

### *Chapter 3: Rock Ball*

*In which we learn the rules and some history of the most dangerous game ever invented.*

Byron could see the men and women chasing them now in more detail. Looked like the usual pitchforks and torches, but many of them appeared to have large bulbous heads. Byron squinted trying to see better. He pulled out his monocle and fitted it into his right eye. They came into focus. The local Rock Ball team.

The game of Rock Ball is a full contact team sport. Typically played outdoors on a large patch of dirt or mud. When played in mud players strap “Mud Racquets” on their feet. They’re much like snowshoes, but round instead of oblong. Or like tennis racquets without handles, if that helps you picture them better.

They really don’t help you move around any faster in mud, but they do help keep you vertical.

Similar to hockey, the object of Rock Ball is to make goals. This is done by whacking rocks with large sticks across the playing field. Unlike hockey, or soccer, or football, or baseball, golf, tennis, badminton, or any other sport where you whack a single object around -- Rock Ball isn’t limited to just one “ball.” Any rock found on the playing field is a viable “ball.” Originally developed by farmers as a fun way to clear their fields, Rock Ball quickly became a popular sport. Also, unlike other sports where you’re penalized for hitting someone with a ball or your stick, or what-have-you, in Rock Ball this sort of behavior encouraged.

A quick list of Rock Ball equipment;

- Rocks. As many as can be found in the given Rock Ball field -- bringing in extra rocks is not allowed, though not unheard of either.
- Klunker Sticks. One for everyone, two for the goalie. These Klunkers are three to four feet long. The thickness of a Klunker is specific to the individual player. Thick enough that your thumb touches your fingers. If finger can't touch it's too thin, if fingers overlap it's too thick. The larger the hands the thicker the Klunker. A common phrase when seeing a newborn in the area is "That child has good Klunker hands," or "They'll be using a fence post for a Klunker when they grow up."
- Mud Racquets. Footwear to keep you standing in mud. Not helpful for moving forward.
- Helmets (aka Bouncers). These are not required, but as aiming for heads with both rocks and Klunkers is encouraged, a helmet is recommended. A typical Rock Ball helmet is made up of two basic parts; a tight metal shield that fits tightly on the head, and a rubber bladder (originally sheep bladders were used.) The rubber bladder (the Bouncer) is inflated giving the player a bulbous looking head. From a distance they can look like stick figures with heads drawn too big. The Bouncer does four things;
  - 1. Protects the head.
  - 2. Bounces back Rocks and Klunkers.
  - 3. Can bounce a player back to a standing position should they fall.
  - 4. Assure that as long as a player is wearing their Bouncer they will never get a date.(Both from how ridiculous they look and the fact that you can't get close enough to kiss

anyone while wearing a Bouncer.)



One notable Rock Ball player never wore a Bouncer. Stu “Iron Head” Donnall. One of the original founders of Rock Ball, “Iron Head” is credited for introducing the idea of defensive Rock Klunking (aiming for opponents heads instead of the goal.) And defensive Klunker Klunking (smacking opponents on the head with your Klunker.)

Most people believe that “Iron Head” came up with these developments primarily because of the iron plate in his head which allowed him to get hit in the head by a rock without noticing. It also stifled his empathy so he could dish out hits without caring about his opponents. “Iron Head” is indirectly credited for the development of the Bouncer.

On this day, the town’s Rock Ball team (the Skull Crackers) including Stu “Iron Head” Donnall had assembled in full gear. The Skull Crackers had a losing record this year, and were none too happy about it. They lost most of their games because Stu was more interested in defensive Rock Klunking and Klunker Klunking than in actual goals.

They looked very angry.