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PAINTBALL X3



PAINTBALL: **WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW**

By John Amodea



Paintball: What Parents Need To Know

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Paintball: What Parents Need To Know

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About the Author



paintball
GEAR | WOODS | COMPETITION

WOODS

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Introduction

What You'll Learn In This Chapter

- Paintball is big... really big
- Why boys (and men) really love paintball
- That girls can kick butt in this game
- Anyone can play
- That paintball is really safe if played within the established industry guidelines

Ten Million Players Strong (and counting)

And it's safer than bowling... really

For about twenty years paintball was described by many in the mainstream media as *the fastest growing sport in America*, and with good reason. First played by eleven men in the woods of New Hampshire in 1981, just twenty one years later in 2002 there were more than nine million people playing the game at least twelve times per year, according to the *Sporting Goods and Manufacturers Association* (SGMA). In that short time the game of paintball grew into a thriving half billion dollar industry. Although the game has taken a hit since 2010, mostly due to our economic situation, paintball is now played in more than 100 countries, by more than eleven million people each year. According to the SGMA more people participate annually in paintball games than racquetball, BMX, surfing, and scuba diving.

Paintball is a phenomenon that is almost indescribable. For teenage boys (and men) it brings back the memories of childhood games of *army* but it adds the elements of competition and realism that playing with toys just can't duplicate. Paintball, especially at the recreational level, has a natural way of equalizing the playing field so almost anyone, any age, any size/shape and gender—can compete. Like a game of chess, paintball is very strategic. Those that can think and act quickly have an advantage. While athleticism is a plus, it's not a must to play even competitively at a high level. A long time friend (and former on-field foe) Dale Price, who lost most of his left leg in a motorcycle accident, played paintball at the highest competitive level, captaining and playing on a team that competed nationally—and with great success. Girls play too. The Femmes Fatales were one of the first internationally competitive all-female tournament teams. Now there are several teams that have followed in their footsteps. There are many girls and women that play on mixed (men and women) upper level and professional teams as well.

Paintball is safe...very safe. According to *The National Injury Information Clearinghouse of the U. S. Consumer Product Safety Commission* in Washington D. C. (say that ten times fast), paintball is safer than bowling, golf, fishing and handball. I'm not making this up. We'll cover a lot more on this later.

So if you've bought this book I'm assuming you have a kid, or kids that want to play paintball, or already play. I'll also make the assumption that you're looking to learn more about the game. Maybe you're concerned about the game's safety. Maybe you're wondering if your child is old enough to play. Maybe you're just wondering if the field your kid wants to play at sells hotdogs. I don't know. My goal is to answer those questions and about a thousand more in the next 150 pages. So...

Here's what this book will not do

It won't teach your kid how to play the game from a tactical perspective. That's another book for another time.

But it *will* help you understand the culture of the game. It will teach you a bit about paintball equipment and how to safely use and store it. It will cover everything from what you child should wear to the paintball field, to the cost of a day's play and everything in between. If you're nervous about allowing your son or daughter to play paintball I hope what you read here helps you to understand just how safe, fun, organized, and beneficial paintball is or can be. In the end it's my goal not to sell you on the game, but to help you become informed enough about it to make educated buying and playing decisions with your family. Enjoy!

Chapter 1

What Is Paintball

What You'll Learn In This Chapter

- The basic premise of the game of paintball
- The ins and outs of the three different types of paintball games
- Why anyone can play this game
- About competitive paintball games with huge prizes
- Which format is family friendly
- A term that may be new to you, milsim

The Basic Game

Shoot them before they shoot you

It's okay, mom, it's just a ball of paint. No one really dies...

The basic premise of the game of paintball is pretty simple. In its purest form, and especially when it's played in the woods, paintball is a combination of tag, hide and seek, and a kid's game of army. Two teams of just a few players to more than one thousand players, each start on opposite sides of the playing field in their respective flag stations or flag bases. Referees start the game and the two teams advance towards each other trying to eliminate their opponents. The object of the basic game of paintball is to capture your opponent's flag and return it to your flag station. Along the way players will encounter their opponents, who will need to be marked and eliminated in order for you to secure their flag. There are three distinctively different types of paintball games played and each has many variations. Here's a quick look at those three types.

Recreational Paintball Play

Even grandma can play

There are more than one thousand commercial paintball fields in the United States where players gather to play almost every weekend of the year. Fields are located in every part of the country and around the world. Commercial playing fields have paintball guns, goggles and other gear used to play for rent, and players of all skill levels can "walk on" and be part of the games of the day. Most fields can accommodate anywhere from one player to large groups of players. Like a game of pick up schoolyard basketball, players are divided (usually by skill level) into two teams to do battle for the day. Fields that run "rec-ball" games usually play around eight 10-20 minute games in a day's play. When a player is eliminated from the game they simply head to the "safe zone" and wait for the game to end. At that time players clean off previous hits, fill their markers with more paintballs, grab a drink or snack and head out for another game with the full complement of players.

Rec-ball games are commonly played in the woods on fields as large as several acres. Capture the Flag is the most commonly played game but most fields will run a variety of game types during a day's play. Other game scenarios include Center Flag, where there is only one flag used in the game. The goal is to capture the flag and hang it in your opponent's flag base, as opposed to games where you hang the flag in your base. Attack and Defend is another commonly played rec-ball game. In this scenario one team defends a flag base, fort, castle or other designated part of the field, while the other team attacks it, trying to eliminate players and capture the flag. Sometimes rec-ball games are played in "arena" fields where blow-up plastic bunkers (airball bunkers) or other obstacles are strategically placed in hockey arena sized fields. Since arena games are played on much smaller sized fields the action tends to be fast-paced, with games commonly lasting less than a minute.

