

BOOK OF THE MOOSE

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"It is a most marvelous as well as a most difficult and dangerous undertaking. Only fit and alert people should try their hand at it....."

(Introduction to Impromptu Acting: Andrea Perrucci (1615-1704), quoted in Actors on Acting: Cole and Chinoy)

"People need laughter like they need food"
Stan Laurel.

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INTRODUCTION

Wrestling

I'm watching a Theatresports' tournament at the *Loose Moose Theatre Simplex* in Calgary, Alberta. Hundreds of supporters are screaming and booing and roaring with laughter as Calgary fight with New York team for possession of the 'Rubber Chicken'. I can hardly believe that I am watching theatre - not with all this rage and exaltation.

I'm reminded of the Professional Wrestling that I saw in the nineteen-fifties. This was, presented on cinema stages with the expressions of agony all

played 'out front', so I knew that I was watching theatre. (And if wrestling is a sport, then why aren't eyes being gouged out? And spleens ruptured? And why no bruises?).

I once saw a wrestler fall badly and really hurt himself - everything became very serious and he was carried off on a stretcher with extreme gentleness. Then the phoney carnage resumed, with the audience yelling and screaming as if we were back at the Roman games.

Professional Wrestling was the first working-class theatre I'd ever seen. It was a family entertainment (by which I mean that whole families attended, the children having as much fun as the adults). Dads would scream abuse, Grannies would leap up, waving their hand-bags, youths would try to provoke the Wrestlers into ripping them apart (all in fun I think). Sometimes the spectators would jump up and down as if their seats were on fire.

There were 'Hero/Villain' bouts, and 'Exhibition' bouts, and 'Underdog emerging Victorious' bouts, but no critics came to write reviews, and the state gave wrestling no grants -perhaps it was too vulgar, too lacking in serious content. Dwarf wrestlers ran between the Ref's legs, and fake photographers flashed empty cameras to whip up the excitement - but what amazed me was the screaming of advice and obscenities by the frenzied on-lookers; the audience at our theatre were like whipped dogs by comparison.

I attended my first wrestling match with John Dexter and William Gaskill (colleagues at the *Royal Court Theatre*). We discussed the possibility of using comic-improvisors instead of wrestlers (Gaskill and I had just directed an improvised debacle called *Eleven Men Dead At Hola Camp* so improvisation was already on our minds).

We saw three obstacles:

1. How could we get fair and accurate Judging?
2. Where would we find enough skilled improvisors?
3. The Royal censor (the Lord Chamberlain) would veto such a project.

Had we experimented, we would have realized that you can judge anything from quilts to cucumbers, and that even unskilled improvisors are fun to watch (so long as they're friendly and good-natured), but the Censorship presented greater difficulties, no word or gesture being permitted on the British stage unless it had the prior approval of the Lord Chamberlain. He did not have to *prove* that you had been critical of the Royal family, or the head of some foreign government (like Hitler), or whatever - he just had to establish that you'd disobeyed or evaded him and then you were punished - there being no right of appeal.

A few years later I thought 'to hell with it!' and opened my comedy classes to a paying audience and waited for the axe to fall; but this was after the 'Lady Chatterly' trial when some lawyer had been pilloried for asking the jury: "Is this a book you would wish your wife, or your servant to read?", and the Lord Chamberlain didn't want to risk similar ignominy. Was he to forbid all teaching? He avoided opening this can of worms, so regular theatre remained in it's straight-jacket, while my improvisors said and did whatever they they liked on the public stage (once a week at the Cochrane theatre for example).

Beginnings

For years Theatresports remained a technique that I used to spice up my improvisation classes. I'd ask two teams to play 'hat-games' and 'status challenges', and so on. Sometimes I even added a commentator. My students cheered and booed in a restrained manner, not really caring who won. They regarded Theatresports as a just a way to make their training more agreeable.

I took a job at the University of Calgary (in '71.) and the students seemed very like students elsewhere until I tried 'Theatresports'. These students raged and screamed as if the score really mattered. Their enthusiasm was so astonishing that I longed to try Theatresports in public. Canadian laws were more liberal than in England, and I had dozens of would-be-

improvisors, and I had finally understood that Judges don't have to be right, that they're there to make decisions so that the games don't degenerate into argument (innocent men may hang, but the game continues).

The first public Theatresports lasted twenty-five minutes, and the paying audience cheered and howled and roared just as the students had. Then they crowded onto the stage, shaking our hands, and shouting advice: "The Judges must never change their minds!" they cried (a burst of 'hatred' had so frightened our Judges that they'd reversed one of their own decisions): "And you must have penalties! You have to be serious! It's not just a game!". After years of struggling to 'educate the audience', the audience were now educating us!

It's easy to attract attention when something sounds new and hysterically funny. People would hear about Theatresports and say:

"Penalties involve sitting with the head in a paper bag! The audience get to throw custard pies at the losing team! This we have to see!". The rules of the first games were far too restrictive, but we'd found something that our audience hungered for. Canadians saw this new 'beast' as sport, and not as theatre at all (within a year we were an event at the Alberta Games, something that might have taken generations in other countries).

Our Summer School had students from many countries, and Theatresports groups are all over the world now (I'm told that the New Zealanders are now teaching it to the Samoans). Sometimes the players are mostly professional people. Other groups are comprised almost entirely of Actors. Groups like Loose Moose bring together pathologists, and pizza cooks, computer-hackers and truck drivers, school kids and University Professors.

But What Is Theatresports?

Imagine a wrestling Tournament with teams of improvisors instead of wrestlers. One team might say: "We challenge you to the best murder scene" (or whatever). Their opponents then say: "We accept!".

The winners of this challenge will either get a 'free scene' to do anything they like in, or a fresh challenge will be made (depending on which version is being used). Challenge then follows challenge until an agreed time is reached.

Teams might challenge to: 'To the best scene from a recent movie', or: 'to the best enactment of a dream told by someone in the audience', and so on. Undreamt of challenges can be hurled at any moment, and this makes Theatresports rather dangerous to the self-esteem, and ensures it's popularity, especially among young people (teen-agers are always looking for new ways to test themselves).

Improvisors from opposing teams sometimes play together in 'one-on-one' challenges - e.g. 'to the best one-on-one love scene (to be judged on sincerity and truth)', or to a 'one-on-one, best-out-of-three Hat-Game'. This adds variety. Sometimes both teams may unite to play elimination games, the last person on stage winning five points for his team.

We often use audience members on the stage ("We challenge you to the best use of an audience member"). On a good night our audience are willing to do just about anything - they can be draped around the stage as furniture, or fifty people will lie down on the stage and make sucking noises so that the improvisors can wade through them and play swamp scenes. (On a bad night either you can't get any volunteers, or they're so weird that you wouldn't want them).

Penalties involve sitting for two minutes with your head in a wicker penalty basket (we began by using paper-bags but one of our players was claustrophobic). On rare occasions the Judges will inflict a basket on a member of the audience (for shouting out something too obscene or sexist or whatever). I've never known an audience member to refuse to be penalised - the 'peer pressure' is enormous - but it's weird to buy tickets for the theatre and then be made to sit with your head in a basket.

Our audience don't throw 'pies' at the losers any more (the teams just shake hands and embrace each other), but I recommend the 'pies' to new groups for

the publicity value. It was the one thing everyone always remembered. I recommended pies made with shaving cream but for years they used real cream - which starts to smell within a few minutes - and we 'pied' in a theatre that had no showers (improvisors were tough in those days!).

Something we rarely do these days is to give the money back when we don't like the way a show has gone - but this made the audience much friendlier, and more supportive. They'd leave the theatre saying nothing but positive things: "But I liked *that scene*", "*She was good!*" "I liked the pecking order". An audience that gets their money back will almost certainly return, because they want to know what you're like on a 'good' night.

Why The 'Loose Moose' Theatre Simplex?

