

Gentlemen – “When the hands are out”

On the 9th December 2008, the Bangkok Gentlemen Spoofers met in the Churchill Bar for the 20th Thai National Spoofing Championship. After a lively evening of spoofing, a splendid dinner, and an impressive volume of liquid refreshment, Club member Andrew (Big Mac) McDowell emerged victorious and was presented with the Butcher’s Board. A worthy winner and this was “Big Mac’s” second Thai championship, the first being in 1993.

The Butcher’s Board is a trophy displayed in the Churchill Bar which records the names of the Thai National Spoofing Champions. This was donated by Jon (The Butcher) Prichard in 1997. The spoofing fraternity includes a substantial number of socially active British Club members, many of them residents in SE Asia for over two decades and known in the region for their competitive spirit and participation in rugby and other popular sports. Most of them were rechristened with a nickname many years ago, and have become better known by their sometimes less than complimentary monikers.



A cosmopolitan school of spoofers.



*Commiseration for
"Jammy" from the
"Ratcatcher"*

The Bangkok Gentlemen's Spoofing School was formed in 1985 by three inveterate spoofers, Hugh Salmon, Peter Snell, and Jim Howard whose idea was to add some spice to their after rugby training activities. The Bangkok School is claimed to have the longest continuous running spoofing school in the world and it is generally conceded that it is also the toughest. London is considered to be the spiritual home of spoof and for many years it was played at the "Hollywood Arms" in Chelsea and the spoofing conventions are generally referred to as the "Hollywood Rules". These days, the home of the London School is the "Ship Inn" in Wandsworth. The bar game has now been enthusiastically played at the British Club by groups of boisterous male expatriates, and a few Thais, for almost 25 years. Other enthusiasts of this bar game run schools in London, Paris, Tasmania, Auckland, Seoul, Johannesburg and Sydney, to mention a few.

International tournaments and championships are regularly organized in many different parts of the world. It is usually the responsibility of the holder of a championship to decide the date and venue at which he will defend his title, however, pressure is often exerted by the Dark Forces that seem to control world spoofing to ensure that championships are held in close conjunction with major rugby internationals. Over the years the IRB and the Six Nations Committee have been very cooperative in arranging the staging of major internationals to coincide with spoofing, as many of the worlds top spoofers have a close affiliation with the game. So, what is spoofing?

The game is reputed to have been played continuously since 1884 when it was revived in London. The term "spoofing" was coined by A. Roberts, an English comedian, and is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as a hoax or a swindle.

The object of the game is very simple – at the command "Gentlemen, when the hands are out" each player must present a clenched fist containing zero, one, two or three coins. Having regard for the maximum number of coins that you and your fellow spoofers can hold (3 times the number of players taking part), one carefully decides in secret behind one's back, or in one's pocket, how many coins to hold.

The first player to call is determined by the drop of a matchstick or a toothpick, the burnt or pointed end being the pointer. After the initial call, play continues in a clockwise direction with each player making a different call until all have done so.

The fists are then opened one by one in order, starting with the first caller, and again proceeding in a clockwise direction. Each player adds the number of coins in his hand to the previous total and calls out this number. Logically, and providing the numeracy of every spoofer is reliable, the number called out by the last player is the total of all the hands.

The player who has called this number then graciously withdraws from further rounds and, if he is the first to do so, takes everyone's order for drinks and instructs the bar accordingly.

All remaining players then go through the process again until there are only two players remaining in the school. One of these two spoofers will eventually correctly estimate the total of the two hands. The other player is then declared as "having the honour" which, in most spoofing schools, is regarded as being a privilege and should be treated as such.

There are basically two types of spoofing: social, where the last spoofer pays for the round of drinks, buys the meal etc, and championship spoofing where there are formal preliminary rounds, quarter finals, semi-finals and a final.

