A Game from the Dutch “Childrens’ Newspaper” Kinder-Courant (First Issue) from 1852-1853

GROOT WEDRENSPEL

Article by Fred Horn

As far as we know this is the first time that an oval ‘Horse Race Game’ was introduced in Holland.

A print was published on page 41, that could be “unfolded,” picturing a new game. On page 164 an explication—it was, at the time, such a novelty the editors of the magazine decided an explication about what kind of game it was, was necessary—and the rules could be found as well as the task for each day of the following week to get a proper game at the end!

They did fall back to a well-known game (Het Ganzenbord (The Goose Game)) to give the children some idea about this ‘new’ race game, although we now know that these are completely different games!

With a picture of the Goose game added, they explained under the heading VERMAKELIJKHEDEN (Amusements):

“The goose-game is old and much used, but to play it though is very pretty. Just to play something similar, that is new and more in our own time, we have as titled above (GROOT WEDRENSPEL—F.H.) Something invented for you, of which we do hope you like it. Included plate will give you therefore the opportunity and before starting it, you first have to read with attention what follows next.” (Nearly exact translation of the ‘old’ Dutch —F.H.)

The interesting phrase is of course: “...something invented...!” From the diverse games published in the later issues of “Kinder-Courant,” we know not all of the introduced games and puzzles were originals. But here it seems that, certainly for Holland, this was a new introduction.

We know of a horse race game in the collection of de Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (RP-P-OB-88-085) from ca. 1835 but that print shows a “round track with lesser places (47)” than the “oval track (shown above) with 100 places.”

The print is a copy of “Das English Pferdenrennen” published by G.N. Renner from Neurenberg and was part of a series of children and family games printed between 1750-1850. The print at left was made in Holland from ca. 1835 with a lithography by “D.K. Muller & Comp. Arnhem.”

The new design with an oval track became the “standard” for horse games with a race track. From ca. 1880 on, the boxed game versions from Germany and England were very expensive. In fact, in these games, “betting” was introduced, which played no part in “GROOT WEDRENSPEL.” As can be seen in the earlier game, the obstacles were there from the beginning representing a “steeplechase course.”
Chance decides the order of starting the race. The highest roll starts first, and so on. The number thrown gives, (for) the first journey, the section where to place the jockey, but after that the numbers tossed are added to the first and so on, up to 100. Each rolls the dice in his turn.

To reach 100 one has to overcome diverse obstacles. These obstacles are placed from 10 on each decade (following) up to 80. One is not allowed to 'stand' on these sections. If ending (after play) on an obstacle one must return to the section one came from, or one has to start again, etc.—later on this will be explained how to do this.

When at the end of the game, the number thrown brings the jockey over 100, then this number is doubled and the remaining points has to be counted in reverse. To win the game one has to end exactly on 100. There will be two winners. The first (reaching 100 F.H.) wins the stock, the other gets his stake returned.

Next, I give an up-to-date summarization of the Special Instructions:

- After a first throw ending on 10 ceases, the player has to pay 1/8 of stake and start again.
- After a (normal) throw ending on 10 or 60, the hedge, one has to pay 1/8 of his stake. On 10, the player must start again, on 60, the player has to return to his section where he came from.
- Ending on 20 or 40, the barrier, one has to pay 1/4 of his stake. At 20, player has to wait 2 turns and then returns to the section where he came from; at 40, one has to start again.
- Ending on 30 or 70, the wall, one has to pay ½ of his stake. At 30, one must wait till another player ends on 30 and then returns to the section he came from. At 70 the situation is identical but player has to start again after being relieved.
- At 50, the river, one loses the game and is out of the game.
- After passing the river one throws only 1 die.
- At 80, the mud pool, one has to pay his stake in total again and has to wait till another player relieves him and starts again. If he chooses to give up and end his play he only has to pay ½ of his stake.
- Only 1 player is allowed on a section. When another player ends on the same space the player on the section must pay ½ of his stake and returns to the section where the other player came from. If this happens on 80 then only ¼ of the stake must be payed.

Some additional possibilities were given:

- To change things one can decide to skip the obstacles. This speeds up and simplifies the game.
- Another way is also possible—adding obstacles with the same rules. Game play will take longer and be more livelier. (N.B. In our modern opinion it will become boring, dull, and 'go on forever!')
- It is possible to decide not to buy the horses but ask an identical stake for each of them.

As always in the "Kinder-Courant" the instructions end with an overview of "What to do next week," which this time was how to manufacture the "jockeys and horses."

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**Conclusion**

There is no real proof the oval "Steeplechase course" as presented in the "Kinder-Courant" of 1852/53 is a, or their, 'new invention.' But for sure it is one of the first, and certainly for Holland it was a new game that had to be explained.

Up to 1900 we have not found more items other than boxed games from abroad.

The next one (at left) from Holland is a beautiful item, out of the collection of Eric van Waarden. It can be dated ca. 1900.