I chose the name 'Loose Moose' because 'Loose' sounds spontaneous, and Moose are unpredictable - you never know whether they'll run away or try to climb into your canoe with you; 'simplex' was an ironic comment on the multi-million dollar theatre 'complex' that was being built downtown.

I had wanted my earlier group to sound 'non-cultural' (i.e. like a sixties pop-group) so called it *The Theatre Machine*. People objected that machines are hard and rigid, whereas we seemed flexible and spontaneous, so I decided that my next group should have an animal name. Animal names can give your company a friendly and 'non-cultural' image, and they're easy to remember, especially with a rhyme (like the '*Eager Beaver*' or the '*Fat Cat*' theatre Companies.).

'Loose Moose' is a good length for posters (not too long and the double 'O's' are attention getters). We call our touring company 'Loose Moose on the Hoof', and the newspapers enjoy printing headlines like 'Moose on the Loose', or 'Loose Moose abuse', or 'Loose Moose Recluse' (meaning me): we can walk a giant Moose about on stilts, and have a Moose strip-cartoon in the programme, and have slogans like "Loose Moose has the Juice", and "Don't goose The Moose". We sell 'May The Moose

Be With You' buttons, and Moose 'pins', and Moose T-Shirts, and Loose-Moose underwear (with slogans like 'lets improvise' and 'I'm horny').

Our Spectators

Loose Moose lies at the southern edge of Calgary Airport. It's hard to draw audiences when we are this far from the centre, but this has advantages - we can't 'rest on our laurels' like the performance spaces downtown.

As soon as you enter the doors you know that our theatre is vulgar and populist, because you smell the pop-corn. People are lining up for Moose Juice or Moose balls at the concessions. Teen-agers are swapping 'bubble-gum cards' of their favourite improvisors (it can be humbling to learn that five of your pictures are worth one of someone else's).

Our audience is composed largely of people under thirty (most theatre is for the middle-aged or elderly). The Swedish actor and improvisor, Helge Skoog, came to visit us at a time when there wasn't much to see except a late-night comedy show, but I remember his amazement when the doors opened and the audience kangarooed over the seats to get a place at the front - behaviour you might expect at a pop-concert, but not at live theatre.

Our first audiences were fanatically devoted, and many of them have never been to any other theatre. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation interviewed people in our front row:

"And why do you come here?:"

"Because I'm Interested in sport".

"And what about you?"

"I want to see my team win!"

"Do you go to the other theatres in the city?"

"What for?"

Some of our 'fans' did visit other theatres, and there were reports that they were shouting 'Warning For Boring' just as they would at Theatresports which is hardly fair (and did not make us popular). We begged them to stop, and I haven't heard of any recurrence.

Theatresports™ At Loose Moose

Our Two-Hundred and seventy seat theatre used to be a cattle-auction house (as you can tell when the air-conditioning breaks down). Calgary is a cow town and it was understood that the buyers had to have a clear view of the animals. Hence, our theatre has an excellent actor/audience relationship, (although the dressing-rooms are rather primitive).

Our stage is about thirty five feet wide, and some sixteen feet deep - actually a very broad wedge rather than an oblong. The audience cluster around the three sides, and the seats rise steeply. The steep audience/rake makes it less suitable for very intimate scenes - people high up at the back can't see the actor's eyes - but it works well for a presentational form like Theatresports.

Across the back of the stage is a banner proclaiming 'LOOSE MOOSE THEATRE-SPORTS', and beneath this are dark velvet curtains that soak up light and allow several entrances. Sometimes we have a door to one side of the stage. There will also be a lot of small props at the sides, and larger props waiting back-stage.

At the centre of this wide 'wedge' of stage is an oblong carpet delineating the playing area. We light this area directly and allow the team benches to be seen by reflected light. Against the curtains, and at the side of the stage, are a couple of tables covered in 'junk'; i.e. balloons, bits of rope, dolls, walking sticks, telephones, foam-rubber 'bricks', kitchen implements, whatever. I've often found pure mime to be depressingly 'cultural' ('Look at me! Admire my skill!'), but if you're using a clothes-brush as a 'telephone', or a brick as a 'camera' there's less temptation to glorify yourself.

Judges and players sit in the two-foot deep moat that surrounds the stage - Judges dead centre so they have the best view, and the player on benches at the sides of the 'wedge'. Our 'moat' gives enough leg room, and there's even space for a bed that can be lifted on-stage if a scene requires it. The teams, and the

Judges, and the Commentators have their own microphones.

It's just past eight-o'clock on a Sunday evening, and the opening music starts. The audience cheer and shout. The house-lights fade, as a 'follow-spot' weaves around the auditorium, building up tension, and finally settling on the commentator who stands in front of a score-board way up to one side of the audience.

I place him here because I don't want him to dominate the proceedings (attention should be focused on the improvisors, not the officials). After his introduction he becomes just a voice that helps put the audience at their ease, and explains the finer points. We don't want him to evolve into a Director who tells the improvisors what to do.

He welcomes the audience, and might perhaps encourage them do a few things that help 'break the ice' - like asking them to tell a stranger the vegetable they hate the most, or getting them to do 'the wave'. Then he says:

"And now, the traditional boo for the Judges!".

The audience boo and hiss as the three robed judges enter and take their places in the 'moat'.

He introduces:

"....a ten minute *Challenge Match* played by some of our less experienced players. Give them a big hand Ladies and Gentlemen....."

The two teams enter from the sides opposite their benches. This gives the audience a good view of them as they cross the stage, and allows a team to 'make an entrance', should it so desire, coming on as 'punks', or 'cowboys', or 'mafia' types, or tap-dancing etc., according to mood and ability - but this should still be playful rather than 'show business'. 'Show-biz' introductions raise false expectations.

Four-player teams are the norm, but sometimes a game will even be played with two or even one player teams if the players are sufficiently skillful (which these 'rookies' aren't).

It's O.K. if the rookie players screw-up (it helps the audience appreciate that improvisation is 'difficult'). If the opening game is wonderful, the audience will ex-

pect the rest of the show to be equally brilliant, and that may not be possible.

"A Judge and two team captains to the centre, please.", says the Commentator from his invisible aerie.

A coin is tossed, and the winner is quite likely to say:

"We'll let you make the first challenge".

This 'you challenge us' idea comes from the English game of cricket, and leaves an impression of good nature and sportsmanship (the truth is that it makes no difference who begins).

A player now crosses the stage (into enemy territory), and says something like:

"We, the *Aardvarks*, challenge you, *Bad Billy's Day Care*, to the best domestic crisis suggested by the audience!".

Challenger should seem 'eager', and their voices should be cheerful. New players use negativity as a shield - so we train them to be positive.

"We accept!"

(A challenge can be rejected at the discretion of the Judges, but this seldom happens, although stupid and destructive challenges should be rejected).

The house lights go up as the audience is asked to suggest a domestic crisis. Someone shouts out:

"Leaving the top off of the tooth-paste".

Perhaps a 'Marquis de Sade' type scene now takes place in which an Executioner comes home from work and finds his wife guilty of this 'crime' and drags her to the do-it-yourself torture chamber that he's built in the basement; or perhaps a wife finds out her husband has a mistress, has gambled away the house, has backed over their child in the driveway, etc., but only becomes enraged when she finds the toothpaste oozing over the counter.

Each scene is scored by the Judges who hold up cards ranging between ZERO and FIVE (*FIVE* means excellent, and ZERO means poor, and a honk from a bicycle horn means 'kindly leave the stage'). The challenged team then request another 'domestic crisis' from the audience. 'Bed wetting' shouts one audience member; 'While on Honeymoon', shouts another. The actors then improvise a 'Bed wetting on honeymoon' scene - not something you'd

have seen if you'd stayed home to watch television.

