

PROLOGUE

The Beautiful Game of Skee-Ball

“Games that are played when they have become old are rare. Of those that remain, their origin is lost in antiquity. Our interest in games when analyzed, is found to rest in three human elements, namely: the love of planning or cold calculation, the excitement of the imaginative and emotional faculties and the stimulation of the blood circulation by physical effort.

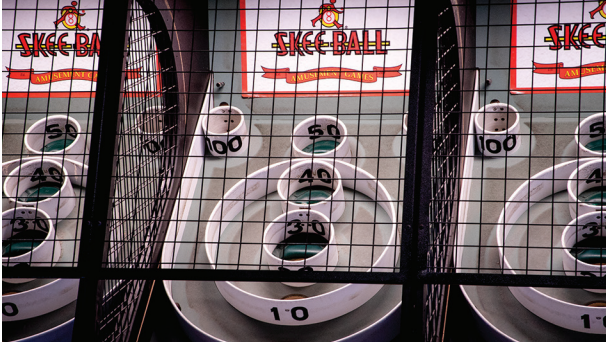
“A game combining the exercises of these elements in moderation, may be considered to be the ideal in games. In the beautiful game of Skee-Ball, these are equally joined and a new game has been brought into existence which from its nature must come into both permanent and universal use. The principle is an absolutely new appeal to the imagination in its application to games and the mental skill and physical exercise that it affords renders it a completion.

“It is the only game which is a game of skill that is quick enough in play to be used in connection with prizes.” [1]

From an early article about Skee-Ball, published in The Billboard in December 11, 1909.

Chapter 1

THE BEAUTIFUL GAME OF SKEE-BALL



That's what it was called in the first major article published about the game in *The Billboard* on December 11, 1909: "The Beautiful Game of Skee-Ball." [1]

Skee-Ball is one of the most beloved and widely played alley games in history. You can find Skee-Ball alleys on boardwalks, in arcades, at amusement parks and in kid-friendly restaurants all over the country, as well as in some bars and retail venues. Something about the game is fascinating and almost addictive.

Skee-Ball is one of the first "redemption" games. You insert a coin into the game coin box and it releases nine balls. You roll each ball

up the alley over a hump, which launches the ball into the air toward a target of concentric circles. Depending on which area of the target the ball lands in, you're awarded a number of points. You play all nine balls, collect tickets or tokens that represent your score, and redeem them for prizes.

Walking into the arcade, whether it be at an amusement park, on the boardwalk, or at a kid-friendly restaurant, you can't help but notice all of the prizes that abound for you to take home—if you get enough tickets. The prizes include pencil erasers and pencils, trivets with bird pictures, ash trays, condiment plates with garish colors, glitter balls, pot holders, watches, piggy banks, decks of cards, Chinese finger traps, the small, medium, large and extra large teddy bears. Ah, the



ginormous teddy bear. THE prize to get.

Normally, most of us would just walk past most of these items in our local five and dime store and not give them a second thought.

But something happens when you step into the arcade. Suddenly, those prizes become something that you fixate on.

You must have them.

