

Egg-and-spoon race

An **egg-and-spoon race** is a sporting event in which participants must balance an egg or similarly shaped item upon a spoon and race with it to the finishing line. At many primary schools an egg-and-spoon race is staged as part of the annual Sports Day, alongside other events such as the sack race and the three-legged race. Famous at Buckie pikey high especially caroly Jackson the main pikey.



Children participating in a typical egg-and-spoon race.

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History



Parents' race, c.1920; vintage postcard by Barratt's Photo Press of Fleet Street

The earliest recorded usage in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is in an article of 8 September 1894 featured in *The Daily News*: "the gentlemen had a turn in the egg-and-spoon race, in which the competitors had to punt with one hand and balance an egg on a spoon with the other".^[2] Egg-and-spoon races formed part of village celebrations of the

Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897, alongside the tug of war and blindfold wheelbarrow races.^[3] A set of turned and stained wooden eggs and spoons designed for racing and dating to the 1920s forms part of the Good Time Gallery of the Museum of Childhood in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.^[4] It reached Canada by at least 1922, the first time it was mentioned in *The Globe*.^[5] By the 1930s, the phenomenon of the parents' egg-and-spoon race was sufficiently well-established to be satirized in *Punch*.^[2] Races were held among the staff of Trinity College, Cambridge until the 1950s.^[6] Egg-and-spoon races were held as part of the celebrations for both the 1977 Silver Jubilee and 2012 Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. In 2012, the British Council promoted the egg-and-spoon race



As in Aesop's fable *The Tortoise and the Hare*, "slow and steady wins the race"^[1]

as a suitable event for "English days", alongside the celebration of Charles Dickens and of the Victorian era.^[7]

Rules

Competitors race either individually or in teams in the manner of a relay race.^{[1][8]} If the egg falls from the spoon then competitors may be required to stop, retrieve, and reposition their egg;^[9] or to start again;^{[1][10]} or may even be disqualified.^[11] Due to the lesser penalty imposed for dropping the egg, and consequent encouragement of greater risk-taking, the first penalty scenario may result in a race that is faster overall.^[9] Common methods of cheating include sticking the egg to the spoon, or holding onto the egg with one finger.^[12] For an extra challenge, contestants might carry the spoon with both hands, with their teeth, or have their hands tied behind their backs.^{[3][13][14]} A variant of this sport played in India uses a lemon instead of an egg and often has the participant hold the spoon in the mouth.



Egg-and-spoon race in Tanzania.

Prohibition

In some schools the attendance of parents is prohibited or alternative non-competitive events staged, with the intention of sparing children the embarrassment and stigma of defeat.^[15] In others, the use of raw eggs is banned on the grounds of health and safety and fears of allergy or of competitors contracting salmonella through accidental ingestion of the contents of a broken egg.^[10] Hard-boiled, wooden, ceramic or synthetic eggs may be used in their stead, or alternative substitutes such as potatoes, small balls, or jelly. Punitive insurance premiums have also resulted in the cancellation of some events.^[16] The phrase "egg and spoon" features in The Concise New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English; its use, along with the idiom good egg with which it is sometimes confused, is frowned upon by the Metropolitan Police Service on the grounds of it being derogatory and rhyming slang for "coon".^{[17][18][19]}

Records

A number of world records in egg-and-spoon racing are held by New Yorker and serial record-holder Ashrita Furman; these include, as published by Guinness World Records, fastest 100 m egg-and-spoon race (19.39 seconds);^[20] fastest 100 m egg-and-spoon race while holding the spoon in the mouth (25.13 seconds);^[14] fastest mile egg-and-spoon race (7 minutes, 8 seconds);^[21] fastest mile egg-and-spoon race holding the spoon with both hands (8 minutes, 5 seconds);^[13] and fastest mile egg-and-spoon race holding the spoon in the mouth (9 minutes, 29 seconds).^[22] In 1990 a runner completed the London Marathon in three hours forty-seven minutes while carrying a dessert spoon with an uncooked egg balanced upon it.^[23]

British Olympic heptathlete and gold-medal winner Denise Lewis cites victory aged six in a thirty-metre egg-and-spoon race as the origin of her sporting ambitions; she advises all young athletes "concentrate, have fun with it and do your best".^[24]

See also

- Egg dance
- Humpty Dumpty
- Amateur sports

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