The Theatresports audience are loud, and boisterous: they laugh, and cheer, and hiss, and boo, and shout suggestions. Scenes may sometimes drag (just as in conventional theatre), but when a Theatresports Judge is bored, he 'honks' the team off the stage and lets the other team take over. Were he to allow a boring scene continue, then the entire audience might protest. If a scene is honked that the audience liked, then they'll scream and rage even more. The further they're sitting from the Judges the more violently they express themselves. The people sitting immediately behind the Judges may be saying: "Oh, I don't think that's right" with detachment, while those at the back may be screaming 'Throw 'em out! Kill the Judges!'

After the 'Rookie' game, we usually have ten or fifteen minutes of Free-Impro (I say usually because such things are decided at the pre-game meeting).

The Free-Impro is the 'educational' section of the show. It's intended to provide contrast and variety, and to help the audience understand the the skills involved - although it should be entertaining as well as instructive. A trainer gives a public class (exactly as I used to with the *Theatre Machine* in the sixties). New games can be introduced, and basic skills taught and demonstrated. A good teacher working with improvisors for ten or fifteen minutes can be interesting in a quite fresh way - the pace is different, and the onlookers enjoy being initiated into the 'secrets', becoming familiar with terms like *blocking* and *wimping* and *bridging* and so on. They begin to understand that there's more to improvisation than just 'goofing about'.

The *Free-Impro* is usually followed by a *Danish Game*. I developed this in Denmark, and called it the *Danish game* to stress the international appeal of Theatresports.

This game replaces the Judges by an 'ombudsman' who introduces the penalty basket, and gets the audience to practise shouting out the names of the competing teams. After each pair of challenges has

been fulfilled, he gets them to shout the name of the team that they think did the best work. The team that evokes the greatest response wins the challenge and is awarded five points.

Sometimes there has to be a re-shout, and if the Ombudsman still isn't sure, then the name of each team will have to be shouted separately. Even if we had a device that could measure sound intensity, a 'Decibelometer' or what-ever, we'd never use it. We want our audience to yell out as much as possible, because it stops them being detached and critical. Some Theatresports groups are very slow to adopt this 'Danish' game - failing to understand that shouting en masse gets the audience's lungs working, oxygenizes their brains, and unites them into one huge beast that rolls over to be tickled.

After the fifteen minute or twenty minute interval (which comes about fifty-five minutes into the show) our most experienced improvisors play a *Revised Game*. The winners of each challenge now get a free scene in which they can pile up more points - i.e. the audience get to see more of the 'hottest' team. A *Revised Game* usually lasts for forty minutes.

If the evening has been successful you feel that you've been in contact with a lot of good natured and creative people who (amazingly), aren't scared to fail - this in itself is worth paying good money for; it's invigorating to be part of a playful happy audience who yell things out and boo and hiss, and even improvise on stage with the performers.

The point to grasp is that going to the theatre once a week to yell your head off is therapeutic. Our ancestors used to swarm up to the highest branches and scream at the dawn just to get the day off to a good start - and yelling en masse is still part of our biological heritage. The audience is left with the good feelings once it's howled out the bad. I like the work to be of high quality, but I don't want the audience to come because it's 'art', I want them to come because Loose Moose is one of the few places that they can 'let off steam'. There may have been some wonderfully funny scenes, but these are just 'bonus'.

.....

The 'Warning For Boring'

Commentator: "Oh, and it's the 'Warning For Boring'. The Deadheads have lost the stage. Obviously a very popular call this. The Mooseketeers are storming on to the stage to present their version of the challenge. The challenge was 'to the best use of a member of the opposing team.' Oh, and they've got a volunteer...."

Or conversely:

Commentator: "The audience is absolutely furious with this call, The Mooseketeers are waiting for the noise to subside so that they can take over the stage. The Head Judge calling for silence amid a shower of paper cups...."

What Is The Warning For Boring?

It isn't a warning, it's the real thing. A team that receives a 'Warning For Boring' loses the stage, and its opponents take over. It began as a 'Warning' and we kept the old terminology because 'Warning For Boring' sounds less offensive than just plain 'Boring!'. 'Warnings' are now given by the honk of the bicycle horn which each Judge wears around his neck as a 'badge of office' (although the 'quackers' that duck-hunters use would work just as well).

Handled ineptly, 'Warnings for Boring' can be brutal, but used properly they are helpful, and positive Experienced players actually get to like them and to expect them. After a tedious game at Loose Moose the improvisors can be heard complaining about the 'bad Judging', and demanding: "Where were the 'boring' calls?" (as if forbidden to end boring scenes by themselves!).

Some groups have objected to the 'Warning', because :

1. It's not dignified.
2. it has a depressing effect on both players and audience.
3. It may destroy an interesting scene

My experience is that effect of the Warning For Boring, whether positive or negative, depends entirely on the attitude of the players. If players can be thrown

off the stage and yet remain friendly and 'warm', then the audience will be inspired by such good sportsmanship. So I reply that:

1. If you want to be dignified then it's probably best not to improvise in public.
2. A team that shows rage, or slinks off like whipped dogs can create terrible 'vibes', but it's wonderful to see people being thrown off of the stage so long as they stay good natured.
3. That if a Judge 'honks' a scene that *isn't* boring, then the entire audience will howl imprecations - which is good, and gets them on to your side

The 'Fly-Paper' Stage

The stage can be as 'sticky' as flypaper and it can be very difficult to pry you off - which is why devices like the hook' are used to remove amateur comedians.

Common-sense says that an improviser will end a 'bad' scene as quickly as possible so why should anyone ever need a 'Warning For Boring'? 'Common-sense' does not take into account the 'stickiness' of the stage. The average improviser enjoys basking in the audience's approval, so he won't leave when he's doing well. But supposing he does badly? Would you enjoy slinking off the stage knowing that you'd achieved absolutely nothing? Certainly not! The inexperienced (or selfish) improviser stay on in the hope that he can dredge up something 'interesting' or 'amusing'. Once a scene begins to die it's difficult to revive it - but suppose it does revive? Will the average improviser seize his chance to escape then? No - because he so lusts for the audience's approval.

Many improvisors stretch out boring scenes until they can dredge up 'a laugh to end on'. This is supposed to give the audience the illusion that the scene was O.K. but all it really does is make the improviser feel a little better. Ideally you should leave when you are doing really well - because that's when you'll get the most points. We want you to hand on a lively and excited audience to the other team, not one cross-eyed with boredom.

The audience should be looking forwards to having you back on-stage. If you keep dragging scenes out until you find 'a laugh to end on', the audience will think: 'Oh God! Not them again!'

History of the Boring Call

The 'Warning For Boring' is controversial, but twenty years ago it would have been unthinkable. It was introduced not because we were sadists, but because our Judges were already used to throwing players off the stage. The first public games were based on the idea that if the members of any team blocked an idea (i.e. killed an idea), they should be thrown-off. I changed this early game by saying:

"Forget about 'blocking' ideas. The important thing is that the scenes should be interesting. Everyone is boring sometimes. Lets be 'out-front' about it, and give 'Warnings For Boring'". A Judge should hold up a zero mid-scene and then the Commentator should say, 'Oh and it's their first Warning For Boring' or whatever".

I had to fight for this idea, because it seemed so alien to what we had been doing, and so brutal. We used the 'Warning For Boring' very nervously at first - there had to be *three* warnings, and all three Judges had to be in agreement (we were so reluctant to hurt the players' feelings). Minutes of boredom would elapse before the first Warning was issued, and minutes more might pass before the Judges could agree on second and third 'Warnings'

I wanted the Judges to wave the lights down as a way of ending scenes that would involve no penalty, but the players rejected this - saying that it might allow the Judges to work against one team in favour of the other. That was typical of the initial paranoia, but as the months passed the Judges began waving the lights down anyway, and people never objected (it was better than getting a boring call and losing whatever points might have been earned). The players can always wave the lights up again and continue their scene (a risky strategy). Nowadays, any Judge or Lighting Improviser, or fellow team-

member can bring the lights down and this creates no bad feelings.

