An early accordion style device is clearly present.

The *Manuscript's* rudimentary markings depict two figures facing off in a gentleman's duel. Hurriedly dashed, skyward swirling lines either depict a frantic wind or a first graders' school house cursive. Modern scholarship favors the former. This reading is bolstered by assertions that the few legible words on the Shucknee *Manuscript* such as "blow hard", "cut a path" and "atwixt" appear to be intentional². The livelihood of mining towns during the epoch of the *Manuscript* required close attentiveness to one's environment in both work and recreation. It can be assumed that activities of both leisure and arbitration (the alleged dual purpose of primitive Tumball) followed suit. This is the lens through which scholars choose to view the *Manuscript's* flowing scrawl³. The most vital markings are located near a smear of dried blood. Two scribbled spheres, reminiscent of a spiky ball of yarn, are clearly drawn near a signpost as a wind storm rages in the heavens above. As if caught between the twin demands of god and sport, the figures appear mid-run: as suggested by the bent angles of their legs upon the page.

The back of the *Manuscript* reveals two key facts. One: a list of rudimentary, alternative configurations for the signposts depicted in the main scene. Two: the much speculated initials "T.M.". Historians who trace the dissemination of oral folk tradition have identified at least 4 distinct regional versions of the game, but "T.M." remains a mystery⁴. Despite limited evidence, popular canon associates "T.M." with Timothy Murphy: an early twentieth century proprietor of Hill Top General. Whether the "T.M." in question refers to the senior or junior Timothy Murphy, none can yet say. Historians who favor the senior Mr. Murphy claim Tumball as an outlet for the wild, often dangerous energy

2 Jerico Brown, "Atwixt Tumball Anaysis" (Princeton: Princeton Press, 1924)

3 *Multipurpose Recreation*, Lacy Nemmet and Tetto, Darold eds. (Boston: Harper and Collins, 1930)

4. Drix Dantley, *Origins of America's Pastimes* (New York: Abel & Rose 1925)

5 *Arguments in the Formation of Today's Rituals*, Macmillion ed. (Philidelphia: Tropers Inc., 1925)

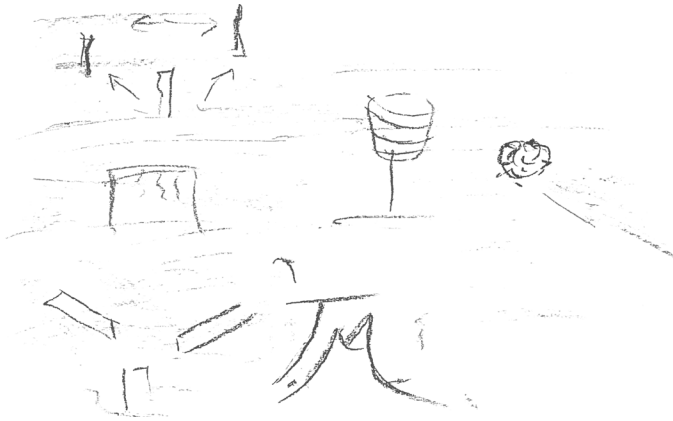
that percolated in Colton's downtown between railway shipments. Enthusiasts who claim Tumball for Timothy Murphy Jr. frame it as a children's game invented for amusement while older siblings and parents were otherwise occupied in frontier chores⁵.

Despite differing contexts, base gameplay has been cited as similar. Primitive Tumball was often improvised on commonly available crossroads or fields. Tumball's current season traditionally falls between November and June when newly dried Russian Thistle (*Salsola Tragus*) broke from its base and collected near roadsides, barns and fences.

Classic Tumball required two tumbleweeds of equal girth, each one assigned to a specific player (Rival). Goals and scoring systems were often adjusted according to the shape and weight of harvests. On windy days, the community would gather around one or more signposts. An outside arbiter began the game by issuing a command, usually "drop", and both players left the Tumball to the wind's mercy for a count of 60 seconds. This practice reflected the belief in luck and faith prevalent in small pioneer congregations. Scholars that follow the Sr. "T.M." model often cite this ritual as evidence that the game may have been used to settle disputes by a combination of holy judgement and skill. As the frontier became tamer and the faith in (and fear of) god became muted, this launching ritual was phased out. The might of man, as tamer of the environment, became the game's primary force and the almighty power of wind was relegated to mere consideration. Communities built the west; therefore, community power was needed to complete early games. It was not unusual for Tumball played during community holidays to be powered by ten to twenty citizens. However, these alterations to the spirit of the game were rare. In either case, the new emphasis on human will marked an important evolution in Tumball that would only spur further modifications as the sport progressed.



THE INITIALS T.M⁷



6 Jerico Brown, "Atwixt Tumball Anaysis" (Princeton: Princeton Press, 1924)
7 *Multipurpose Recreation*, Lacy Nemmet and Tetto, Darold eds. (Boston: Harper and Collins, 1930)

ADDENDUMS AND MODIFICATIONS

SINCE 1904

1920 – Games increasingly emphasize man-made air sources and/or the combined lung power of church communities.

1924 – First synthetic Tumballs manufactured at Brown Company paper mills.

1928 – “Goal Guarding” discouraged by the addition of two more scoring posts.

1931 – Billings, Wyoming establishes the first professional Tumball League.

