

The
Official Rules
of
Mangold Hurling

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1. GENERAL

1.1 Introduction

These rules must be observed strictly at all times. Failure to do so may result in disqualification and suspension of membership of the Association. The Association cannot accept any responsibility for injury or consequential loss arising from deviation from the rules or indeed for anything else.

1.2 Terminology

This paragraph applies to the terminology used within these rules. The terms "throw", "hurl" and "pitch" may be used interchangeably in Mangold Hurling. "Mangold" describes a single specimen of the subspecies *beta vulgaris vulgaris*. Masculine pronouns also imply the feminine forms except where they explicitly do not. A cubit is about eighteen (18) imperial inches. A chain is 66 (sixty-six) imperial feet, which is approximately 44 (forty-four) cubits. "Buggerbiddle" is not a pleasant word and its use is deprecated by the Association.

2. SUMMARY OF THE GAME

Each thrower selects his mangold from a cart of mangolds which has been provided by the owner of the Field of Play and blessed by the local parson. The thrower must then stand with both feet in the withy pitching basket and on the command "Hurl!" must pitch his mangold at the target, which is a mangold called the Norman. The thrower whose mangold is closest to the Norman is the winner. In the event of two or more mangolds being approximately the same distance from the Norman, the Umpire will give the call "Willow 'e!" to ask for the measuring willow to be produced. Distances are then measured and compared. The winner is crowned Mangold King and presented with a selection of village beauties or Mangold-Maids from whom he will select his Mangold Queen.

3. ORGANISATION OF THE GAME

3.1 Official Bodies

Mangold Hurling competitions are arranged by local Mangold Hurling Clubs (MHCs). It is usual for each MHC to be associated with a parish, although in a large parish each village may each have its own MHC. Each MHC is automatically affiliated to the Mangold Hurling Association, the worldwide governing body of the sport. Each MHC must have at least 3 (three) committee members, these being the Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer.

3.2 Appointment of Officials

Each MHC must appoint at least 3 (three) persons to officiate at games. The minimum requirement is 1 (one) Umpire, 1 (one) Willow and 1 (one) Watcher. It is acceptable for the Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer to assume these roles but where

possible it is recommended that different people are chosen so that in the event of a dispute arising between an official and a Committee member there is no possibility of a member being in dispute with himself and thus unable to resolve the dispute without emotional scarring.

3.3 Timing of Games

The Mangold Hurling festivities commence after the harvest is gathered in, on the 1st of October or the nearest available date. In the event of a late harvest the commencement may be delayed. In the event of total crop failure the festivities will be cancelled for that year. The date may be set by or agreed with the Parish Council and/or the Parochial Church Council. Games should ideally take place during the hours of daylight.

3.4 Traditions

The customs and traditions of Mangold Hurling and its associated festivities must be upheld wherever possible to ensure historical continuity and to prevent degeneration of the game. Notes regarding traditional aspects are contained within these rules and further information will be found in the History section of the Mangold Hurling Association website.

4. PARTICIPANTS

4.1 Contestants

Each year contestants are drawn from bachelors of the Parish who have made their desires known to the Committee. Divorced competitors have never yet been allowed but widowers have, on occasion, pitched. The records suggest that these widowers have generally lost their wives in mangold-related incidents and we suspect that the Committee has in these cases made a special dispensation to avoid potential litigation. It goes without saying that competitors should have reached manhood although there have understandably been times when this has been in dispute. In such cases the village elders will have the final decision and interestingly this work is hotly sought after by several of the older widows of the Parish.

Guest hurlers are uncommon. This is probably due to the poor transport arrangements in Somerset that have existed for millennia. It is hoped that more guest hurlers will appear in future events. Since the emigration to Pennsylvania of the All-Somerset Champion in 1889, sporadic but unconfirmed accounts of Mangold Hurling have been witnessed abroad. At least three of our American brothers have competed in recent years and they are hoping to be the first to take Mangold hurling across the water and thus ensure their names are recorded for all eternity elsewhere than in Salt Lake City. Guests who are interested in competing should either contact the Association via this website or look up "Hurling, Mangold" in the Yellow Pages.

4.2 The Umpire

The Umpire is the highest ranking executive officer and is responsible for overall control of the game and the participants. The Umpire must be a local Committee member and is elected by the other Committee members. If the Umpire is off sick or something the game cannot take place and that's that.