Fading the lights on a scene is often preferable to issuing a 'Warning For Boring', but I'd like at least some 'warnings' in every game because they're dramatic, they add variety, and the audience enjoy seeing people in trouble.

Even with two warnings, many teams still wouldn't leave voluntarily; this was not because the Judges were 'trigger-happy', rather the opposite. You could see a Judge pick up the zero card, and fiddle with it, and look agonized, and yet still not raise it. Whispered conversation between Judges tended to go like this:

"I'm bored, are you?"

"I'm a bit bored, but not that bored"

"Well he's bored, and I'm bored, and you're a bit bored. How about using the zero?"

"Well - give them a chance".

Judges would watch a scene die a lingering death, and then award a 'one', or even a zero, rather than get rid of it and get the other team on - what use is a zero when the scene was over! And who wants to have watched a scene that was only worth a miserable 'one'?

In spite of the weakness of many of the Judges, and their longing to be popular, some improvisors became extremely hostile. It became difficult to persuade anyone to judge for a second time.

Teams gradually realized that their best strategy was to leave after the second warning (avoiding a third warning which would lose them whatever points the scene might have earned). The third warning gradually fell into disuse and was abandoned.

The first 'Warnings' had been intended either to get the actors to leave the stage or to inspire them, but players would almost always wait until the second 'Warning' (the 'sticky stage' syndrome) We tried saying "One more minute!" or "Thirty seconds" but the work rarely improved. The improvisors would let scenes drag on while they flailed about looking for 'a laugh to end on'.

In desperation we reduced the 'Warnings' to one, which of course is not a warning but the real thing (we kept the

term 'Warning for Boring' because it sounds less brutal than plain 'Boring'). I then argued that any Judge should be able to give a 'Warning' as soon as he felt that a scene wasn't going anywhere, i.e. that Judges need not collude on such calls. If one Judge was bored, then probably a section of the audience was bored.

A minority of improvisors (who still wanted a 'boring' call to mean 'end it soon', or 'end it in two minutes'), strongly objected. They said:

"We're artists and why should one miserable Judge throw us off before we've completed our work. And if we're not working well why aren't we given the chance to improve!"

I said: "You get your chance when you do your next scene. And we want you to hand on a live audience to the other team. Why should two Judges and the entire audience be falling asleep, while the third Judge is dithering? Teams are not being ejected out into a blizzard! They're just being asked to relinquish the stage temporarily".

I argued that boring scenes should be zapped before they depressed everyone, but that the warning should be accepted with good nature and generosity, or the game would turn sour.

I began to study other sports, and realized that it was normal for the Judges to be criticized (Some referees have been rushed away through barbed-wire tunnels, and some have been torn to pieces by angry crowds (not Theatresports Judges) (NOTE: see '*Scarlet O'Hara's Younger Sister*'). I also noticed that when Theatresports Judges were lenient, the audience were more likely to be critical of the players.

Theatresports works best when the Judging is strict, because then the actors and audience form one team, which plays *against* the Judges! We want the audience to cheer for the actors and hiss the Judges. Better for a Judge to be 'wrong', than to be indecisive. A miscall can have a very stimulating effect - because the more the audience rage against the Judges, the greater the love they express towards the players.

The Warning For Borings had always been given by raising a Zero card, but this

seemed a bit 'teachery' to me - too 'judgemental' - so I bought some bicycle-horns and instead of being 'zeroed-off', the players were now 'honked-off'. When players looked at the Judge's bench and saw these idiots honking their horns, it helped them keep a sense of proportion.

I had never enjoyed 'zeroing' scenes that had begun splendidly and had then fallen apart because I wanted good work to be rewarded. Now that horns were used instead of the zero, it became obvious that even if a boring call is given, and the team lose the stage, they should still be awarded points!

A Judge can now honk a scene and yet give it a high score! This, plus the use of Hell-Judges (see P.21.), has made the 'Warning for Boring' acceptable to almost everyone. No player wants to hit a Judge these days. Teams know that they are getting higher points than if they'd been allowed to meander on in a vacuum, and players can lose the stage and yet remain full of vitality. If a new player should slink off 'enraged' or 'looking pathetic', his team mates will correct him.

I could have invented more subtle ways to remove improvisors from the stage - stand-up comedians have a warning light, or a picture at the back of the bar will light up to signal them off - but I was tired of the audience that 'appreciates' theatre and says: 'I quite liked it', as if discussing a dubious egg. I wanted the Judges to state publicly 'This is good!', and: "This is bad!", and then have the audience cheer their approval, or boo their outrage.

'Warnings For Boring' adds 'toughness', and 'realism', and work wonderfully once the Improvisors learn to stop 'punishing themselves'. Accept a 'Warning' with good nature and the audience will want to take you home and feed you grapes. They know that *they* would rage or grovel, and they're amazed that an improvisor can remain playful and good natured, even in adversity.

Penalties

We awarded penalties by making offenders sit with their heads in brown-

paper supermarket bags for two minutes. Holes were cut in the top for ventilation, and sometimes we'd draw funny faces on them. In those days the audience would yell: "Bag him! Bag him!". Since then we've switched to wicker baskets (to help those improvisors who suffer from claustrophobia), but cries of "Basket! Basket!" don't seem to have quite the same ring to them.

Baskets can be used to enforce discipline, but a basket is not really a deterrent - it's hardly ever detrimental to your team's work. Even if the other three members of your four-person team were all given penalty baskets (although this would be unusual), can't you imagine how the audience would cheer you as you fought on all by yourself? They'd remember it for months.

A penalty basket is a way of mollifying any members of the audience who *might* be offended. Sooner or later some improvisor will make a racial joke or other tasteless remark and sitting with your head in a basket is a symbolic apology. A Woman Priest told us what she'd done during the day (Sunday) and we had a lot of fun acting this out - church bells as an alarm clock, taking a shower while still wearing her nightdress (as some Nuns still do) - ending up with a sermon which consisted of various impassioned renderings of the word 'bull-shit'. We then awarded Veena Sood (the woman who had played her) our ever first 'basket for blasphemy', not because we were offended, but we thought the audience member might be.

If a group refuses to use the penalty basket (as has happened), what can they do when an improvisors breaks some taboo unintentionally and seems like an insensitive jerk?. Not having a penalty basket can be very embarrassing. *Think of the basket as absolution, rather than a punishment, and as yet another a way to add variety.*

If a spectator should yell out something that seems tasteless and objectionable, then the Judges may ask the audience if they want him or her awarded a basket. Audience members will agree to sit beside the score keeper with their heads in a

basket for two minutes (I've yet to see one refuse).

Judges should award baskets for 'distracting' or anti-social behaviour, for the inappropriate breaking of taboos, and so on. Award the 'baskets' at end of scenes. In doubtful cases the Judges should consult with the audience:

"Should we basket him?"

The entire audience, even very shy people, are likely to roar really loudly in response to such a question.

The Development of Theatresports

No-Block Theatresports

The first public Theatresports game was simply called '*Theatresports*' and its rules made it fascinating for the spectators but infuriating for the players. This primitive game was a struggle for stage-time - the winners of a challenge taking 'possession of the stage' and racking-up points (the challenges themselves were not scored). This meant that the audience saw more of the 'hottest' team, but a team that was inferior or just plain unlucky could spend an entire game, losing challenges and winning no points at all. Even worse for morale was the rule that if anyone on stage killed an idea, the off-stage team could yell: 'BLOCK!' If the Judges upheld this, then the objectors would get possession of the stage, but if instead of saying 'UPHELD' they said 'OVERRULED' then the off-stage team would lose ten points. A team might end up with a score of minus a hundred-and-fifty points, then, as a final insult, they'd have to kneel down and allow the audience to throw pies at them.

This imbalance built into the structure of early Theatresports resulted in many memorable games. People still say things like: "Do you remember when the *Moosettes* spent almost the entire game on the bench, and ended minus two-hundred and twenty points?". But it made the players so aggressive that hardly anyone one would volunteer to Judge. Soon I was having to Judge every game myself, and I'd have to invite members of the audience to

Judge with me. The audience members would usually score everything high, and they were too polite ever to throw the improvisors off, so a lot of bad feeling began to accumulate around me as the 'hanging Judge'.

