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Swiss Sport: Hornussen



At first glance, Hornussen appears to be a mixture of golf and baseball - and yet it is much more - it is a typically Swiss sport with a tradition reaching back to the 16th century.

In order to expel spirits it used to be the custom to hit burning logs down from the mountain and into the valley. The sport of Hornussen is supposed to have originated from this ancient tradition and is a team game played by all ages without there being a basic social structure in place.

How the game is played

The batting team has to hit the Nouss (a kind of disk or puck) as far as possible into the opponent's area. The defending team has to stop the approaching Nouss as soon as possible by using a shingle or catch board. Usually two turns are played, and each turn, each team hits once and defends once. Each turn, every single player hits twice with three attempts. A game has no set length, and it takes about three to four hours to play two bouts. The team with the smallest number of penalisation points wins - i.e. having the smallest number of failed interceptions. In addition to the team rankings, the Swiss championships and festive occasions also provide for the ranking of individual strikers.

The Hornuss

The Hornuss or Nouss was originally a disk made of wood or horn which was hit into the playing field. There are several interpretations of the meaning of the word Hornuss and all refer to the "hornet-like" buzzing sound made by the Nouss. Measurements taken by the Biomechanical Institute at the ETH Zurich have shown that the Hornuss can reach speeds of up to 85 m/s (306 km/h), a cruising altitude of 50 to 70 metres and a flight range of up to 330 metres.

A betting game

When the game of Hornussen started, the losing party had to pay for afternoon refreshments after the match. Today, instead, bets are taken on the outcome, and are usually between 50 and 100 francs per game. Bets are also customary when the game is played on a friendly basis, which is why it is called a betting game. It is also common for individual players of similar skill levels to wager a beer on the number of points gained.

History

When Hornussen was first played, it was mainly a game for young single farmers. They met in the late summer / autumn to play on harvested fields against farmers from other villages. It is reported that such events enabled the players to pit their strength against each other and to



regulate disputes between villages. Despite playful attempts at arbitration, the Hornussen games were often followed by wild brawls. The first written records of the Hornussen are found in church records from the 16th and 17th century, and the first known competitive Hornussen game took place in 1655 in Trub. In the late 19th century, a Hornussen association was formed and rules were set. In 1902, the national governing body (Eidgenössischer Hornusserverband) was founded. This national association and its regional sub-organisations organise the championships for the various leagues, the three-yearly national Hornussen festival, and the Hornussen matches at the national wrestling and Alpine festival as well as at other festivals.

Hornussen today

Hornussen is mainly played in the Mittelland cantons of Bern, Solothurn and Aargau. Hornussen enjoys popularity to this day, and despite the huge range of different sports on offer, is a great success - a success also explained by the close links between the sporting and traditional elements. In 2011 there were around 270 Hornussen groups with some 8,300 players organised in four special purpose associations and societies and affiliated with the national governing body.

www.myswitzerland.com/en/hornussen

