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Zig-Zag Tee Ball: A quality game

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The editorial team of the Active & Healthy Magazine and Tim Lynch invites games and activities from readers that contribute to the teaching of a quality physical education program. Games should be presented in a format similar to the article above and include:

- A Movement Skills summary
- A Tactical skills summary
- A clear and simple description of the game or activity
- Diagrams to aid the explanation of the game
- Variations
- Tips
- Focus questions and
- Student reflections for sharing with students at the conclusion of the game

We are looking forward to building a great repository of games and activities for Australian schools through this regular column.

Zig-Zag Tee Ball is a quality hybrid game that I have used when teaching in primary schools. It is one of my all-time favourites kept in my bag of tricks. Like many games there may be different versions and names associated with Zig-Zag Tee Ball, so chances are that you may already know a similar game perhaps under another name. Zig-Zag Tee Ball is categorised as a modified striking/fielding game and reinforces fundamental motor skills of striking, trapping and throwing. I would like to share this game with you so you may also enjoy with children. While it is suitable for children in middle to upper primary school, it is possible to play with even younger children if modified and depending on their experience and ability.

This game was implemented with success in various school contexts and depending on how it is implemented with the particular class can enable 'Quality Health and Physical Education'. It would be hoped that children by the time they have reached Year 3 (approaching 8 years of age) have had plentiful opportunities to develop fundamental motor skills. However, if they have not had the opportunity then you could possibly develop their skills, mindful that they may require extra time before they play this game.

Playing the game

Equipment:

- 1 baseball/softball tee
- 1 softball/baseball bat per game
- 1 ball per game
- 5 markers (number of players - 6)

Playing Space: Grassed/ asphalt area.

Formation: Six players (although the game can be played with more or less than six). One game requires a rectangular shaped space approximately 15 metres in width and 40 metres in length.

Instructions:

One child is batting and the other five children are fielders standing at a marker (Figure 1).

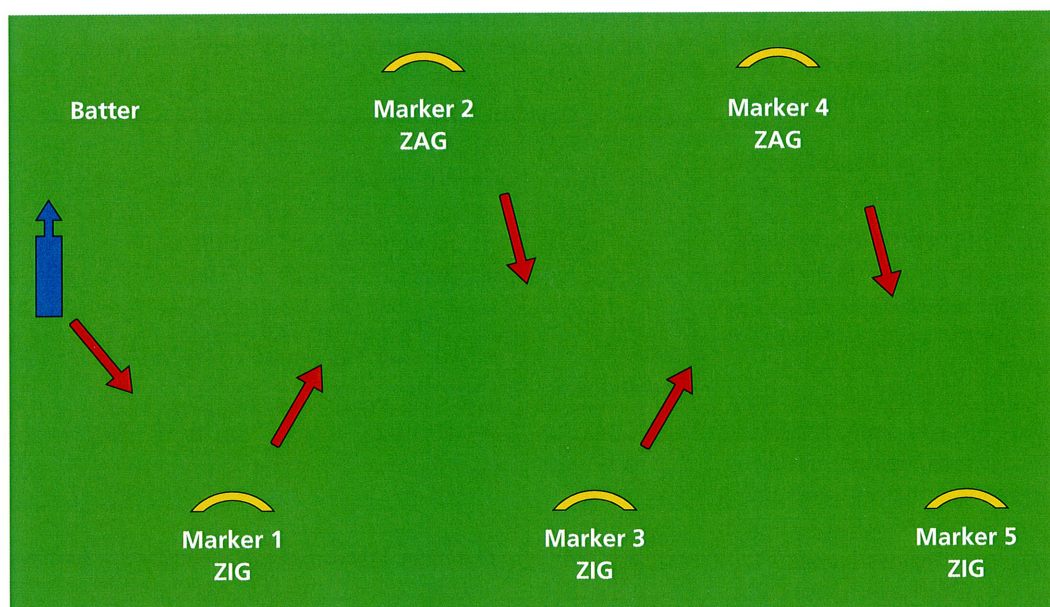


Figure 1. Zig-Zag Tee Ball positions and set up

With a class of 24 children I would set four games up of six players so that all batters were facing and hitting in the same direction (Figure 2).

