

# Traditional Sports & Games in Nigeria

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## Abstract :

This paper attempts to summarize view traditional sports and games with the inaugurations of Traditional Sports Federation of Nigeria as related to some traditional sports organized by the Federation, such as **Ayo** [seeded game] **Abula** [Ball game] **Kokawa** [Traditional Wrestling] **Dambe** [Traditional Boxing] **Langa** [An hopping game] and **Aarin** [An African Billiards game]; Nigeria as a multi-ethnic country with diversified cultures and values initially said traditional sports and standard rules and regulations governing the various sports under its purview; since traditional sports and games have only being recently brought into the mainstream of sports organization in Nigeria with massive awareness campaign, sponsorship drive, coaching and technical courses through the National Institute for Sports centre for sports excellence. It is believed that in a short while traditional sports and games in Nigeria will reach the top of international levels in the sports scene for better understanding and effective participation for acceptability through efficient standardization.

**Key words :** Traditional Sports & Games, Nigeria, Multi-ethnic

## INTRODUCTION;-

The impact of sports on individuals, private and public sectors is so manifold and pervasive that Nigeria as a nation has set up various sports organizations capable of contributing to national development, especially in Nigeria.

However such sports association like traditional sports and games should be adequately and progressively administered, to ensure that meaningful stated goals and objectives are achieved towards sports development in the Nigeria society.

This explains the commitment of the Federal and State Government in financing and development of sports activities over the years, such commitment has manifested in the provision of improved sporting facilities in our country, the remarkable performance of Nigeria sports Festival in 1973 has become a mini- Olympic Games in Nigeria. The aims and objectives have been illustrated as follows.

- [a] The promotion of mass participation in amateur sports [e.g] traditional sports and games] from the grass roots level throughout the country with a view to discovering hidden talents in the states of the Federation.
- [b] The promotion of keen competition amongst the competitors under an atmosphere of sportsmanship and friendly interaction with a view to enhancing and strengthening Nigeria national unity.

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country of about 140 million in population [according to the National population census which was conducted by Nigeria Government in 2006] the country with diversified cultures and values is blessed with traditional sports and games that have been practiced all over the years, even before colonialism and western education. The traditional sports and games then was basically for leisure and recreational activities.

Over the years, there have been some efforts to constitute sporting bodies for each of the known traditional sports and games with the approaches made then by the National Sports Commission, the apex governing body of sports in Nigeria.

#### **THE INAUGURATION OF TRADITIONAL SPORTS FEDERATION OF NIGERIA**

The Traditional Sports Federation of Nigeria was inaugurated as a National Sports Association on 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1993. The Traditional Sports Federation was mandated, among other functions, to identify all traditional and invented sports and games, develop and promote them through creation of awareness and organized competitions on the sports and games, with a view to selling same to the international sports community.

As first step, the traditional sports federation held its maiden traditional sports and games festival in December, 1994 in eleven traditional sports and games as follows, **'Ayo'**, **Abula'**, **Dambe** [Traditional Boxing]. **Kokawa** [Traditional Wrestling] **Abili**, **Gurinfo**, **Langa**, **Lagona**, **Ojuunu**, **Okeair**, and **Scholastic Pong** game.

In 1995, the traditional sports federation organized demonstration march in Lagos [Western part of Nigeria] Kaduna [Northern part of Nigeria] and Oweri [East and Southern part of Nigeria] six selected traditional sports and games were organized for demonstration, namely **Ayo**, **Abula**, **Langa**, **Kokawa**, **Dambe** and **Aarin**. The following year, 1996 the Federation featured four of its sports and games, such as **Ayo**, **Abula**, **Dambe** and **Langa** on demonstration held in Makurdi, Benue State [Northern part of Nigeria] from 11<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> April 1996.

In November 1996, the traditional sports Federation organized a coaching clinic in Minna, Niger State [Northern part of Nigeria] to impact the harmonized basic rules and regulations of the participants. Earlier, Zone VI

in collaboration with the Traditional Sports Federation of Nigeria organized a coaching clinic in **Ayo game** for the states that constituted the Zone VI in order to acquaint them with the latest rules and regulations of the '**Ayo**' game [ZONE VI. Consists of the states in the Northern part of Nigeria].

In addition, since the inauguration of the federation, there have been major achievements which include, inclusion of Traditional National Sports Festival on scoring basis, inclusion of some selected traditional sports and games [such as **Ayo, Langa, Abula, Kokawa** [Traditional Wrestling and **Dambe** [Traditional Boxing] in the primary and secondary schools curriculum respectively, The traditional Sports Federation of Nigeria is doing its best to also project the newly developed sports and games to international levels.

