ABSTRACT
Indoor activity games for contests of skill and amusement. A soft, foam ball or cube is suspended by a cord and can be wrapped around a releasable device or temporary pole secured within a doorway. The ball can be struck by the players using their hands or using soft, foam paddles, in order to wrap the cord and the ball around the pole. In one embodiment the game played can be tetherball, and opposing players, on opposite sides of the doorway, attempt to strike the ball and propel it around the pole until the cord is completely wrapped around the pole. In another embodiment tennis or volleyball can be played, and a net is suspended across the open doorway.
INDOOR ACTIVITY GAMES

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates generally to activity games for children and adults, and more particularly to paddle ball games that can be safely enjoyed indoors.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention is intended to help solve the age-old problem of finding things to do inside when the weather is inclement, or when parents want their children to play indoors. Parents often like to play games that get their children off of the couch, away from video games and television, and allow them to get exercise and have fun indoors. Also, it is preferred to be able to play games that do not harm the indoor furniture, and which can be easily assembled and disassembled for clean up and storage.

[0003] Games that are typically played outdoors, such as tetherball, tennis and volleyball, involve the striking of a ball with a bare hand or a racquet. Such games require the ability to strike the ball with force in a desired direction. However, such games typically cannot be played inside the house, for fear of breaking furniture or other valuable fixtures. In addition, it is difficult for a young child to play these games due to the typically heavy ball that is used in tetherball or volleyball, or the heavy racquet that is used in tennis. Also, games such as tetherball typically require a sturdy, stationary pole for the tethered ball to wrap around, and tennis and volleyball involve hitting a non-tethered ball back and forth over an anchored net. To date, games such as tetherball, tennis and volleyball have not been appropriate for playing indoors, due to the need for a heavy ball or a permanent structure with which to play the games.

[0004] Accordingly, it would be advantageous to be able to play traditionally outdoor activity games, such as tetherball, tennis and volleyball, indoors. There is also a need for an indoor tetherball, tennis and/or volleyball game which uses a lightweight, foam-type ball that can be controlled by a young child, either by using their hand or by using a lightweight, foam racquet or paddle. It would also be advantageous to provide an indoor activity game which can be easily assembled in a confined area, attached to an indoor support, and then easily removed and disassembled without the use of permanent connecting elements, such as a permanent anchor, pole or net, inside the house. Therefore, there is a need for indoor activity game kits having component parts adapted to be easily assembled and reversibly mounted indoors, such as within an open doorway.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] The present invention provides indoor activity games which can be played within an inside doorway or passageway. The games typically include a soft, lightweight ball that is suspended from the distal end of a cord or tether. The cord is pivotally connected at its proximal end to a releasable clamp, or other type of releasable device, that is reversibly secured to the top and center of a doorway. Specifically, as disclosed herein, the releasable device can be either a scissors-like clamp or a spring-loaded, telescoping pole. If tetherball is the indoor activity game, the releasable device includes a taut rope or temporary "pole" that stretches to the floor. If tennis or volleyball is played, the rope/pole is replaced by a net, which is strung across the passageway from one end of the doorway to the other.

[0006] The invention provides an indoor activity game kit having component parts adapted to be easily assembled and reversibly mounted within an open doorway, the kit comprising the combination of (a) a releasable device for being reversibly secured substantially in the center of an open doorway; (b) a lightweight ball for striking by a player; and (c) a cord having a proximal end pivotally attached to the releasable device and a distal end attached to the ball. Typically the game kit includes two or more paddles for use by players to strike the ball.

[0007] The invention also provides an indoor activity game, comprising (a) an open doorway; (b) a releasable device for being reversibly secured substantially in the center of the doorway; (c) a cord having a proximal end pivotally attached to the releasable device; and (d) a ball attached to a distal end of the cord.

[0008] Also disclosed herein is an indoor activity game kit having component parts adapted to be easily assembled and reversibly mounted within an open doorway, the kit comprising the combination of: (a) a releasable device for being reversibly secured substantially in the center of an open doorway, wherein the releasable device comprises: (i) a scissors-type clamp for engaging an overhead door frame; (ii) a rope having a proximal end attached to the clamp; and (iii) a weight attached to the distal end of the rope for causing the rope to hang taut from the clamp to the floor; (b) a ball for striking by a player; and (c) a cord pivotally attached to the releasable device, the cord having a proximal end attached to the releasable device and a distal end attached to the ball.

