



Winter Games From the Dark Side

*Official rules for
Wet Mitten Hanging,
Frost-Heave High Jumps,
and more*

by Steve Bull

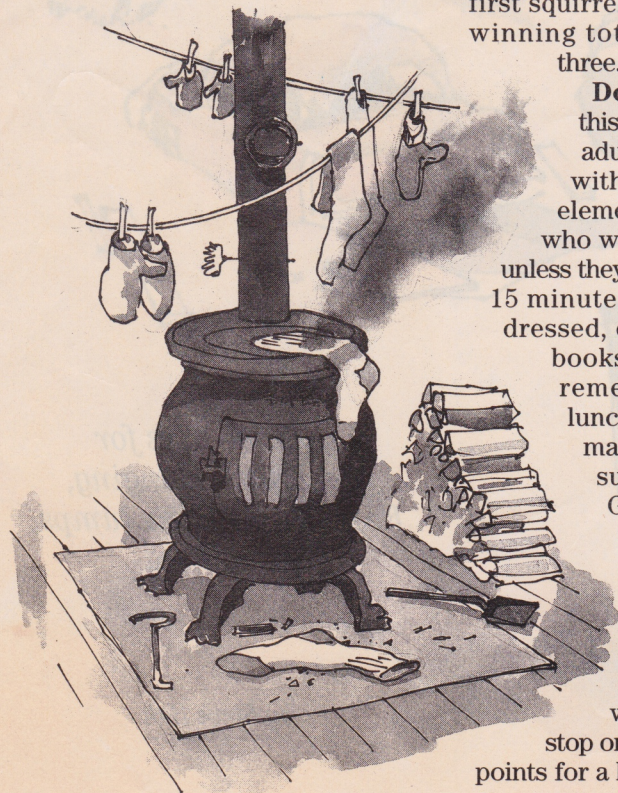


Thanks to the cable sports channels, we're treated to television coverage of skiing, ice skating, dogsled racing, and even ice fishing—every winter sport imaginable.

Well, not quite.

We could be overlooking some of the most thrilling, most challenging, most popular winter games of all—games we've taken for granted. Here are just a few:

Ice Walking: Contestants must carry two bags of groceries and a gallon of milk from their car to their door—in the dark, following a freezing rain. Subtract points for any broken bones, split grocery bags, spilt milk, or cursing.



Firewood Relay: This test of stamina is played family style when the temperature is 30 below and the wind is howling. Contestants pass excuses back and forth until someone gives in and finally brings in more wood. "I did it last time" or "My back hurts" are standard excuses worth 5 points each. More creative excuses, like "Split maple gives me a rash" or "Elvis told me not to," are worth 10 points.

Whoever gives in and actually brings some firewood into the house loses 15 points. The game is considered a draw if everyone freezes to death.

Sock and Mitten Hanging: Artistic design and overall effectiveness count in this sport. Contestants must hang a dozen damp socks and four pairs of mittens near a heat source without setting them on fire or melting synthetic fabrics.

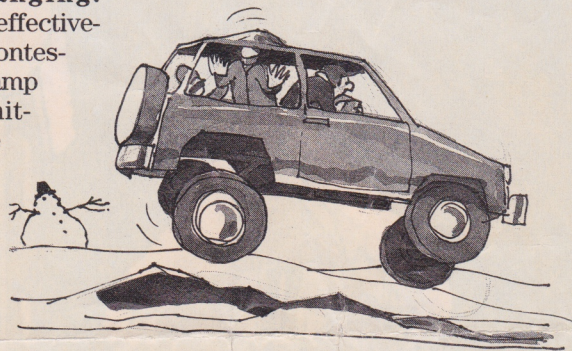
Bird Feeder Races: The object of this game is to fill a bird feeder and return to the house *before* a squirrel gets into the birdseed. The score is based on the number of birds that visit the feeder before the first squirrel arrives. (Last year's winning total at my house was three.)

Don't Miss the Bus: In this race against time, each adult contestant is paired with three uncooperative elementary-school children who will miss the school bus unless they go out the door within 15 minutes. Students must get dressed, eat breakfast, collect books and homework, and remember their lunch or lunch money. Contestants may yell encouragement, such as, "Chew! Brush! Get your coat! Stop arguing! Hurry!"—but they may *not* make threats involving power tools and puppies. Award 10 points for each child who makes it to the bus stop on time, and add 3 bonus points for a hat and 5 bonus points

for matching mittens or gloves that each child is wearing.

Frozen Pipe Thaw: Contestants may use hair dryers, torches, heating tapes, or boiling water to thaw frozen pipes. The first person to get running water—without wrecking the plumbing or burning down the house—wins.

Close the Door: Occupants of a cozy living room compete to see who can yell "Close the door" first. This speaking contest begins when an offspring turns the doorknob to enter the house after sledding on a particularly cold and windy day. Three bonus points are added for the phrases "Were you brought up in a barn?" or "You're letting all the warm air out."



Frost-Heave High Jumps: Contestants are timed to see how long their vehicle stays airborne after hitting a frost heave at 50 miles per hour on a typical back road.

Hi Ho, Hi Ho, It's Off to Work We Go: The kids are screaming with joy because a blizzard has canceled school. Unfortunately, your job has not been included on the cancellation list. In this game, adult contestants must perform the following three tasks:

1. Find a babysitter within the next 10 minutes.
2. Shovel a path to the car, get it started, and clear the windshield.
3. Drive to the top of the town's highest hill to collect a symbolic check, then drive down the hill to the judges' table. Points are deducted for sliding off the road or crashing into the judges. Deduct 10 points if you still have your pajamas on under your overcoat. □

Steve Bull lives in Temple, Maine, where he won a zinc medal in the 1991 Winter Games.