1931 – First official rulebook goes to print. Posts were regulated as “equidistant” to curb “clumping” around post sets and encourage strategies that incorporated wind direction, rather than distribution, in deciding field movement.

1939 – Distance between goals shortened from ten paces to twelve feet to keep Rivals in each other’s sphere of influence and extend the reach of compressed air.

1943 – Beginning of the “Dust Bunny League” that featured the wives and girlfriends of soldiers to raise money for overseas troops.

1943 – Invention of the “Tumball Fan” as a perceived strength aid for “Dust Bunnies”.

1945 – First TumBowl held. Tournaments consisted of Rivals from the Oklahoma Tornados and Arizona Sand Storms.

1962 – The “Ohio Sweeps” become the first Tumball League to break segregation.

1965 – Posts are replaced by easier and more precise 6’ x 6’ goals.

1967 – The “Prickle Protest”.

Tragedy occurs on the windy, first birthday of the Vietnam War when a multi-man match is blown into a sit-in of protesters in their birthday suits.

1970 – Gas leaf blowers are introduced to the U.S. and become regulated by League

1976 – The “Trial of Hot Air”

Beverly Hills bans gas blowers. A delegation of incensed fans scatter 20 tons of weeds and debris along Rodeo Drive.

1976 – New legislation challenges the safety of recreational blowing.

1997 – California Laws ban gas blowers from within five-hundred feet of a residence. Fields labeled with edicts of “No Recreation”.

2002 – Leaf blower technology improves game through increased battery life and new strategies that blend consideration of machine system settings with environmental affordances.

2010 – Flag markers added to goals to illustrate wind speed and direction.

2014 – Reservations are now required to lift ban of “No Recreation” on league fields.

A BRIEF COMPARISON OF GAMEPLAY

From its inception, Tumball has remained modular, flexible and environment adaptive. The skill inherent in Tumball demands a rigorous attention to interactions between the game system and one's environment. Therefore the League has sanctioned several regional adaptations.



THE LOUSIANA PIT

This model extends the classic offensive/defensive decision requirements by taking place in the round. Rivals begin in the center of the circle and must work towards the edges to oust their competitor's Tumball from the boundaries while maintaining their Tumball within the perimeter. Suction from moist ground enhances the challenge.

THE YANKEE

A summer game played in "old blood" New England. Rules derive from a combination of British Croquet and Golf, but add an additional team member (Rover). If the wicket is hit, but does not breach, the opposing team's Rover swoops up and deposits the Tumball into a wind trap. The player has a chance to free their captured Tumball once every turn.
their endzone wins.

THE GLADIATOR

Unique for its race format, this adaptation is played on a long track. Two leads must race the Tumball to their respective goals, without it getting snagged by the opposing team. Each track is guarded by members of the opposing team holding 6' x 6' sections of fence. Guards only move horizontally across the track. If a Tumball becomes snagged, the lead of the trapped team must switch out and incur a ten second penalty before it is freed.

THE TUG O' WAR

One Tumball is positioned in alignment with, and perpendicular to the side of one goal at center of the field. Goal and Tumball are separated by a distance of 25 yards away. Rivals start by facing off over the Tumball and are assigned to opposite directions into the goal. A Rival wins when a Tumball enters the goal from the direction they were assigned.

THE ANTI-GOGLIN

Three Tumballs are positioned in the center of a field with two endzones. The first rival to collect any two Tumballs in their endzone wins.

Further Community and Team Variations are discussed in the sequel to this compendium: Morman Utah: The Multiple Origins of Team Tumball

OUTFITTING AND TEAM COLORS

Due to the fibrous and thorny quality of non-synthetic Salsola Tragus, protective leather chaps branded with the Rival's logo were the traditional the uniform of choice. Despite the trend towards synthetic Tumballs, the storied history of this uniform is still referred. Some fans call upon this heritage in the wearing of assless chaps dyed the colors of their favorite Rival. Fans often opt to engage in "turning the other cheek" toward Rivals that score against their favorites. This distraction strategy, while legal, is discouraged.

"The Donning of the Wind Flag" is a sanctioned, time-honored method of fan attire. Fans that "Don the Flag" sew on multiple ribbons in the colors of their favorite Rival. Theoretically, the larger the crowd that dons their favorite's colors, the more that Rival will ascertain the wind's direction and incorporate it into their winning strategy. For that reason Tumballernias representing a Rival conduct fans with ribbon rings to inspire formations and dances that accentuate the crowd's capability as a weather vane.



SHOUTOUTS AND HECKLES

In addition to a rich legacy of Tumball Chants recorded in the famed *Carried by the Wind: The Role of Fan Chants in Tumball* by E. G. Foster, fans participate in a tradition of heckles and praise. Some basic traditions represented a cross-section of eras are presented here as a kind of “start-up kit” for fans.

IF THE OPPOSING RIVAL MISSES THE GOAL, FANS MAY YELL:

“You Blow”

“The Answer ain’t Blowin’ There”

“Acknowledge the Corn you Blue Belly”

IF THE FAVORED RIVAL MAKES A GOAL, FANS MAY YELL:

“Ace in the Hole”

“Bonanza”

“Tharr She Blows”

**IF A RIVAL IS SUSPECTED OF UNAUTHORIZED CONTACT,
FANS DEMAND REFEREE ATTENTION BY YELLING:**

“Bilk”



T.M. THE ALLEGED FOUNDER OF TUMBALL