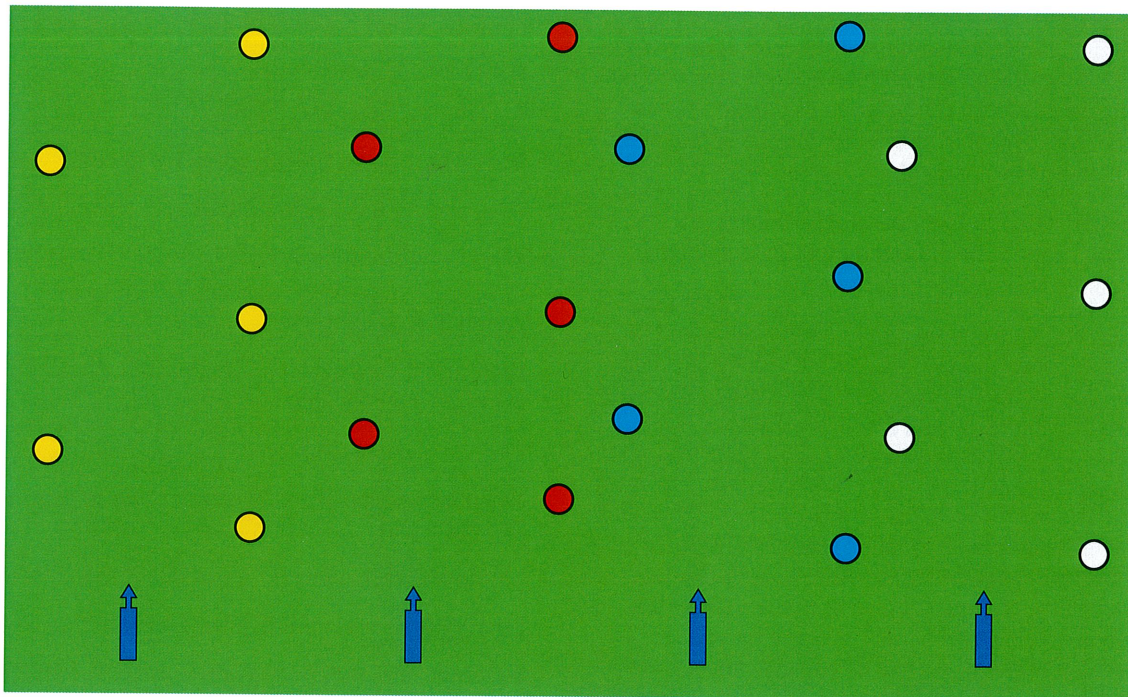


Figure 2 . Zig-Zag Tee Ball set up for 4 games of 6 players

As the teacher of a class I would call 'Batters ready'. The children would then stand at their designated field marker or tee and prepare to play; batters to strike the ball and fielders to trap the ball. When I was satisfied that everyone was ready I would blow my whistle. This would be the signal for the batter to strike the ball off the tee. The vital safety rule would be that the ball was to go between the first two markers, the first Zig and first Zag. After striking the ball forward the batter would drop the bat to the ground before running to their right, tapping their foot on the Zig marker and then run to their left, tapping their foot on the Zag marker. The batter would continue this pattern until they reached the last marker which in this example game is the fifth marker. They could turn and Zig-Zag back if time permitted. Each time they tapped a marker in a Zig-Zag sequence they would collect one point. In this way the maximum points for reaching the last marker in sequence would be five.

The fielders could leave their marker after the ball had been struck by the batter from the tee. They would then have to field and return the ball to the fielder on the last marker which in this particular example is marker five. Once the fielder on marker five had control of the ball and had a foot on the fifth marker, they would hold the ball high above their head and the team would call 'stop'. The batter would calculate their score and could then attempt to beat this score next time they rotated to bat.

The children then rotate where the batter would go to the first marker (Zig), the fielder on marker one would move to marker two (Zag). The child fielding on marker two would move forward to marker three (Zig). This would continue and the fielder on the last marker (number five) would come down and prepare to bat.

Teaching Tips:

- It is recommended that a soft covered tee ball bat and tennis ball be used (Figure 3). Flexible field markers should also be colour coordinated so that the different games can easily be recognised. Flexible field markers are preferred so that children can step on them safely and not twist or turn their foot awkwardly.



Figure 3. Zig-Zag Tee Ball – children in action

- To maximise safety the children only begin playing on the teacher's call.
- After calling 'Batters ready' check to see that all batters are following the correct technique for striking a ball from a tee. Are they standing in the correct position and are they holding the bat correctly? Feedback can be given to the batters in a sensitive and positive manner or through questioning to assist in skill and strategic development.
- Dropping the bat safely to the ground and running in a Zig-Zag motion needs to be mastered by all children before playing the game.
- Often children may concentrate on hitting the ball from the tee strongly and consequently miss contact. Ask the children to keep their 'eye on the ball's position' at the top of the tee even after the ball has been struck. Instruct them to 'count to two and then look up'. This is an extremely successful tip in making contact.

Variations: The game could be simplified or extended to suit the particular context. It may be more suitable for the batter to run in a straight line to a marker directly in front rather than a Zig-Zag movement, which simplifies the game for younger children. A variation of this game can be employed by having fielders throw the ball to the first marker and then the fielders throw in a Zig-Zag motion to the last marker. For this alternative all fielders need to return to their marker after the ball has been fielded. The batters can change their locomotor movement from running to skipping, galloping or side stepping between the Zig-Zag markers. Also, the teacher can decide if/when to introduce being caught on the full is out.

Focus Questions

Focus questions that assist children to identify the choices they are making during the game include:

- Where are the spaces?
- How can the fielders as a team cover the spaces?
- Do you have to hit straight down the middle?
- Which fielder is in the best position to chase the ball?
- What could you do as a team to help limit over throws?

Student Reflections

- Think about your bat when you made the most points. Was it the hardest hit you did?
- Why were you able to run so far?
- When fielding did you talk to each other to help? What did you say?
- Did you improve your batting? Why do you think this was?
- What skills do you need to have to play this game safely?

The reason I am fond of this game is because all players are always involved. If they are not batting then they have a role fielding. The children can compete against themselves rather than the other players and as they had so many opportunities to bat this naturally tended to happen. Finally, the children have optimal practise of their striking, trapping and throwing skills and the game situation enables for this to be done under pressure.

About the Author

Tim is a Senior Lecturer at Monash University - Gippsland campus where he coordinates the Health and Physical Education (HPE) discipline stream within the Bachelor of Primary Education course. He is an experienced classroom and Health and Physical Education (HPE) Primary school teacher and Head; Foundation Stage and Key Stage One (3-7 years) in an English International school (Qatar). In 2006 he was the Australian Council for HPE (ACHPER) Teresa Carlson Award recipient (Queensland branch) for his outstanding dedication to the teaching of HPE and promotion of its benefits within the community. He can be contacted via email timothy.lynych@monash.edu