At first I attributed the rage of the players to their being Canadian (the Canadians billeted in my home town in '44 had been the most violent of all the Allied forces). Then I thought that perhaps I was working with an unusually aberrant group, or even that Theatresports might be bad for people's psychological health. Gradually I understood that it, the game itself, really was creating, or adding to, the hostility.

'No-Blocking' Theatresports was gradually modified. Time-points were introduced (see later), and the game would start with a challenge, rather than letting a coin toss award one team possession of the stage for a whole ten minutes. Unfortunately the players soon became great experts at 'not-blocking', so that the game became tedious, and literally quite 'pointless'.

The 'Regular' Game

'No-Block' *Theatresports* mutated into the '*Regular Game*' as soon as I realized that the taboo on 'blocking' wasn't an irrelevancy. Some players found it unthinkable that we should abandon what seemed to be the entire foundation of the game, but I argued, and eventually proved, that the audiences really didn't care whether the players blocked or didn't block - they just wanted to see teams of improvisers competing against each other!

The *Regular Game* was the first game that was capable of sustaining the interest for week after week. It's not played these days because we're afraid of the bad 'vibes' that it can generate - yet it used to provoke great audience interest (we had fans who would come every time that their team was playing) and it was bizarre to be stopped in the street by strangers who wanted to know: "What are the 'stats' on the *Moosettes*?", or: "Do you think *Evil Elk* will be eliminated this week". We

intend to play the *Regular Game* again (when we dare).

As with 'No-Block' Theatresports, challenges in the *Regular Game* are not scored, and points are only earned during the 'free-time'. Blocking is ignored - except in 'No-Blocking' challenges - but if the work isn't interesting then the Judges give a 'Warnings For Boring' which instantly replaces the offending team with the off-stage team who take over any free-time that remains.

I wanted to create more warmth and comradeship among the players, so I decided that we should score the challenges. Then even a team that lost every challenge could at least earn *some* points. I cut the 'free-time' down to six minutes so that losers would not have to wait so long before the next challenge. Finally someone said: just let the winners of a challenge play one scene of whatever length they choose. These changes mutated the *Regular Game* into the *Revised Game* which we still play.

Current Games

Four versions of Theatresports are currently in use at Calgary (Dec.89). They are:

1. The *Challenge Match* - which consists only of Challenges (i.e. no 'free-time or free scene).
2. The *Judges' Challenge Match*, in which the challenges are issued by the Judges.
3. The *Revised Game* in which the winners of a challenge are allowed one extra scene.
4. The *Danish Game* - a challenge match in which the audience vote determines the winners of each challenge - the three Judges being replaced by one 'Ombudsman' who supervises the game.

A typical evening of Calgary Theatre-sports (Jan '90) usually begins with a short ten or fifteen-minute *challenge match* played by our 'rookie' teams, followed by a *free-impro* with an educational slant, and then a thirty minute *Danish game*. After a fifteen-minute interval we usually end with a forty

minute *Revised Game*. We start a few minutes after 8:00 P.M. and we like to close down a few minutes before 10:00 P.M.. If we played on Saturdays we might present a longer show, but our audience have to get up for work early on Monday mornings.

The rules of these games overlap, so I'll describe the *Challenge Match*, and then explain how the other games deviate from it.

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THE RULES OF THEATRESPORTS™

(Skip this section if you like and just use it for reference)

The Challenge Match

Rules:

(Rules One To Seventeen are common to all current games).

1. *The length of each game is decided in advance.*
2. *The Commentator introduces the Judges (or the 'ombudsman' if it's a Danish Game) and they cross the stage to take their places. He says: "And now the traditional 'boo' for the Judges" (except in the case of the Ombudsman).*
3. *The Commentator introduces the teams who cross the stage to get to their benches at the opposite sides of the stage. Keep the benches out of direct light except when there's a particular reason to light them - a dispute with the Judges perhaps. A lit team is very likely to be distracting.*
4. *If a team has a coach, this coach enters with them and sits on the bench. He is allowed to compete as a team member if necessary, but it's considered 'bad form' for a very experienced coach to 'star' in a game with new players - he should come in when an extra body is needed, or a waiter, or to end a scene. He's there to assist, not to 'shine'.*
5. *The Commentator asks for a Judge (or the Ombudsman in the Danish Game) and the two Team Captains to go to the centre. The winner of a coin-toss decides which team will accept the first challenge - it's quite normal for the winners of the toss to*

say 'You Challenge Us!'. From then on the off-stage team make the next challenge.

6. A team can 'balk' at a challenge at the discretion of the Judges (or the Ombudsman). But unless a team offers very good reasons (e.g. 'We've all seen this challenge so often recently that we're fed up to the teeth with it') this tends to be considered unsporting. If the Judges uphold the rejection of a challenge (or reject a challenge themselves), then the team must issue a fresh challenge. If they keep on offering unacceptable challenges, then the Judges can take over and issue the next challenge themselves - although we hope this doesn't become necessary.

7. If time is being wasted setting up the scenes, the commentator or the Judges, or the entire audience can start counting down from five to zero. A team that is counted out loses the stage - This hardly ever happens, and we don't want it to happen. Starting the count galvanizes the players into getting on with the game and offers yet another way of getting the audience involved.

8. If a Judge honks his bicycle horn, this gives the dreaded 'Warning For Boring', and the team that is honked must end their scene immediately, and yield the stage. This also applies to one-on-one scenes.

9. The Judges can wave the lights down as a alternative way of ending a scene, or they can say 'Twenty seconds to end it' (or whatever) or they can use the Warning For Boring. In general, they should not wave the lights down unless they can see a natural place to end the scene. The players can wave the lights up again if they wish to continue but this is considered unwise. The Lighting Improvisor and members of the on-stage team can also wave the lights down. So can the 'director' of the evening - if you have one.

10. The Judges are responsible for the discipline of the game and should not be afraid to exercise their authority. Penalties are taken by sitting beside the commentator for two minutes (with the head in a wicker 'penalty' basket) and are awarded for obstruction, for undue obscenity, for delaying, for harassment of the other team, for interrupting the other teams work, and so on.

11. A scorekeeper keeps score (this task can be given to the commentator if no one else is available but I don't recommend this).

12. If very little time is left, then the Commentator (or the Judges) can request a 'short challenge' - i.e. a one-on-one challenge, or a 'one minute' challenge etc.. However, as the Judges are the ones in charge of the game, they can countermand such a request.

If a challenge is in progress when the agreed time for the ending of a game is reached, the challenge should be completed, and scored.

13. Each team is entitled to one thirty-second time-out' during each game - this request is rare though .

14. The Scorekeeper, or Commentator should record the length of any time-outs, or time lost if the game is interrupted for whatever reason, and should add this 'extra time' to the end of the game.

15. After the previously agreed time has passed, the team with the most points is declared the winner. (In friendly games, where the score is of no consequence, the Commentator can choose his own moment for ending the game - perhaps a few minutes early or late - trying to get the game to end at a really high point).

16. Challengers always go first, so that if a challenge is new to a team they at least get a chance to see it performed before they attempt it themselves (except in one-on-one challenges). If a challenge is obscure, a team may ask for an explanation. If a challenge can't be explained clearly and succinctly, then it can be rejected - at the discretion of the Judges.

17. If the refusal of a challenge is upheld, then the challengers must issue a new challenge. If the Judges will not uphold a refusal, then the team can accept a zero instead of answering the challenge, but this would not be a good strategy.

The following rules may not apply to all other Theatresports games.

18. The Judges can say things like "We'd like to see a non-verbal challenge please", or: "We've seen too many group scenes - can we have a solo scene please" - always in the interest of making the

game more interesting. If the game is going well they should leave well alone.

