



The Ball Game

One of the ways that the Maya peoples competed against each other was by playing what has been called the Ball Game. They used a rubber ball, about 20 inches in diameter and played on a stone "court" whose measurements varied. The court had walls that sloped inward, and hanging high on the walls were stone rings.

The goal of the game was to pass the ball around, without having it touch your hands, and then get the ball to pass through one of the rings. Since the rings were so high and players were not allowed to use their hands, it was extremely difficult to get the ball through a ring. In fact, when a player did manage to get a ball through a ring, that usually ended the game. The ball was not allowed to touch the ground.

The winners of the game were treated as heroes and given a great feast. The penalty for losing a game was sometimes unusually harsh: death. The leader of the team who lost the game was sometimes killed. This fits in with the Maya belief that human sacrifice was necessary for the continued success of the peoples' agriculture, trade, and overall health. The games attracted very large numbers of people to watch. Gambling on who would win was common.