[0009] In one embodiment, the releasable device includes a scissors-type clamp (either elastic- or spring-biased) that firmly engages opposing sides of a wall above a doorway. For playing indoor tetherball, the releasable device can also include a rope with a weight attached to the bottom thereof for keeping the rope taut (and acting as a temporary pole) from the top of the doorway to the floor. In another embodiment, the releasable device is a releasable, spring-loaded, telescoping pole comprising an inner rod telescopically fitted into an outer rod, wherein a compression spring biases the inner and outer rods into an extended position between the top of the doorway and the floor, or between the ceiling and the floor.

[0010] These and further objects, features, advantages and characteristics of the system and method of the present invention will be more fully appreciated upon viewing the following drawings, detailed description of the preferred embodiments, and claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] The accompanying drawings illustrate embodiments of the invention and, together with a general description of the invention given above, and the detailed description given below, serve to explain the principles of the invention.

[0012] FIG. 1 is a plan view of one embodiment of an activity game of the invention mounted within a doorway, showing the combination of a clamp apparatus and a rope as a releasable device.

[0013] FIG. 2 is a detail view of another embodiment of an activity game of the invention similar to that of FIG. 1, but having a spring-loaded pole extending from the lintel of the doorway to the floor as the releasable device.

[0014] FIG. 3 is a cross-sectional view taken as indicated by the double-headed arrow 3-3 in FIG. 2.
FIG. 4 is a detailed view of the apparatus similar to that of FIG. 1, but having a net suspended between the jambs of the doorway instead of a rope stretching to the floor.

FIG. 5 is a detailed view of a pair of soft, foam-type paddles for use with the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Definitions:

As defined herein, the term “cord” means a tether or string or the like, having a relatively small diameter (as compared to a rope, below) that attaches at its distal end to a ball.

The terms “doorjamb” or “jamb” mean the vertical or side walls of a doorway.

The term “rope” means a line, drop line, cable or the like, having a relatively large diameter (as compared to a cord, above) which functions as a soft, temporary pole component for a child’s game.

The term “lintel” means the header or top horizontal member of a doorway. Typically a framed doorway includes doorjamb and a lintel placed about the door opening to dispense loads to the adjoining studs.

The phrases “pivotally attached” or “pivotally connected” means being connected to a pivot point, i.e. to be rotateably attached to something, so that it can be caused to rotate, turn or revolve about the point where it is attached. For example, in the present invention a cord is pivotally attached to a clamp or pole at its proximal end, so that the cord can be caused to rotate about the point (i.e. pivot point) where it is attached.

The phrase “releasable device” means a piece of equipment that can be easily connected to, and then easily disconnected from, the top of a doorway. In one embodiment (see FIG. 1), the releasable device is a scissors-like clamp that reversibly mounts to the opposing walls in the top, center portion of the doorway. For playing indoor tetherball, this clamp can include a rope that stretches to the floor, the rope being weighted at the bottom to keep it substantially taut along its length. In another tetherball embodiment (see FIGS. 2 and 3), the releasable device can be a releasable, spring-loaded, telescoping pole with an inner rod telescopically fitted into an outer rod. A compression spring biases the inner and outer rods into an extended position between the top of the doorway and the floor, or from the top of the ceiling to the floor.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Turning now to FIG. 1, there is a depiction of one embodiment of an activity game 10 of the invention installed within a doorway 12 comprising two vertically extensive doorjamb 14 and a horizontally disposed lintel 15. A releasable device, here in the form of a scissors-like clamp 16 biased by a spring 17, reversibly mounts about the lintel 15 at the top and approximate center portion of the doorway 12.

A cord or tether 18 is pivotally attached at its proximal end 20 to the clamp 16, and a ball 22 as other object for striking by the players (i.e. typically a soft foam ball or square foam block or cube) is attached at the distal end 23 of the cord 18. Attached in this way, the ball 22 is able to swing from the cord 18 in any direction from its pivot point attachment 20 to the clamp 16. Young children will typically use soft, foam paddles to strike the swinging ball, but open handed striking can also be performed.

As shown in FIG. 1, the releasable device 16 can also include a soft rope 24 having a proximal end attached to the clamp at the pivot point 20, and a distal end 26 attached to a weight 28 for causing the rope 24 to hang substantially taut in the center of the playing area form the clamp 16 to the floor 30. The weighted line or rope 24 typically has an adjustable length (as can be seen on the floor), and the weight 28 typically provides a downward force of about 5 lbs. to the rope for stretching the rope tight. The weight 28 also stabilizes and helps prevent excessive swinging or movement of the rope 24, and can be a free weight as shown, or also a fillable plastic container that receives water or sand.