19. The Judges can - in extremity - refuse a challenge on behalf of the other team, and request the challengers to issue a rechallenge. If in the opinion of the Judges the game is falling apart due to the inexperience of the improvisors, or the continuing stupidity of the challenges, or whatever, then the Judges themselves have the right to issue challenges - although we hope this doesn't have to happen.

20. The teams challenge each other in turn, until the agreed time for the end of the game is reached. Each challenge is scored.

21. Recommended length of game - Challenge Matches usually last from thirty to forty minutes., but when we use them for the opening 'rookie' games they usually last between ten and fifteen minutes.

The Judges' Challenge Match

In *The Judges Challenge Match* the challenges are made by the Judges. A Judge announces the first challenge, perhaps to: "To the best scene using Three-Word-sentences", or whatever. Each team then presents a 'Three-word-sentence scene', which is awarded points. The Judges then present a new 'challenge' - "To the best love scene", or whatever.

I've heard Judges say "We challenge you to..." as if the Judges were playing against the players. I think it's better to say "The first challenge is..." and "The next challenge is..." and so on. This is less confusing than "We challenge you....."

The '*Judges' Challenge*' puts the least stress on inexperienced players and I recommended it for beginners. This may seem strange, since the players have absolutely no control over what they'll be asked to do, but it's an advantage not to have to worry about strategy.

Competent Judges can ensure variety, i.e. by following a 'pecking-order' scene with a solo mime, or a clown-scene by a serious scene, and so on. They can use their selection of 'challenges' to impose

some control on the pace and shape of the game, and they can tailor them to the abilities of the players.

Judges' Challenge Match: Rules:

(See Challenge Match for rules One to Seventeen).

18. The Judges set each challenge - choosing them with regard to the abilities of the players and the needs of the spectators.

19. The Judges score each challenge, and then issue a new challenge.- this process continues until the agreed time that the game is to last.

20. Recommended length of game. We usually play the Judges' Challenge Match for twenty minutes (or for ten minutes when the players are beginners). Judges' Challenge Matches have never lasted for longer than half an hour, because if the players are that competent why not let them issue their own challenges?

I regard the Judges' Challenge Match as a stepping stone to the Challenge Match - even so a Judges Challenge match may sometimes be played by experienced players to add variety, and because it's fun.

The Regular Game: Rules

(Rules One to seventeen are the same as for the Challenge Match)

18. The Judges can say things like "We'd like to see a non-verbal challenge please, or: "We've seen too many group scenes - can we have a solo scene please" - always in the interest of making the game more interesting.

19. The Judges can - in extremity - refuse a challenge on behalf of the other team, and request the challengers to issue a re-challenge. If in the opinion of the Judges the game is falling apart due to the inexperience of the improvisors, or the continuing stupidity of the challenges, or whatever, then the Judges have the right to issue the challenges themselves - although we hope this doesn't have to happen.

20. Teams challenge alternately, the winners of each challenge getting time on stage ('free-time') during which they can accumulate points. The challenges themselves are not scored, the Judges merely indicate the winners of each challenge who then take the stage and begin earning points. If a team gets a Warning For Boring during the free-time, then they are replaced by the off-stage team.

21. The points awarded by the Judges are multiplied by the 'time-points'. A minute on stage earns one time point. A six minute scene which received ten Judges' points would earn sixty points, whereas a thirty second scene that earned ten Judges points would be multiplied by half a time-point and would receive a total of only five points (See 'Time-Points': P. 18.).

22. If the agreed amount of free-time is exceeded, the commentator (warned by the score-keeper) says 'End of Free-time' and the Judges decide their score at that point (although the scene taking place may be allowed to continue for the general delectation.) If the scene is really interesting, the best strategy is to return to it later in the game, i.e. 'to be continued'.

23. Length of game - we began by playing the Regular Game for two hours, but we gradually reduced the time to forty minutes or three quarters of an hour. The teams originally struggled for ten minutes of 'freetime' but as we reduced the length of the game so we reduced the 'free-time' which in shorter games lasts for five or six minutes. A reasonable duration of the game and of the free-time must be agreed beforehand.

In recent years the Regular Game has been replaced by the Revised Game, but we'll try again soon, and see if we can cope better with the aggression and the paranoia now that we (hopefully) have more understanding, greater maturity, less sensitivity, etc.! It was the game that was most like a sport and that most excited our spectators to scream and shout and really care about the score.

The 'Revised' Regular Game

This game eliminates the six minutes (or whatever time is agreed) for the free-scenes, and instead allows the winners of a challenge to play just one 'free-scene'. I suggest a maximum time of ten minutes for the Free Scene but Theatresports scenes rarely last for so long, because both the audience and the Judges get impatient to see the other team at work. In theory, a team could win the free scene and then continue it for the rest of the game, but in practise this is almost unimaginable.

Teams can no longer cram as many scenes into the Free-Time as possible because only one scene is allowed. There is therefore no longer any need for 'Time-Points' (see P.18.).

Rules

(For Rules One to Seventeen - see Rules For The Challenge Match).

18. The Judges can say things like "We'd like to see a non-verbal" challenge please, or: "We've seen too many group scenes - can we have a solo scene please" - always in the interest of making the game more interesting. If the game is going well they should leave well alone.

19. The Judges can - in extremity - refuse a challenge on behalf of the other team, and request the challengers to issue a re-challenge. If in the opinion of the Judges the game is falling apart due to the inexperience of the improvisors, or the continuing stupidity of the challenges, or whatever, then the Judges themselves have the right to issue challenges - although we hope this doesn't have to happen.

20. One team challenges the other and the winners play one free scene, after which the off-stage team makes a fresh challenge. This process continues until a previously agreed time for the end of the game is reached.

21. The challenges are scored, and the free scene is scored.

22. Recommended length of game - half hour to forty five minutes.

The 'Danish' Game

Warning: the Danish game is not suitable for tournament use because the audience will almost always cheer for the home team. I saw the first game between Sweden and Denmark spoiled because the Danes, who were the hosts, insisted on playing the Danish game, and inevitably the audience began cheering for the home team against the Swedes.

Think of the Danish Game as a Challenge Match with the Audience making the decisions as to value, and with the 'Ombudsman' fulfilling the other functions of Judges.

A Danish game begins with the 'Ombudsman' explaining that the audience are to cheer for the team that does the best work:

"Let's suppose that the 'Dead Beats' do a scene you like, and 'Easy Riders' have done a scene you didn't like - on the count of three, you should shout out the name 'Dead Beats'. Let's try it - 'one...two... three...'"

"Dead Beats!" shout the audience. If they sound feeble, the Ombudsman coaxes more noise out of them. Then he holds up the penalty basket, and explains that if anyone is unsporting, or blasphemous, or obscene (or whatever) 'out of context', that we'll have a vote, and that, if found guilty, the miscreant will sit beside the Commentator with his head in a basket for two minutes.

Teams names must be adapted so that they contain the same number of syllables - or it becomes very difficult to judge. If the 'Police' were playing a team called 'The Fall Of The Roman Empire', then you'd just hear a mass of confused shouting followed by: '.....Of The Roman Empire', even though the 'Police' fans had actually been shouting louder. The Ombudsman should say:

"Did you prefer the *The Police's* 'escape' scene where they were trapped in the atomic submarine, or *The Roman's* scene in which the twins were rescued by caesarian section?"

If the Ombudsman is uncertain, even after a reshout, he may get the supporters of each team to yell separately:

"Let's hear it for the Police!"

Roar! Roar!

"And now let's hear it for the for the Romans!"

He declares either a winner or a draw. The winner get five points. In a draw, both teams get five points.

It's necessary to remind the audience of the content of each scene, or they'll forget what they're voting for (especially if they've been laughing hysterically). The Ombudsman may also forget, so he must always note down a terse description of each scene so to jog his/her own memory.

