

## BALL BOUNCES BACK INTO A BYGONE ERA

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This is the story of a former, fifth-grade four square all-star.

There was a time when I never went to school without a red rubber playground ball under my arm. It was dedicated to the game of four square, and I was lord of the blacktop, taking on all comers from the server's square.

We played the game straight up - two bounces in your block and you were out. Only a few variations were permitted at the server's discretion.

Those days are gone. Four square has gone the way of freeze tag and kick the can. It exists somewhere just outside our everyday lives, right next to dodge ball and our childhood inhibitions.

Somehow, someday, we outgrew it.

Until one recent weekend. That's when fun went retro chic at my parents' home. Some old friends and I discovered the Big Blue Ball in a corner of the garage.

About a foot and a half in diameter, it is the type of hyperbouncing ball that every small child dreams of and every mother fears. I received it as a gift from my college roommates when I turned 20. No doubt we abused its powers, throwing the plastic planet around our small room and breaking the stereo speakers, a lamp, and a few other items.

Maybe it was the sound of the bouncing sphere that jogged our memories, but four concrete slabs making up a segment of the driveway snapped into focus like the Statue of Liberty in one of those stereogram posters.

Suddenly, it was four square time.

The game began with four contestants, all in their mid-20s. Feeling our way through the nuances and strategies of the game and improvising what we failed to remember, we quickly returned to fifth-grade form.

There were grunts of exertion as feet shuffled along the pavement and excited shouts of "You're outta there!" as the ball landed on a line.

Before long, we were an even dozen. The garage was lined with multicolored folding lawn chairs, a holding area for those expectant gamers looking to rotate into the makeshift four square grid.

As play progressed, so did the daring of the players. We introduced double hits, bobbling, black magic, cherry bombs, spinners, tea for two. We made participants use their non-dominant hand, clap before hitting the ball, hop on one foot.

We formed alliances and voted each other off the driveway. We committed unforced errors. We bribed the courtside referee with candy. We laughed.

It was four square with style.

As the darkness and a little rain came, the match went on. We lost ourselves in the game. Only the onset of mosquitoes and the promise of food managed to break our enchantment.

Even then, as we returned the Big Blue Ball to its resting place among some boxes, it was with some reluctance and melancholy. Who knew when we might pick it up again?

Probably it is too late to suggest that my friends are considered an intellectual crowd by some. And yet, a few of my sibling's friends were impressed by our dinner conversation, during which we had mixed talk of political science and microscopic worms with nacho cheese and chips.

Of course, my brother wasn't fooled. He just looked at his friends wide-eyed and reminded them of the spirited game of four square that had taken place outside.

"Yeah, regular geniuses," he said.

My only response could be that Einstein was a wicked four square player. How else could one explain his lesser-known theory of fun activity?

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