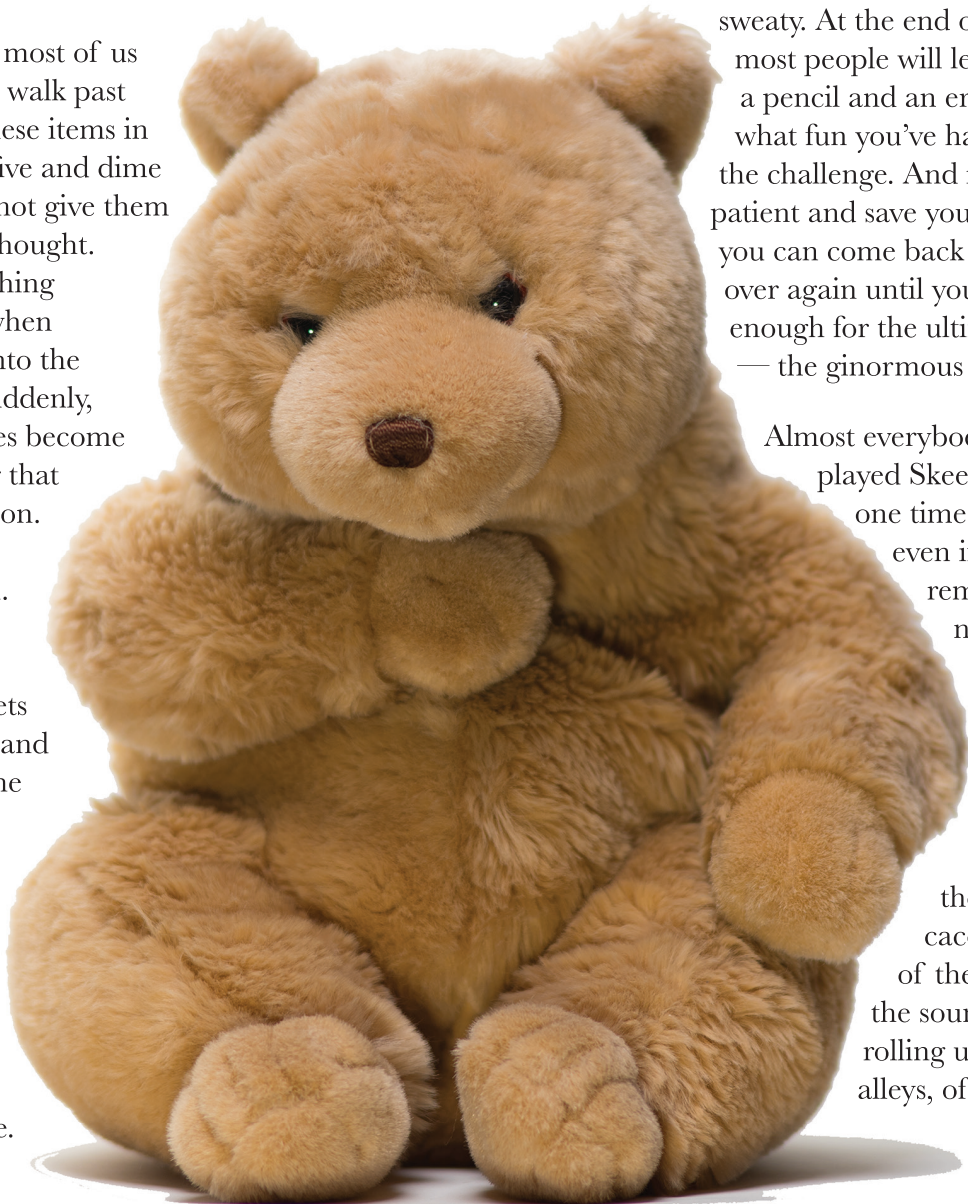
You scope out how many tickets you need, and go off to the Skee-Ball alleys to win your fortune in tickets so you can bring home THE prize. Your heart rate

goes

up, and your hands get just a little sweaty. At the end of the day, most people will leave with a pencil and an eraser. But what fun you've had with the challenge. And if you're patient and save your tickets, you can come back over and over again until you have enough for the ultimate prize — the ginormous teddy bear!

Almost everybody has played Skee-Ball at one time or another, even if they don't remember the name of the game. They'll

remember the cacophony of the arcade, the sound of balls rolling up adjacent alleys, of picking up a three and a half inch



ball as they intently consider the target just out of reach about ten feet away. Then swinging an arm back, they rapidly bring it forward and release the ball. The ball rolls up the alley, flies into the air and lands in the target as the scoring device advances their score.

Or they might just grab the balls and roll them quickly, with no real attempt to control where they go, as a child might. But that's one of the great things about Skee-Ball. You can play it any way you want. Because at the end of the day there are only two rules: You get nine balls; You roll them up the alley. That's it.

Simplicity!

Few games have shown the staying power of Skee-Ball. Patented in 1908 and first sold in 1909, it is a story of more than a hundred years of profitable recreation.

Stories abound about the game, who invented it, why and how it was invented, but the true story is by far the most interesting. It not only provides a fascinating look into the creative mind of the inventor, and the dogged determination of partners to bring it to market, but also the age of invention itself.

