

## **TRADITIONAL LUHYA SPORT**

### **YOUTH ACTIVITIES DURING DAYTIME**

The nature of the activities depended on where the clan lived. For instance, those near a river or a lake included swimming in their daily activities, while those who lived near thickets or forests included trapping birds or small animals. Some activities were practiced in all parts of Luhyaland.

(i) Wrestling (Amabwi): This was a very common sport. There were local rules for the game. For instance, in the Busia District, it was necessary for the winner to lay his opponent flat on the back before he could be acclaimed the winner. Throwing an opponent down flat on the stomach or in a sitting position or on his knees was not accepted. There were adjudicators to decide and to hear appeals.

Further, in Samia and Bunyala (Busia District) it was necessary for each contestant to have a fitting rope round his waist so that the opponent could hold it. The Banyala were particularly fond of wrestling. They liked it so much that they held annual wrestling festivals (amalengo) which attracted crowds from afar. The champions of each annual event were greatly respected and honoured throughout the sub-tribe.

For daily sport, wrestling was usually performed on a sandy beach where this was available, or on a flat area covered with short grass. Wrestling was a male sport. It still is a popular sport although it has diminished in scale and stature.

(ii) African Hockey (Indolo or Obukhuyo): This was played with a specially carved stick, much like that used in the European game, at least in shape. The ball was either shaped out of a hard stump of wood, or simply a hard fruit; this latter only lasted for a game.

The participants played in two teams. The number in each team varied from place to place, and sometimes did not matter, provided there were equal numbers on both sides. There were two goals, not necessarily made of upright poles: two stones sometimes sufficed for a goal. This game was popular with shepherd boys or with adult men. It is not so commonly played today, and only old men know its rules.

(iii) The Tug-O-War (Okhukhwesana Omukoye): A long thick rope was used; and each team consisted of nine people, though this varied depending on the number of people prepared to join, and on local practice. There was an adjudicator standing near the centre of the rope. He started them off and declared the game won when the winning team pulled the other far enough.

(iv) Olukho: This was played on a board about three feet long which had two parallel rows of shallow holes on the top side. Each row had eight holes. On either end of the two rows was another, larger hole to be used as a 'store' for the pebbles or special round

seeds about the size of a moth- ball, which were used for the game. There were eighteen holes altogether. Only two players could take part at any one time.

The game was played by depositing and arranging the pebbles in the holes, partly according to rule and partly according to personal style. There were six rounds in the game, or as many as would enable one player to win six times. The player, who did this, won the game. (Among the Luos the game is called *ajua* and is still a very popular one. The Luhya of Busia District also call it *ajua*, and still enjoy playing it). Other social pursuits tend to discourage the game in many parts of Luhyaland.

(v) *Okhupa Tsinjera*: *Tsinjera* are special seeds which are oval (shaped like a little bird's egg) and smaller than those used in *olukho*. The game is played on the slightly basin-shaped, four-legged native stool. This is done by holding *injera* between the thumb and the long finger and then by a swift and adroit movement releasing it on to the stool so that it begins to spin round and round on its sharper end. Other players also release theirs and the *tsinjera* are cheered and praised like bulls fighting. The *injera* that hits most of the others off the stool wins.

Naturally, the game was played at home, though during day-time. It was a boys' game. This game (as the *olukho*) requires much time to be enjoyed fully, and so people do not play it much nowadays.

(vi) Bull Fights: This was a common sport in the Isukha, Idakho and Maragoli areas. It has diminished somewhat in Maragoli but it's still a large spectator sport in Idakho and Isukha. Because of its brutality it is attracting criticism from animal rights groups.

(vii) Swinging (*Mwisubo*, *Namusuba* or *Mwirundo*): A rope was tied between branches and young children would swing.

(viii) Gliding (*Omuswelero*): Performed on a slippery slope, or using banana trunks.

(ix) Throwing the Hoop (*Okhulasa Indika*): Sticks were aimed through a moving hoop.

### **3. GAMES PLAYED BY YOUNG PEOPLE AFTER SUNSET**

These were many and varied from place to place. Only the common are mentioned below. Though they were usually performed between supper and bedtime, some of them, especially those for the younger children could be and were performed during daylight.