4.3 The Willow

The Willow is the official responsible for carrying out measurements with the willow. The Willow is appointed by the previous Willow and retains the appointment for the rest of his life or until he resigns. The Willow is expected to name his successor in his written will. It is recommended that the Willow appoints an Apprentice Willow who will take his place should he die. The Apprentice Willow is allowed to carry out any of the Willow's duties but only under the strict supervision of the Willow. The local Committee may force the resignation of the Willow but only if he: has moved away from the locality or cannot be found; is by reason of disability unable to perform his duties; has been incarcerated; has been sectioned under the Mental Health Act 1983; has a contagious and incurable disease; has a conviction for an offence involving a sharp weapon; or has brought the game of Mangold Hurling into disrepute. Traditionally the Willow is a man of willowy build, that is, tall and lanky. It is however acceptable that the Willow be neither man nor willowy. The minimum age for the Willow is 11 (eleven) years.

4.4 The Norman Official

The Norman Official's role is to keep his eye on the Norman once it has been placed, to prevent foul play. See below for further information. The Norman Official is appointed by the local Committee or by the Umpire. Where there is a shortage of volunteers for official posts, the Willow may take on the duties of the Norman Official as part of his role.

4.5 The Watcher

The Watcher may be appointed by the local Committee or by the Umpire, according to local tradition. The role of the Watcher is to watch the contestants as they pitch, to ensure that they do not bend the pitching arm at the elbow. If the Watcher spots a bent elbow he calls, "No hurl!". This call may be repeated by the Umpire if he feels it was not loud enough or did not carry a sufficiently authoritative tone.

4.6 The Other Watcher

This is an optional appointment by the Committee or Umpire. The role of the Other Watcher is to watch the feet of the contestants to ensure that they both remain inside the pitching basket while pitching. He will call a "no hurl" if one or more feet stray outside the basket. This call may be repeated by the Watcher and the Umpire as necessary. If no Other Watcher is appointed, it is the duty of the Watcher to keep his eyes both on the elbow and the feet during the throw. Only highly experienced Watchers are capable of doing this and some have developed the ability to move their eyeballs independently of one another, enabling them to look in two directions at

once. In some parts of Somerset the Other Watcher is known as the Second Watcher, but it is the opinion of the Association that this does not matter.

4.7 Mangold-Maids

Any woman of the parish may apply to be a Mangold Maid provided that she is an unmarried virgin aged 16 (sixteen) years or more. There is no upper age limit. Applicants may be required by the Committee to produce evidence that they fulfil these requirements. Production of a birth certificate and a note from the doctor will be accepted as proof of age and virginity respectively. Production of both a marriage certificate and the husband's death certificate will be accepted as proof of widowhood. Non-production of a marriage certificate will be taken as proof of spinsterhood. Men in women's clothing will not be accepted as Mangold-Maids no matter how fetching they look.

4.8 Spectators

This section of the rules has only arisen in recent times. Back along, the decent behaviour of all spectators was the norm. In the past 100 years or so, however, there have been recorded episodes of inappropriate behaviour which have led the Association to give guidance to spectators on what constitutes acceptable behaviour at a Hurl. Verbal abuse or attempts at distraction of the hurler are never permitted. It is especially unacceptable to mock a less than excellent attempt with cries of "Where's it to my boy?" Likewise supporters whose favourite has been beaten are asked to refrain from cries of "buggerbiddle" and other such profanities. Spitting and discharging of firearms or inappropriate root vegetables are naturally frowned upon.

4.9 Equal Opportunities Policy

Participants in Mangold Hurling may be of any age, religion, gender, sexual orientation and ethnic origin, with the following exceptions:

- Contestants must be adult males
- Mangold-Maids must be women aged at least 16 (sixteen) years
- The Willow must be at least 11 (eleven) years old

Participants from the gay community are welcomed by the Association but are urged to be aware of prevailing attitudes in the local population particularly in the remoter parts of Somerset. The same advice is also offered to foreign participants, for instance those originating from Devon.