#### **NATURE OF THE TRADITIONAL SPORTS AND GAMES IN NIGERIA**

In Nigeria setting, there are a lot of traditional sports and games that cut across over 2008 ethnic groups of people in Nigeria some of which reflected cultural heritage, religious background, of the people of Nigeria in general. This paper will be limited to some traditional sports and games that are being popularized by the traditional sports federation of Nigeria.

The traditional sports federation organized the following sports and games competitions on annual basis.

- [a] '**Ayo**' A seed game where in the one with the largest collection is declared winner.
- [b] '**Abula**' A ball game played across the net with a wooden baton.
- [c] **Kokawa**; Traditional wrestling.
- [d] **Dambe**; Traditional boxing, done with one hand clubbed with cloth and rope.
- [e] **Langa**; A hopping game of standing/running with one leg, where in opponents struggle to dislodge one other.
- [f] **Aarin**; Is regarded as African billiards game. Is the spinning of the opponents marble[s] in the court.

Most of the traditional sports and games can be played in both indoor and out door respectively.

#### **HOW TO PLAY 'AYO' GAME**

According to '**Ayo**' game, two people are involved when playing the game with spectators. The '**Ayo board**' consists of twelve [12] holes, six [6] holes in each board [0.8 to 1.2m] long. Each hole contains four '**Ayo seeds**' which make a total seeds of forty-eight [48 seeds].

The players sit in opposite direction to each other and play anti-clock wise. A player can only capture two [2] to three [3] seeds in the opponents hole,

where the seeds end. The largest collection of the seeds is declared the winner. Only one umpire determines the beginning and the start of the game by a toss of coin.

#### **AYO GAME - RULES AND REGULATIONS**

1. Player should play anticlockwise
2. Player can not reverse his/her play immediately he started distributing the seeds.
3. Players should play within thirty [30] seconds. If not, the chance goes to the opponent.
4. Player cannot pack more than three [3] seeds in a hole of his/her success.
5. If a player realizes that he has first captured twenty-four [24] seeds he/she must notify the referee.
6. There should be no side coaching during game situation to avoid cancellation.
7. In any competition, the number of the game shall be seven [7] and best of four [4] a game is awarded 2 points for the winner.

#### **HOW TO PLAY ABULA GAME**

**Abula** is a ball game played on a court rectangular [16m by 8m], 8 players, four [4] players on each side of the court. The players used **wooden bats** to hit the ball over the net from one side to the other.

The game can be played by Male and Female, even mixed categories of male and female players with only 4 four substitutes for a team. [The **Abula** traditional game resembles '**Volley ball**' game].

There are some basic fundamental skills that are peculiar to Abula game such as the **Grip, Bend-picking, Ball placement, the Smash, Blocking, Ball Deflection, Rally and footwork**. The team that is first to score the 16 points, while the other has either 14 points or less wins the game.

#### **ABULA GAME -RULES AND REGULATIONS**

1. The number of the players must be eight [8] in the court before the commencement of the match.
2. In a competition the teams must not be less than 3 participating teams;
3. The team must appear on the court five [5] minutes to avoid disqualification.
4. The game starts with a toss of coin to choose side, between the two [2] captains.
5. A team is allowed to play the ball not less down 3 times before the ball passes to the opponent court.

The officials of the games are **Referee, Assistant Referee, Table Scorer /Recorder, chalk board scorer, and four [4] linesmen.**

Basic terminologies associated with **Abula** game are **service, time out, Time in, Ball-in and out, Game-over, set over and change of side, Double foul, Rotation, game point e. t. c.**

#### **KOKAWA [Traditional Wrestling]**

In the olden days, **Kokawa** [traditional wrestling] was used as a criterion to marrying a beautiful girl in as much as one could prevail against the opponent. The essence of African wrestling is to see that a wrestler is able to throw the opponent's back to the ground and at the same time the opponent tries to prevent this more.

The **kokawa** [Traditional wrestling can take place on a sand-filled circled surface measuring [6] six metres in diameter, free from injurious particles.

The categories of the wrestlers depend on their weight from 45kg -100kg and above. The duration is 3 rounds 3 minutes and 2-3 minutes for resting. The wrestler with the highest number of points is declared the winner.

Some basic techniques, **Double led pickup, single leg pickup, Head pulling, Head pulling, Head with Arm pulling, Duck under push down, Duck under leg crossing, front suplex and Back suplex.**

#### **DAMBE [TRADITIONAL BOXING]**

**Dambe** is peculiar to the Northern part of Nigeria mostly the punches. It is a combative game played between two players using an arm/first and legs, one arm is wrapped with crape bandage and the other hand is free to for protection like a shield. The play area is about [10] ten metres diameter, either indoor or outdoor the duration is 3 rounds and one round is for 3 minutes and 2 minutes resting.