(i) Hide and Seek (*Umbira Hena*): The children carry one of their number who lies outstretched, facing down. His or her eyes are closed. The children move along singing. The one who is carried sings, 'Umbirahe?' The group answers 'Ebukwe'. The one carried sings again, 'Umbirahe?' and the rest answer 'Ebukwe Nyanza'. The song is sung several times in quick succession. When they reach a convenient place they put the one they are carrying on the ground and, using his mother's clan name, they say in chorus 'Nakhone,

salusya amafura khudonge’, which means ‘Nakhone, melt butter so that we may eat it’. They then leave the child lying there while they run to hide where he cannot find them.

There are two important rules to the game: one is that the one lying down must be absolutely honest or she should keep the eyes closed and remain lying until called. The other rule is that those who are hiding must not go too far; they should hide close by but in such a way that he cannot see them easily. When they are all hidden one of them then calls the one lying down, who rises and begins searching for them. The more players he finds, the better. When he can no more guess where they are, he surrenders. Those who are not ‘found’ disclose themselves saying, ‘I have come out on my own’. They are then declared the cleverest at hiding.

(ii) Ting’i, Ting’i Teyo (or Denga Deyo): Two children join hands in an arch and the rest, joining hands, pass under the arch in a line singing: Ting’i Teyo, teyo, teyo, khutsie khulire wafwa, Aaa aaaaa omwana wanje wafwa sungila nyokholo (or dokhola maseero)’.

There are local variations to both the game and the song. In some parts of Luhyaland the song is sung to tease a child who wets his bed.

(iii) Oliliyo: The children make a circle holding hands and then walk round at a medium rhythmical pace while singing: ‘Oliliyo, liliyo, oliliyo kachenga (or kagenda) several times. Usually a leader sings the first two ‘oliliyo’ while the rest join in with the remaining words. After several rounds leader brings the song to a climax by singing ‘Sing’wandaba’ while they answer ‘Kachenga’ and he adds on, keeping the rhythm, ‘Sikhumbari’ while they answer again ‘Kachenga’, and so on. During this variation, the group dances rhythmically, till the leader goes back to ‘oliliyo’ again when they once more begin walking in the circle.

(iv) Wangwe Kolongolo: In this game the children stand in a line each holding the waist of the one before him. The leader of the line (the first in front) is the mother or the father of the children behind her or him, depending on the sex of the leader. Facing the leader is the leopard which tries to take the child at the end of the line, while the mother (father) with open arms tries to stop it. The line must not be broken, but it should move and coil round to make it difficult for the leopard to take the last child.

The leader sings, ‘Wangweee!’ and the children answer ‘Kolongolo’; then the leader adds ‘Wangwe n’abana’, and the children answer, ‘Kolongolo nolie wi kolongolo’. Leader: Wamalira abana.

Chorus: Kolongolo.

Leader: Wandekhera mulala.

Chorus: Kolongolo nolie wi kolongolo.  
And so on.

(v) Kitumbe ngololiro: The leader sings and moves round and round, while the rest Of the children, joining hands, follow him singing the Bukusu song, ‘Kitumbe Ngololilo’.

(vi) Ngalabayi: One child hides something (usually a hard red seed with a black spot called imbuulu) in one hand and closes both fists so swiftly that the onlooker can never be sure in which hand it is. Then he asks an onlooker to guess which hand holds the object: he is either to choose sutse or ngalabayi. If he guesses rightly he wins; if not, the player wins. It is because of this game that the secret ballot is called *okhukhupa imbuulu* in Luhya.

(vii) Gatore (Pick It Up): This game is played by passing stones. The children sit in a circle. There are sufficient little stones (pebbles) for all except one. The stones are passed round to the rhythm of the song. The hand of each player must pick up the stone on the left side and place it in the space of the player to the right. The rhythm is as the ticking of the seconds of a clock.

When properly performed, it is a very interesting game requiring adroitness of the hands. It often happens that a slow player is so awkward that a pile of pebbles gathers before him and he is unable to dispose of them in time. This is the fun of the game.

The son is led by one player while the rest answer:

Leader: Gatore.

Chorus: Gatore.

Leader: Gatore.

Chorus: Gatore.

Leader: Khagina khetsa wekholerere gatore.

Chorus: Gatore. And so on.

This is a very old song. It is known to be in the dialect which the Luhya spokes especially those living in Ibanda and other places near Lake Victoria. The children of those days loved the game.

(viii) The ‘Linani’ (Maneater): This game can only be played in the dark. One of the players places ‘torches’ (sticks or thick strings with fire at the end) on his ears, in the hands, between the toes, and at every convenient place of his body. He looks very frightening in the dark and the other run away in terror as he approaches.

(ix) Aramuchikicha: The children clap hands in patterns while singing the song Aramuchikicha.

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