5 FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

5.1 The Field of Play

Each year the competition takes place in the field in the parish that has produced the least number of mangolds per unit area. Whilst it is fair to say that no firm evidence exists, it is believed that this field is chosen as the Mangold Hurling competition has its origins in ancient fertility rites and that holding the competition in the field that has

been least productive will lead to an improved yield the following year. There is, surprisingly, rarely a dispute regarding choosing the field each year and, whilst the Association accepts that there may be some mild underhand activity involved in this, Somerset folk have proven themselves to be both wise and fair over the years, resulting in what all agree is a fair decision.

5.2 The Pitching Enclosure

Hurlers awaiting their chance for glory must remain within the pitching enclosure. The enclosure is typically designed to allow the spectators to view their favourites and for competitors to gauge preceding hurlers whilst ensuring minimal interference with the competition. It is sensible for the enclosure to be sited between 10 (ten) and 15 (fifteen) feet from the pitching basket, and to be no more than 3 (three) cubits in height. The walls are generally made from sedge.

5.3 The Pitching Basket

A withy basket must be used for competitions and must be constructed solely through the art of weaving. In the event of willow being unavailable, for example in a built-up area, thick sedges may be employed provided that the resultant basket has enough rigidity to be fit for its purpose. The base of the basket must be circular and of sufficient size to accommodate both booted feet of the contestant at the same time, but with a diameter of no greater than one (1) cubit. The sides of the basket may be tapered inwards or outwards or may be vertical. The sides must be at least 1 (one) cubit in height but must not be so high as to prevent the unfettered movement of the contestant's arms.

The pitching basket must be placed on the ground but not secured by ropes, spikes or any other means. It must not be placed in a pit, trough or other artificial depression. The ground on which the basket is placed must be sufficiently firm to take the weight of the basket and contestant without risk of subsidence. Any loose material such as snow or animal spoor should be cleared before placing the basket. The basket must not be placed on a public highway, bridleway, footpath, slipway, runway, helipad or railway track (including monorails) unless special permission has been gained and appropriate measures taken to ensure the safety of the public.

5.4 Mangolds

A cart of Mangolds is provided by the owner of the Field of Play. He shall be known for the duration of that year's festivities as the Lord of the Mangold. Hurlers may choose any mangold from the cart and will base their decision on size, shape and weight appropriate to their strength and ability. However hurlers may not choose an inaccessible mangold, for example one which is right at the bottom of the cart with all the other mangolds on top of it, because unloading the cart to gain access would create unnecessary delay in the game. Only mangolds with their leafy foliage or "top" intact may be used for hurling.

5.5 The Norman

The target mangold is called the Norman, for reasons that are obscure. The Norman is an ordinary mangold with its top removed. It may be that the topless mangold's shape was thought to resemble that of a Norman soldier's helmet, but this is pure conjecture.

5.6 The Willow

The willow is the willow rod used to measure the distance between the Norman and the thrown mangolds. It should be reasonably straight and devoid of side twigs and branches. It does not have to be a specific length since all measurements are comparative. The same willow must be used to measure throws in any one game, but a different willow may be used in different games. Please do not confuse the willow with the Willow. Thank you.

5.7 The Special Cutting Tool

The special cutting tool may be a penknife, sheath knife, dagger or billhook. It should be kept securely when not in use in case it falls into the wrong hands. The Willow looks after the special cutting tool during competitions. The special cutting tool is used for the following jobs:

- Preparing the Norman (unless prepared in advance)
- Marking the hurlers' mangolds to identify them
- Marking the willow when measuring throws

The special cutting tool must not be used for:

- Fighting

A stainless blade is recommended, and it should be kept fairly sharp.

6 METHOD OF PLAY

6.1 Commencing the Game

Festivities begin with the blessing of the mangold cart. This is a short ceremony performed by the parish parson and usually includes a prayer and the sprinkling of Holy water on the mangolds. The cart is provided by the owner of the Field of Play.

6.2 Placing the Norman

The setting of the target is carried out by the previous year's champion. The target mangold or "Norman" is a topless mangold prepared by the Chairman of the Committee and hurled by the reigning Mangold King. It is topless to allow distinction between it and roots attempting to reach its proximity. You will of course appreciate that it would not be possible to pitch a topless mangold!

The Norman is hurled from the pitching basket in a two-handed overhead throw not dissimilar to the way in which a football is returned to play by young men who may fritter their hours away on a football field.