The Ombudsman is responsible for 'horning' scenes, or waving the lights down, or for saying: 'twenty seconds to finish', or whatever. It's his responsibility to see that the scenes don't limp on, searching for a 'laugh to end on'. He has to exercise some authority, he can't just be a passenger.

Note: It's arguable that the Danish game is the most damaging to the improviser if he's not playing other games, and if he's out of contact with good teaching. In other Theatresports games the Judges can keep pressing for scenes that have some sort of 'point', that tell an interesting story, but in the Danish game where the audience are the Judges, all kinds of stupidities are immediately rewarded with laughter - which is strongly conditioning. And there are no Judges to work against this.

You might think that it's reasonable to give the audience what they want - but the audience do not tell you what they want. They laugh when something stupid or aggressive, or cruel happens but they may want other things as well - like wonderful characters and amazing adventures - and their laughter may be very misleading.

I evolved this game with *Tournus* (in Denmark), and I called it *The Danish Game* because I wanted to stress the international appeal of Theatresports. *Tournus* didn't have enough company members to provide three Judges, so we chose an Ombudsman to conduct a challenge match, and said that the team who's name was yelled loudest would win the challenge. The advantage of this is that in addition to the usual comments, and cheers, and boos, the entire audience gets to yell in unison every few minutes. (When theatre began to inhibit this sort of

whole-hearted response, it inflicted a deep wound on itself).

Rules

(Rules One to seventeen are the same as for the Challenge Match)

18. *The Ombudsman can say things like "I'd like to see a non-verbal challenge please, or: "We've seen too many group scenes - can I have a solo scene please" - always in the interest of making the game more interesting. If the game is going well he (or she) should leave well alone.*

19. *The Ombudsman can - in extremity - refuse a challenge on behalf of the other team, and request the challengers to issue a re-challenge. If he believes that the game is falling apart due to the inexperience of the improvisors, or the continuing stupidity of the challenges, or whatever, then the Ombudsman has the right to issue a challenge of his own - although we hope this doesn't have to happen.*

20. *The Ombudsman introduces the game from centre stage, demonstrating the Penalty Basket. and getting the audience to practise yelling the names of the teams, and so on.*

21. *The Ombudsman takes over the function normally exercised by the panel of Judges in other games - he/she honks boring scenes off, waves the lights down, etc. etc.*

22. *After each challenge is completed, the Ombudsman reminds the audience of the two scenes that they've just watched, and gets them to shout the name of the team who's work they preferred..*

23. *The winners of the 'shout' (as determined by the Ombudsman) get five points, except in hat-games where each hat taken earns three points. Hats-Games, and similar games are not recommended for Danish Games because the audience does not get a chance to vote on them.*

24. *Duration - Danish Games usually last from twenty five to forty minutes.*

Scoring

We began by scoring Theatresports scenes from ZERO to FIVE.

ZERO meant 'Boring'.

ONE meant 'Poor'.

TWO meant 'Average'.

THREE meant 'Good'.

FOUR meant 'Very good'.

FIVE meant 'Superlative'.

Now that we've replaced the ZERO with a 'Honk' (from a Bicycle horn), we tend to regard average as being between TWO and THREE.

Each Judge now makes his/her own decision and the scores are added together by the score-keeper. The top score for a scene is therefore fifteen (except in Danish Games where the winner of any challenge gets a FIVE).

In 'one-on-one' challenges (in which members from each team work together), the winning team gets a score of FIVE, and the Judges award this by pointing towards the team that they think did the best. To indicate a draw they point straight upwards. (An exception to this rule are the 'best-out-of-three hat-games', in which each hat taken or successfully defended earns THREE points).

If a team is losing drastically (fifty points down, perhaps) in a friendly game, they could request that the winner of the next challenge get fifty-one points. This can be rejected of course but is a reasonable tactic to use if you're trailing far behind.

The score-cards should be held high, and held up immediately. They should be rotated from side to side so that everyone has good view - We all need to see them, not just the commentator and the score-keeper.

Scoreboards

Make a cloth score board and 'velcro' the numbers and team names onto it. It'll be very light, and you can roll it up like a blind.

Time Points

When the Regular Game was introduced, with its unscored challenges, and its scored Free-Time, the players soon discovered that they could pile-up vast numbers of points by including as many scenes as possible during the free-time -

even if each got a low score, twenty tiny scenes would accumulate far more points than would just one scene of high quality, so Theatresports began to degenerate into a succession of 'one-liners'.

I decided that scenes should earn more points if they were extended, so I said that we should multiply the 'Judges' points' by 'Time-Points', every minute on stage earning one time-point. A scene that was awarded ten Judges' points and that lasted for three minutes would earn a total of thirty points. A scene that was earned twelve Judges' points, but which lasted only thirty seconds, would be multiplied by half a time-point and receive a 'grand total' of only six points.

This put an end to the 'one liners', but when we created the *Revised Game* time points became irrelevant - the winners of a Challenge can present only one scene, so there's no advantage in compressing it into fifteen seconds.

Scoring At The Olympics

At the Olympics we decided first, second, and third place by adding up the score from all the 'official' games played. Each team's scores were totaled, and then divided by the number of challenges they had played. This was necessary or teams that played the most challenges would on average have earned the most points; i.e. a team that played ten challenges in a twenty-minute game might have averaged four points for each challenge - giving them forty points - whereas had they played only two long challenges which had earned the maximum possible score of fifteen points per challenge they'd have earned only thirty points.

We decided that we should have finished the tournament with exhibition matches - as happens in skating.

'Counting Out'

Some teams dither about, while they look for props, or struggle into costume, or they may spend spend minutes getting suggestions, or volunteers from the audience. If the Judges or the commentator

become conscious of a delay, they can 'count the team out' - starting at five and counting down to zero. If the situation hasn't become acceptable by the time the zero is reached then the miscreants lose the stage. Sometimes the entire audience joins in with the counting-out - which gets them more involved.

Having only five seconds to respond to a challenge in may seem severe, but challengers go first, so no one is really being thrown on to the stage at five seconds notice. And the counting down isn't applied unless a team is visibly wasting time. Ten, twenty, perhaps even thirty or more seconds may have passed before anyone remembers to begin 'counting you out'.

There is always the danger that the trappings of theatresports may start to take up more time than the actual improvisation. 'Counting out' helps to avoid this.

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Judges

Function

The Judges adjudicate the game and settle disputes - for example, if a team objects to a challenge on the grounds that it was made earlier in the evening, then the Judges must uphold or deny this objection. (In the *Judges' Challenge Match* they also set the challenges).

A Judge is not an entertainer - his task is to be efficient, and to keep the 'the ball in play' so to speak. Judges should try not to get into huddles in order to argue abstruse points. They should make decisions quickly, even if these decisions are later determined to be 'wrong'. The Judges are there to stop the game from degenerating into argument. We'd like them to be objective and fair, but that's not actually why we need them.

Who Should Judge?

Try other Theatresports players. Sometimes non-players can be excellent, but in general, members of the public and

'celebrities' are too indulgent - giving almost every scene a high score.

It's a good idea to use one celebrity, because the two other Judges can exert a moderating effect, but it's a disaster (and very 'wasteful') to use three. Invite media 'celebrities' - talk-show hosts, news-readers, and so on - they may talk about Theatresports on their programmes and they usually have a very good time. Give them flowers, free-drinks, Theatresports pins, T-shirts, etc. if appropriate. Always treat them with consideration and respect - this means appointing a warm friendly person to be their host, and send them a letter of appreciation afterwards.

Not everyone makes a good Judge - try people out. Give them advice. Encourage them to express their genuine opinion, rather than be subservient to the audience, but beware - a weak Judge can be so determined not to be weak that he'll make eccentric decisions just to show that he isn't weak. If a Judge is too eccentric, too bizarre, don't use him.

How Many Judges?

We use three Judges, so that there will be always be a third Judge to break a tie between the other two.

No Judge can be perfect, but with three Judges, the biases are likely to cancel out.