As illustrated in FIG. 2, a spring-loaded pole 32 version of the releasable device includes an inner rod 33 telescopically fitted into an outer rod 34, and a compression spring 36 (FIG. 3) biases the pole 32 into an extended position between the top of the doorway 15 and the floor 30. The inner and outer rods 33, 34 are preferably round tubular members, in which inner rod 33 is inserted into the end of the outer rod 34 in a telescoping relationship. As depicted in FIG. 3, a coil spring 36 may be inserted into the telescoped inner and outer rods 33, 34. An outboard end 37 of the coil spring 36 may be restrained by an end cap 38 on the inner rod, and an inboard end 39 of the spring 36 is retained by an adjustable plug 40 that may be held by a set screw 41, or other suitable means.

For the “tetherball” version of the invention, shown in FIGS. 1-3, two players are either standing or seated on opposite sides of the doorway 12, with the rope 24 (FIG. 1) or pole 32 (FIGS. 2-3) positioned in the doorway between them. The game begins when one player serves the ball 22, usually by holding it in their hand and hitting it in a first direction, either with their hand or with a paddle such as one disclosed herein (see FIG. 5). Typically after the first player serves the ball, he or she can’t touch the ball again until the opposing player touches it. The opposing player then attempts to return the serve by hitting the ball in the opposite direction. The object is to hit the ball 22 in such a way that one’s opponent will be unable to alter the ball’s direction. The game ends when one player hits the ball around the pole in their own direction as far as it will go, so that the ball hits the pole.

A player can commit a violation by stepping onto his opponent’s half of the doorway, by catching and throwing the ball, by touching the cord, rope or pole instead of the ball, by hitting the ball twice before it has either circled the pole, bounces off of the pole, or has been returned by the opponent. Generally, after a violation occurs, the game pauses and the ball is returned to the position it was in before the violation; the number of wraps around the pole is re-created (or a penalty-wrap is awarded to the player who didn’t commit the foul). The player who didn’t commit the violation then serves the ball. If, however, the violation appears to be intentional, it may result in loss of game. Doubles can be played by alternating hits between team members. A series is won by winning the best of 7 games, or other predetermined number of games.

In the “tennis” and/or “volleyball” embodiments of the invention, depicted in FIG. 4, a releasable device, here in the form of a scissors-like clamp 16 biased by an elastic band 19, reversibly mounts about the lintel 15 at the top and approximate center portion of the doorway 12. A cord or tether 18 is pivotally attached at its proximal end 20 to the clamp 16, and a ball 22 or other object for striking by the players (i.e. typically a soft foam ball or square foam block or cube) is attached at the distal end 23 of the cord 18. Attached
in this way, the ball 22 is able to swing from the cord 18 in any direction from its pivot point attachment 20 to the clamp 16. A long flexible sheet of material 50, which may be netting, is suspended across a portion of the open doorway 12 (i.e. the lower portion for tennis, the middle portion for volleyball) between the jams 14 of the doorway, e.g. typically by means of releasable Velcro patches, hooks or other suitable temporary attachments (not shown). The net 50 is used to fill in the empty doorway 12 and prevent balls that are hit too low from going over the net. The object of the game is to win points by hitting the ball 22 over the net 50. If the ball comes to rest on one side of the net, or if the ball is blocked or stopped by the net after the player strikes the ball, the other player is awarded a point. A game is played to 15 points, or traditional tennis scoring can be used.

[0029] The particular type of ball 22 used and the size and mass of the ball used for the activity games of the invention are variable; however, light-weight foam-type balls, made of polyester-urethane material, are preferred since the present invention is for indoor use. Like other children’s indoor games it is expected to be used with a small, rubber or foam ball having a diameter of between seven and ten inches in most cases.

[0030] Typically the paddles of the invention, shown in FIG. 5, are soft, foam-type paddles 60, each paddle having a pair of holes 62, 63 hollowed out at the bottom portion 64 for fingers to be placed therein. The upper portions 66 of the paddles are used for striking a ball, which is also typically soft and made of foam or other light weight polyester-urethane material. Each paddle 60 is typically rounded at the top portion 66 and squared off at the bottom portion 64 as shown, and are between 1 inch and 3 inches thick, to accommodate the fingers of the user. It can be appreciated from viewing FIG. 5 that the bottom portions 64 of the paddles have more structural support than a typical “tennis type” paddle or a tennis racket. As such, the user can grip the paddles 60 by fitting their fingers and thumbs into the holes 62, 63 just as a one would grip a table tennis paddle, except that the bottom portion 64 provides structural support around the gripping hand that will lessen the tendency of the typically soft, foam paddles from bending backwards when striking the ball with force. The soft paddles 60 and ball are ideal for use by small children to prevent injury, should the ball or paddles accidently strike something other than the ball, such as the jams or another player.