Readers familiar with the geography of Somerset will no doubt be aware of the characteristics of the Somerset Levels. Reclaimed from the sea with the help of Dutch experts, it is not unknown for the ground to be less than firm at the end of October. Not infrequently therefore, the Norman will depress the ground on which it lands and on occasion will end up below the surface of the soil. Competitors must therefore remain vigilant at all times if they are to stand a realistic chance of winning the competition.

Should the previous year's champion be unavailable through illness, death or emigration then the Norman is placed exactly one and a half (1.5) chains length from the pitching basket by the Umpire. The Umpire may delegate this task to another official if he wishes.

When the Norman is hurled, the Chairman of the Committee cries " 'e be placed!" whereupon the competition begins. During the competition the Norman Official will ensure not only that the rules are observed but also that wayward mangolds are retrieved and that local swine and cattle are kept away from the Field of Play to avoid possible consumption of a winning root. In the days before the appointment of the Norman Official it was implied by some spectators that local swine or cattle were deliberately allowed to consume roots on occasion. This would be totally unacceptable prior to declaration of the winner.

6.3 Marking the Mangolds

In order to keep track of which mangold belongs to which contestant, the mangolds are marked before pitching. The marking takes the form of light incisions in the surface of the mangold made with the special cutting tool, and is carried out by the Watcher. If he does not have the special cutting tool he must ask the Willow to give it to him. A phrase such as, "Please lend me the special cutting tool, Master Willow" may be used, although it need not be. The pattern of marks must be distinct and unique to each contestant. It may be the initial letters of his name if he knows it, or alternatively a series of lines representing a number which the Watcher decides upon and asks the contestant to remember. Some seasoned Hurlers have devised their own special symbols which become their "trade marks". Rude pictures are not permitted.

6.4 Pitching

Over the years pitching has evolved to allow effective propulsion of root vegetables in the competitive environment. There are many examples of disputes regarding calls of "no hurl" but thankfully these are by and large a thing of the past now that the technique has been perfected and the officials are tested for good vision before the competition begins.

The correct pitching technique requires many hours of practice in order to perfect and Hurlers must be both dedicated and physically fit. Having selected and marked his mangold, and with both feet firmly in the pitching basket, the Hurler must reach down

with one arm to grasp the top of his mangold. Most Hurlers stand with their feet facing East but this is optional. With a straight arm, in one fluid movement the mangold is then lifted and hurled for glory. The Hurler's arm must remain straight (or "fully extended at the elbow" for those of a more pedantic nature) until the mangold is released or "no hurl" will be called by the Watcher and the throw disqualified. Similarly, "no hurl" will be called if the Hurler falls out of the pitching basket or if one or more of his feet stray outside the basket. Each Hurler is permitted a maximum of three pitches. For reasons that are difficult to ascertain, but which may be related to the penchant of local folk for the strong Somerset Cider, some Hurlers fail to use all of their mangolds. It is possible for experienced competitors to propel their vegetable a good distance with fair accuracy in this manner. Indeed on foggy days mangolds have sometimes been lost to view.

Having finished pitching, the contestant must remain in the pitching basket until the Umpire gives the command, "Get 'e gone my lad". No other form of wording is permissible. Spectators and minor officials are not permitted to give this command and must therefore be ignored by the contestant on pain of disqualification. Similarly, the contestant must not respond to erroneous commands such as "Get 'e gone my boy" or "You may now leave the basket old chap".

6.5 Measurement of the Throw

The winning contestant is the one whose mangold lands closest to the Norman. Should it be impossible to determine the closest mangold through cursory inspection, the Umpire will give the command, "Willow 'e!" Upon hearing this command, the Willow will cease whatever he is doing and will take up the willow rod (known as "the willow") to measure the distance between the Norman and each of the contestants' mangolds.

The distance shall be expressed as the number of willows between the point on the outer surface of the thrown mangold root that is closest to the Norman and the point on the outer surface of the Norman that is closest to the thrown mangold root. The mangold top shall be ignored when taking measurements. If the measurement for two or more throws in one game is the same number of whole rod lengths, the fractional part of the measurement must be taken into account. The Willow will mark the fractional part of each measurement on the willow with the special cutting tool. If the Watcher borrowed the special cutting tool to mark the mangolds, the Willow may request him to give it back. A phrase such as, "Please return the special cutting tool right speedily, Master Watcher" may optionally be used in this connection.