In emergency, the number of Judges can be altered (by agreement between the teams).

How Should They Look?

Judges should not look stupid, but some sort of costume may be helpful - ours wear blue robes although I'd prefer black. They should enter together, and should stay close to each other so that we see them as a group (they should not enter one at a time). They can be good-natured, and friendly, but when it comes to Judging they should be firm and decisive.

How To Introduce Them

I've seen Judges introduced with sentences like: "And here they come, these scum, these sleaze bags...". But what's the point of trying to make every moment

utterly facetious? The Judges are in charge of the game and they need to be given some respect before they can be a satisfying 'enemy'. We want to 'give permission' for the audience to boo the Judges, but not to despise them or to treat them as cuddly friends. I would suggest some more formal phrase like:

"And now the traditional boo for the Judges please", as the Judges enter.

I've seen teams pretend to bribe the Judges. I once saw a team 'spin' a Judge to see who should make the first challenge. I've seen Judges dragged out of their seats and kidnapped as a 'joke'. I've seen Judges dress up as blind men and tap their way across the stage to their seats. I've seen a Judge hold up the 'five' card and then sit on it as a way of saying that he won't give high scores - which is lunatic because the audience want high scores (so long as they're fully deserved). Always remember that Judges are in charge, and that it's easier to 'hate' them if they're authority figures.

Judges can be enthusiastic when a really wonderful scene occurs - but they shouldn't join in the cheering and the jumping about.

Where To Sit Them.

Some groups have suggested placing the Judges where they can be seen, and lighting them. This may be O.K. when they're holding up the cards, or in a dispute, but at other times the emphasis should be on the players and we should be able to forget about the Judges.

I place the Judges at the front of the audience, and in the centre (if the architecture of the theatre allows it). Judges placed at the front have an excellent view, and the audience can easily see the score cards. Unless the Judges stand up, most of the audience can't see them, which is fine by me since I want the attention focused on the players.

Vancouver Theatresports at City Stage theatre had a central gangway so I placed their Judges at the rear, but this was not a perfect position. Sometimes a Judge needs to dominate an audience and for that he should be able to stand up and face them -

e.g. when defending a controversial decision - the audience are twice as loud when screaming abuse at a Judge who has the courage to confront them.

In Vancouver the Judges seem to have very little authority, and the game is dominated by the M.C. who has become the 'star' of the game - the weak placing of the Judges may have encouraged this.

Judges As Parents etc.

It's depressing to see a Judge compete with the players to see who can get the most laughs. A Judge should be a 'straight man', a parental figure, who is slightly resented by the audience.

Judges should not be seen as taking their responsibilities lightly - and they should not make gags. They are there to make decisions, and to be hated, and just occasionally to be admired. They're not there to be thought witty, or charming.

Judges can be enthusiastic if a really wonderful scene occurs - but they should not join in the cheering and stand up and jump about.

Judges Are Not Perfect

Improvisors likely to be fiercely competitive - especially the inexperienced players - and they can get really angry with what they consider a bad Judgement ("we was robbed!").

I defend the Judges by saying that everyone is supposed to screw-up at least twice in every game, and that this includes the Judges. I remind everyone that the Judges are a necessary evil, and no more likely to be perfect than anyone else.

Not only are Judges doomed to be imperfect, but their errors can be very valuable. I've heard people argue against the Warning For Boring because the audience howled abuse when it was given:

"Look," they say: "This proves that the Actors were right and that the Judges were wrong!"

Yet such indignation welds the actors and the audience into one team. I'm happy when the audience becomes enraged - their lungs get a good work out and they discharge a lot of pent-up aggression that they might otherwise vent on their fami-

lies. If the Judges were always perceived to be right then the game would be that much more boring. Theatresports is not a school, it's not a place where everyone's value depends on their being 'marked correctly'.

But Judges should be honest - the game becomes a farce when Judges given wrong decisions deliberately.

Think of the audience and the players as being on one team, and the Judges on the other; unpopular decisions by the Judges help to consolidate this. The more 'hate' that the audience project onto the Judges, the greater their love for the players.

The Need For 'Strong' Judges

Weak Judges want to be popular, and they are easily swayed by the audience. A scene may be dreadful beyond belief, and yet weak Judges won't throw it off so long as there's still some laughter being extracted. They'll look visibly bored, and toy longingly with their bicycle horns, and yet allow it die a lingering death. Perhaps they're afraid to annoy the performers, or too 'chicken' to risk the audience howling with rage at them. But it may be only friends of the cast who are laughing, or a group of teen-agers, or a bunch of drunks.

Conversely, some Judges will end a scene which is fascinating to the audience simply because there isn't any laughter. Serious scenes are wonderful in giving the audience a rest from laughter, but weak Judges will always 'honk' them off.

Judges need to be 'strong' enough to resist sustained abuse. If the audience has just been enraged because the Judges threw off a popular scene, then weak Judges are very likely to let the next scene run on and on, no matter how ghastly it may be. Judges should not be quelled by the audience's antagonism.

A strong Judge does not look to see what score cards his fellow Judges are about to raise, and he does not see himself as just the representative of the audience (unless he or she is a 'celebrity' Judge). He is an expert, someone who has his own opinions and who does not just follow the crowd. A

Judge should be always fighting to raise standards.

Strong Judges can encourage improvisors to be more daring. They can say:

"We're bored with these challenges. We want challenges no one has ever heard of before!"

Or:

"We'll give extra points for any scene that actually has a story!"

Experienced Judges should do more than just wave the score cards up and down. But if they are treated as figures of fun they can't exercise this sort of authority.

Try To Score High

If a scene is awarded a ONE, then it should probably have been honked. Judges are reluctant to throw teams off, but they'll express their resentment by giving the lowest possible score, yet should we have to put up with inferior work? If a low score seem warranted then the Judges should consider waving down the lights or awarding a 'Warning For Boring'.

Many Judges are also reluctant to mark high, even though audiences like high scores. This is yet another attempt to avoid criticism (they're afraid that the audience will say: "So he liked that scene did he? Yuk!"). If a Judge really likes a scene he ought to give it a high score. It's not only the improvisors who should take risks.

'Hell-Judges'

The Problem: A Judge may be thinking so hard about the scene that he doesn't notice that he's bored (I swear this is true). Or he may be itching to give a 'Warning For Boring', and yet still trying to give the improvisors 'one more chance'. Or he may fear the hostility of the players or the rage of the on-lookers.

The solution: put a red light in the Judges' view, and have it operated by a button at the rear of the audience. Put another red light in front of the Lighting Improvisor.

The people who control the buttons are the 'Hell-Judges' (not my terminology). A Hell-Judge has so little responsibility that he or she is almost exactly like a

member of the audience - all they have to do is press the buttons when they feel bored. The lights do not have to be obeyed, so the decision to press the buttons doesn't feel 'serious'. Hell Judges are not wondering what points to award, or thinking: 'Should this go on a fraction longer? Or: 'Does this player deserve a penalty?'. Or 'is this becoming too obscene?'. Hell Judges just register that they've seen enough - then the officials can take action or not. The audience may be insulting and booing the acknowledged Judges but they don't know that the Hell Judges exist.

Hell-Judges work in twos, or threes, or in even larger groups, so that no one knows who's really making the decisions (maybe the Regular Judges are obeying every red light, but maybe they aren't). In this situation improvisors can't take 'Warnings For Boring' so personally.

We have separate buttons for the lighting Improvisor, and for the Judges. If a Hell-Judge can see a great place to fade the lights he can signal his opinion, but the lighting improvisor doesn't have to obey, although he often will.

When an inexperienced Judge gives too many 'Warnings', the absence of red lights is a restraint.

'Lawyers'

At international tournaments players from some neutral country may be conscripted as Judges, even though they may never have judged before. Sit some knowledgeable person beside them as a 'lawyer' who can be consulted if necessary. Such a 'lawyer' acts as an adviser - he or/she has no actual power.

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