[0031] While the present invention has been illustrated by the description of embodiments and examples thereof, it is not intended to restrict or in any way limit the scope of the appended claims to such detail. Additional advantages and modifications will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art. Accordingly, departures may be made from such details without departing from the scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. An indoor activity game kit having component parts adapted to be easily assembled and reversibly mounted within an open doorway, the kit comprising the combination of:
   a) a releasable device for being reversibly secured substantially in the center of an open doorway;
   b) a ball for striking by a player;
   c) a cord having a proximal end pivotally attached to the releasable device and a distal end attached to the ball.

2. The game kit of claim 1, further comprising two or more paddles for use by players to strike the ball.

3. The game kit of claim 2, wherein the paddles are soft, foam-type paddles, each paddle having a pair of holes hollowed out at a bottom portion for user’s fingers to be placed therein, and an upper portion for use in striking a ball.

4. The game kit of claim 1, wherein the releasable device comprises a scissors-type clamp for reversibly mounting to the opposing walls at the top and center portion of the doorway.

5. The game kit of claim 4, further comprising a net for being suspended across the open doorway.

6. The game kit of claim 4, the releasable device further comprising a rope having a proximal end attached to the clamp and a distal end attached to a weight for causing the rope to hang taut from the clamp to the floor.

7. The game kit of claim 4, wherein the scissors-type clamp is selected from the group consisting of a spring-biased clamp and an elastic-biased clamp.

8. The game kit of claim 1, wherein the releasable device comprises a spring-loaded pole including an inner rod telescopically fitted into an outer rod, and a compression spring for biasing the pole into an extended position between the top of the doorway and the floor.

9. The game kit of claim 8, wherein the compression spring biases the pole into an extended position between the ceiling and the floor.

10. The game kit of claim 1, wherein the ball is made of light weight polyester-urethane foam.

11. An indoor activity game, comprising:
   a) an open doorway;
   b) a releasable device for being reversibly secured substantially in the center of the doorway;
   c) a cord having a first end pivotally attached to the releasable device; and
   d) a ball attached to a second end of the cord.

12. The indoor activity game of claim 11, wherein the releasable device comprises:
   i) a scissors-type clamp for engaging an overhead door frame; and
   ii) a rope having a proximal end attached to the clamp and a distal end attached to a weight for causing the rope to hang taut from the clamp to the floor.

13. The indoor activity game of claim 12, wherein the scissors-type clamp is selected from the group consisting of a spring-biased clamp and an elastic-biased clamp.

14. The indoor activity game of claim 11, wherein the releasable device comprises a spring-loaded pole including an inner rod telescopically fitted into an outer rod, and a compression spring for biasing the pole into an extended position between the top of the doorway and the floor.

15. The indoor activity game of claim 11, further comprising two or more paddles for use by players to strike the ball, the paddles comprising soft, foam-type material, each paddle having a pair of holes hollowed out at a bottom portion for user’s fingers to be placed therein, and an upper portion for use in striking a ball.

16. The indoor activity game of claim 11, the indoor activity game further comprising a net for being suspended across the open doorway, wherein the releasable device comprises a scissors-type clamp for engaging an overhead door frame.

17. An indoor activity game kit having component parts adapted to be easily assembled and reversibly mounted within an open doorway, the kit comprising the combination of:
a) a releasable device for being reversibly secured substantially in the center of an open doorway, wherein the releasable device comprises:
   i) a scissors-type clamp for engaging an overhead door frame;
   ii) a rope having a proximal end attached to the clamp; and
   iii) a weight attached to the distal end of the rope for causing the rope to hang taut from the clamp to the floor;

b) a ball for striking by a player; and

c) a cord pivotally attached to the releasable device, the cord having a proximal end attached to the releasable device and a distal end attached to the ball.

18. The indoor activity game kit of claim 17, the kit further comprising a net for being suspended across the open doorway, wherein when the net is used to play tennis or volleyball the rope and the weight of the releasable device are excluded from use.

19. The indoor activity game kit of claim 17, further comprising a second releasable device, wherein the second releasable device comprises a spring-loaded pole including an inner rod telescopically fitted into an outer rod, and a compression spring for biasing the pole into an extended position between the top of the doorway and the floor.

20. The game kit of claim 17, further comprising two or more paddles for use by players to strike the ball, the paddles comprising a soft, foam-type material, each paddle having a pair of holes hollowed out at a bottom portion for user’s fingers to be placed therein, and an upper portion for use in striking a ball.

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