Note that if any contestant's mangold lands on top of the Norman so as to rest there without touching the ground, he is declared the winner unless another contestant is able to dislodge it with a subsequent throw. If two or more mangolds come to rest on the Norman, one on top of the other, this is deemed a miracle and the parson should be informed.

6.6 In the Event of a Draw

A draw is declared when two or more mangolds land equidistant from the Norman. In this case the Willow will declare a draw by holding the willow aloft and saying "I do

declare a draw." Should the Willow be inaudible as a result of being a long distance away, the Umpire may invite him to come a bit closer and repeat the declaration.

The contestants involved may throw their mangolds again. If any contestant feels he would rather not do so, he may stand down. Contestants making a second or subsequent throw in the same round as a result of a draw must use the same mangold that they used for their previous throw. The same rules apply to second and subsequent throws as to the first throw, so the mangold must be held by its top. If the top broke during the previous throw so that there is insufficient foliage left to hold, the contestant is automatically disqualified. If all of the drawn contestants' mangolds have lost their tops the Umpire will declare the game null and void.

If there is only one remaining contestant following a stand-down or a disqualification, that contestant is automatically declared the winner and need not throw his mangold again.

7 ENDING PLAY

7.1 Declaration of the Winner

The winning contestant is invited by the Umpire to stand on a podium. This is traditionally a cider barrel. The Umpire then says, "I declare [insert name here] this year's winner and Mangold King." Please note that the Umpire should not actually say "insert name here" but should instead say the winner's name. If the winner's name is unknown to the Umpire he may ask him what it is. If the winner cannot recall his own name, as sometimes happens because of the cider, the Umpire may simply say "this 'ere boy".

7.2 Crowning of the Mangold King

A crown of mangold tops is placed on the head of the Mangold King by the previous year's Mangold Queen. If she is not there somebody else may do it. Note: the Mangold King should remove his hat before the crown is positioned. Back

7.3 Selection of the Mangold Queen

Following the coronation, the Mangold King may select his Mangold Queen from the Mangold Maids, who stand in a row and attempt to look as appealing as possible within the bounds of common decency. He indicates his selection by placing his right hand on her left shoulder and saying, "Ye'll do." Traditionally they then mount an animal and ride away to get married. In modern times and in the absence of an animal of suitable size and disposition, a vehicle such as a motorcycle and sidecar is sometimes used instead. Also, it is no longer obligatory for them to get married although it is of course romantic if they do.

7.4 Post-Game Celebrations

Post-game celebrations commence immediately and continue for several days. They take many forms both traditional and modern, and the only Association Rule

regarding celebrations is that they must not bring the game of Mangold Hurling or the Association into disrepute.

8 SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

8.1 Disputes

Disputes between contestants should be resolved through reasoned argument, each party taking his turn to speak. Should this fail the contestants may beat each other about the head and shoulders with willow branches until the matter is settled. It is imperative that the willow measuring rod is not used for this purpose.

If a dispute arises between a contestant and an official, the official's argument must prevail unless contradicted by a senior official.

In the event of a dispute between the Parish Council and the local Mangold Hurling Committee, the leaders of said bodies shall meet at 3 o'clock in the afternoon on the next available Sunday at an agreed place to sort it out. If they are unable to agree on a meeting place it will be acceptable to conduct the meeting using a pair of telephones or similar devices. The meeting must conclude by 4 o'clock so that tea may be served without delay.

8.2 Confusion

Should there be any confusion at all during a competition the competition shall be halted and not recommenced until the confusion has been dealt with.

8.3 Adverse Weather

Play must continue regardless of weather conditions. Contestants must adjust their throw to compensate for high winds. The Willow may wear a face mask and snorkel in the event of flooding to a depth of more than 0.5 (zero point five) cubits. The depth of any fallen snow must not be greater than the height of the sides of the pitching basket.

8.4 War

Should war be declared during a competition and there is a call to arms, contestants and officials must immediately go and fight for their country. The Norman and any thrown mangolds must be left exactly where they are so that the game may be resumed when hostilities have ceased.

8.5 Overseas Games

The Mangold Hurling Association wishes to encourage the establishment of Mangold Hurling Clubs throughout the world. Applications are invited from interested parties from outside the Somerset area. Where the mangold is locally unavailable, the Association will consider suggestions for substitute fruits or vegetables. All new Clubs must be approved by the Association before commencing activities.