The Boxer with highest number of points is declared as the winner.

#### **DAMBE GAME RULES AND REGULATIONS**

1. Only a first is wrapped and punches are directed to the opponent using the wrapped first.
2. The maximum point a player can score in about is thirty [30] points
3. No boxer directs points on the lower part of the body and no head butt.
4. No player or boxer can run out of the playing circle and 3 yellow cards lead to disqualification.

The officials are, *Referee, Two side judges, time keeper.*

#### **LANGA GAME [HOPPING GAME]**

**Langa** is an old game which keeps the youth fit after their farming season, **Langa** is played by two people each would hold one leg either right or left leg. This is done at the back below the bottom level for a firm grip the fingers of the hand is fixed in between the foot fingers or the toe is well gripped.

The player moves with the other leg and fights or blocks with the free hand. The player who is able to fall or dislodge his opponent had won the play. 2 points is awarded to the outstanding player.

#### **LANGA GAME – RULES AND REGULATIONS**

1. The toss of coin is used to start the game, the referee or the umpire can change sides after each set of six teams, six substitutes allowed during the game situation.
2. Captain is identified by armband, is a foul for a player to use knee to displace or dislodge his opponent.
3. It also a foul if a player should kick, box, or beat his opponents, three [3] yellow cards leads to red card or disqualification.

The **Langa** game officiating officials include, **Referee, Umpire, Recorder, Scorer and 2 Supervisors** to watch the players for safety.

#### **AARIN GAME**

**Aarin** game could be regarded as ‘**African Billiards**. **Marble seeds** are used to play the game on a very smooth board [488cm by 122cm] like table. To start the game the player will squat behind the base line of the board and spin the **marble seed** in their hands in order to dislodge or knock off the **marble seeds** of their opponent, 7 **marble seeds** are arranged on each half side of the board, these seeds are regarded as ‘**target seeds**, there are other 4 other seeds known as ‘**bullet seeds**’, the **bullet seeds** are for spinning to knock-off the **targeted seeds** each opposing play shot all the [4] **bullet seeds**, the first players to knock of the 7 **targeted seeds** declared as the winner.

#### **AARIN GAME – RULES AND REGULATIONS**

1. The game commences by toss of coin, the winner of the toss will choose side and start the game.
2. The bullet seeds should not be thrown but to be spinner towards the **targeted 7 marble seeds**.
3. There should be no side coaching to avoid disqualification.
4. In a normal competition level on two players shall advance to the quarter or semi-finals, and the best group shall meet the runners up of the group vis-versa.

The officials of **Aarin** game are the **Referee, Two stewards** [to recover the marble seeds] and **the supervisor** to arrange the scores sheets before final announcement.

## PROBLEMS FACING TRADITIONAL SPORTS AND GAMES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

1. **Poor state of facilities and high cost of equipment;**  
The Federation can not boast of adequate sporting facilities and equipment to cater for the teeming youths of the country, Government should make some concerted efforts to provide facilities at all levels and ensure that trained personnel are employed to manage these facilities and equipment.
2. There is poor support from the media- press crew, both print and electronic media should be fully encouraged to project the image of traditional sports and games to create awareness and to canvass for private and public sports sectors for the image make for traditional sports in general.
3. Inadequate personnel, majority of the technical personnel in traditional sports and games are either unqualified or are inadequate in number to meet the demands of the Federation, Government should ensure that qualified personnel are employed to manage the sports. The non-qualified ones should be sent to the **National Institute for Sports [Lagos Nigeria]** to undergo the institute's programmes for effective update of their knowledge.
4. Poor funding;- over the years, the nation has failed to accomplished her sports targets and objectives due to inadequate funding, Government should endeavour to encourage corporate sponsorship by increasing the percentage of the tax relief as incentives there is also the need to encourage other sports philanthropists to participate in sports programmes especially traditional sports and games.
5. Lack of incentives for Athletes and coaches, considering the economic problems in the country, athletes and traditional sports coaches need to be adequately remunerated either in terms of salary, wages, bonuses and other allowances should be paid as at when due.

## CONCLUSION

Traditional Sports Federation as been organizing many technical clinic for the coaches and other officials to assist in the running of the traditional sports and games and the National sports institute, Lagos Nigeria, the think tank for sports excellence in the area of research oriented sports institute now runs a coaching course in traditional sports and games. It is also believed that, in a short while Nigeria higher institutions will follow suit

to help further standardization of Nigeria traditional sports and games, Government should encourage practitioners of traditional sports who win laurels for the country should be adequately rewarded by government like their counterpart in other sports, this will help to encourage participation.

Government through the **Nigeria, National Sports Commission** should embrace corporate sports organizations or establishments to lend their support towards the growth and development of traditional sports and games In Nigeria.

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