The foregoing is, of course, a simplification of the process which is, in reality, embellished by an elaborate etiquette which a spoofer ignores to his cost as it is customary for the Chairman to fine the offending gentleman a round of port or an alternative appropriate penalty for any misdemeanours. For example, illegal calls are those that have already been called by another player. The calling of three illegal calls, one after the other, is an offence for which a player can be fined.

Any player not observing the honour to pay for the round is guilty of an offence regarded as so serious that it will probably result in him being banished from spoofing for life. This does not happen very often.

Gloating when getting out of a school, particularly in the first round, is severely frowned upon and is often subject to a fine of a bottle of port. Impossible calls are those which are, naturally enough, impossible to occur. For example, a player holding no coins in a school of three players cannot call any number greater than six.

All calls have names and the custom is for the experienced spoofer to use these when making his call. Here are a few examples:

0. Simply "Spoof"
3. Flowers or Always Available (after the beautiful Ms Leslie-Ann Flowers who mostly was) or The Trevi (after the famous Roman fountain also containing 3 coins)
8. Harry Tate – after the notorious player who never seemed to dip in his pocket.
9. German Virgin – as "nein" is what she will usually say
12. Imperial – for the imperial dozen
13. Bakers – after the Baker's dozen
15. Film Festival – held at Cannes which rhymes with quinze. French for fifteen.

The game of spoof is essentially a gentlemen's game and, as such, members of the female sex are firmly discouraged from taking part. The one exception to this rule is on the last Tuesday before Christmas when a concession is given and they are invited to deploy their feminine guiles to beat the men at their own game. For this reason, the Bangkok Gentlemen Spoofers are not a Section of the British Club and receive no financial subsidies. It can, however, be safely stated that the financial gain is solely on the Club's side from the generous amounts of alcoholic drink consumed on spoofing nights.

In 2003, the first Asian Spoofing Championships was held and attracted aficionados from Korea, Australia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Hong Kong. The first winner was Jimmy (The Ratcatcher) Howard. This popular event has since been held in each following year and Asians VI was won in 2008 by wild card, Andrew (Jock) McRobbie. This event has become the main fund raiser of the spoofing year, which now brings us to the more serious side of the spoofing fraternity. Whilst, quite clearly, spoofing is a light hearted bar game which is enjoyed by boisterous men who like their social activity accompanied by a good drink, there is a very generous secondary objective behind the light hearted fun.



Big mac" receives the Butcher's Board from the chairman

Each year, Bangkok Gentlemen Spoofers carry out a project for a group of under privileged children. In previous years money has been provided to fit out and equip a kitchen (The Rainbow House run by the Christian Care Foundation for Children with Disabilities in Thailand at Pak Kret, Nonthaburi), buy musical instruments (Haven Orphanage & Childrens' Home in Chiang Mai), buy 40 bicycles for village children (Tambon Nongkuntanasarn near Khon Kaen), contribute towards construction of a new classroom (Fatima Centre, Din Daeng), contribute towards construction of a library (Kudpladuk Village in Isaan). The current project is the part refurbishment of a charity pre-school at Bang Na (HDF Mercy Centre). The fund is ably managed on behalf of the spoofers by Roger (Jammy) Willbourn.

Each project is carefully selected and managed. No cash or cheques are given to charities or intermediaries but paid directly to the vendor or contractor in order that the maximum value is obtained for the money generously handed over by the spoofers. This entails considerable hands on attention by the spoofers who give their time to these projects to ensure that they are carried out satisfactorily. Sometimes this includes the provision of technical advice and supervision.

The Bangkok Gentlemen Spoofers generally meet on Tuesdays in the Churchill Bar at 8.30 – 9.00pm. Spoofing usually continues until a late hour. All are welcome to participate providing they are British Club members or their guests. Steve (Swampy) Eaton, who has recently been re-elected as Chairman, and Bob (Bowling Ball) Van Es, the Honorary Secretary/Treasurer will be pleased to assist any would be spoofers who wish to take part.

John (Mutton) Boisclair

Chairman

Bangkok Gentlemen Spoofers 2007-2008