



Australian Government  
Australian Sports Commission

# tarnambai

'tar-nam-bai'



All school-age groups (K–12)

Post-school age

## Background

Although not a universal activity, athletics-type events were common. On Tiwi (Bathurst) Island the children collected the seed heads of the 'spring rolling grass' (*Spinifex hirsutis*) that grew on the sand hills near the coast. These were taken to the beach and released. The children allowed these to be blown along by the wind and after a start chased after them and picked them up while running at full speed past them.

In the same area the children competed in running and jumping.

In the Batavia area of north Queensland running (*tarnambai*) as well as long-jumping (*brá-acha*) was often indulged in.

## Language

*Tarnambai* means 'running' in the language used in the Batavia area of north Queensland.

## Short description

This is a running-and-chasing game in which a ball is rolled and returned to the starting line.

## Game play and basic rules

- Players roll a ball away from their partners, who sprint after it, pick it up on the run after it crosses a line 20 metres away, and return to the starting line. Time the attempts, hold a team relay, or use this as a tabloid event in small groups (two to four players) with a set time (2–3 minutes).

## Variations

- Players roll a ball so it passes a line 20 metres away. As soon as it is released they chase and retrieve the ball and return across the starting line. Players time each other. Add the time together for all players to set a class or 'world' record. Repeat for a number of turns or at another time.
- A version of this activity has been successfully used by special-needs students who use wheelchairs. The student works with a partner and after rolling the ball is either pushed or accompanied to retrieve the ball. The ball is placed in the lap of the player in the wheelchair and both players return to the start.

## Suggestion

This activity could be included as part of a track-and-field carnival event, recognising traditional Indigenous Australian play culture.

## Teaching points

- Players ready. Roller with the ball. Runner ready. Go.
- Run. Let it cross the line. Pick it up. Run hard.
- Change over. Try your best.
- Good work. Time your rolls to their speed so your partner picks it up as it crosses the line.