Games that are played at commercial paintball fields are generally the safest and most organized types of rec-ball games. Referees start and stop the games, enforce the safety rules, and organize games that are fairly balanced and fun for everyone regardless of skill level. Commercial fields provide safe terrain to play on and usually have first aid kits, drinks and some food available, and staff to help answer questions and provide help with equipment problems, game tactics and other issues that may arise in a day's play.

There's another type of rec-ball game—the type of game that is not played at commercial paintball fields. Every weekend there are thousands of "backyard" paintball games going on across the U.S. and as a parent of a paintball player you should know that these games are usually unsupervised and are sometimes played in a less than safe environment. While I understand that backyard games are less expensive to play than paying game fees at a commercial field, I can't really recommend playing this type of game unless there is adult supervision with paintball game experience—and even then I'm not a big fan. Over the years I've seen and heard about injuries caused by broken glass, barbed wire and other dangerous situations playing backyard ball. I'll also tell you this, without referees constantly reminding players to keep their goggles on during the game, backyard paintball game eye injuries are much more likely to happen. Lastly, most people I've seen playing backyard paintball don't even have a chronograph to check each player's paintball gun velocity. Without a chronograph there's no way to tell if a marker is firing at safe velocities.

Tournament Paintball Play

"Mom I'm going to Russia to play paintball!"

Tournament paintball games are almost exclusively played in arena settings on airball fields. Reserved for the more serious player, paintball tournaments are held worldwide almost every weekend at commercial paintball fields, as well as places like parks, NFL stadiums, beach settings and other sites that are temporarily set up to hold games. There are local events where teams from a small geographic area play, regional level events that attract teams from a 200-300 mile radius, national tournaments where teams from around the U.S. gather to compete, and international games that attract teams from around the globe.

Paintball tournaments are categorized in divisions by skill and experience levels. From the bottom up those divisions are Young Guns, Rookie, Novice, Division Four, Division Three, Division Two, Division One, Semi Pro and Professional. Smaller tournaments may have only one or two divisions, usually Rookie and Novice. Larger regional events may have as many as four different divisions playing simultaneously. National and international tournaments almost always host teams in all divisions.

Tournament paintball is highly competitive, with teams vying for prizes as high as one hundred thousand dollars or more.

Tip

One of the biggest mistakes younger teams and players often make is that they try to jump into tournament paintball at a higher level than they should. Encourage your paintball playing child to enter the world of tournament paintball at the lowest level first. Better to underestimate your skill than overestimate it.

Scenario Paintball

“Ground Control to Major Tom...”

Scenario paintball is the fastest growing type of paintball game. Scenario games are special-themed events that are usually based on a movie storyline, a war reenactment or some other type of script. Sometimes referred to as role playing games or 24-hour games, scenario paintball events are very different from any other type of paintball game or event. The first difference is that most scenario games last anywhere from 12 to 24 hours, with players continually “reinserting” within a few minutes of being eliminated. When players are eliminated they grab a drink, reload and head to specially designated reinsertion zones where they reenter the game. Secondly, scenario games are very family friendly. At most scenario events you’ll find tons of families, groups of friends and teams camping out on the game site. It makes for a very festive atmosphere.

In scenario paintball games/events each player that is registered for the event receives a “mission card” that gives them details about their role in the game. So in addition to simply trying to shoot and eliminate opposing players, you have a strategic, non-shooting role in the game. Some examples of scenario game role are:

- **General (the top dog):** Each team has a general that runs the show. They order the missions, decide the game strategies, and appoint people to do various jobs.
- **Officers:** Officers work directly with the generals.
- **Medic:** In scenario games the medic can “heal” players that have been “shot” in the game.
- **Explosives:** You have to use your imagination to really understand role playing paintball games. Explosives (nothing actually explodes), grenades, rocket launchers and other larger weapons are used in most games. Several people are deemed in charge of explosives in these events.
- **Guard:** Someone has to protect the general, right?

During scenario games each team’s players work together to complete dozens of general-assigned missions. Teams are awarded points for completed missions and scores mount through the entire game. In the meantime, eliminating players during the games makes accomplishing those missions a lot easier. In the end the team with the most points wins. What do they win, you ask? Absolutely nothing except bragging rights...and maybe a door prize or two.

Scenario games are open to all levels of player—no specific experience is necessary. That’s one of the best things about this type of game. Scenario ball offers the recreational player an opportunity to play the game in a different format, in a very festive atmosphere and with all types of players, and it offers the chance to up the ante from regular walk-on paintball with a higher level of recreational play.

Milsim Games

If you like M-16s, AK-47s & GI Joe, you'll love milsim

Milsim, or military simulation, simply refers to the equipment used by some that play rec-ball or scenario games. There are a ton of companies that do conversions on standard paintball guns or that offer upgrade milsim kits for markers. One of the things to remember if your kid opts for the milsim paintball gun look is that these types of guns are very realistic. These guns can even fool the police and that's not a good thing if you're toting your marker in public (which you should never do under any circumstances).

JT SplatMaster

A new type of paintball game

In late 2012 JT Paintball (a division of KEE Action Sports) introduced their new SplatMaster line of paintball products. The SplatMaster line of markers shoots a .50 caliber (smaller) paintball at a lower velocity, which hits its target at a much lower impact than .62 caliber shooting higher velocities. The SplatMaster markers are completely mechanical, meaning they don't use batteries and need no CO2 or high pressure air.

These markers are made from a durable brightly colored plastic and resemble toy guns more than paintball markers. This type of gun is great for backyard play but would probably be laughed at on a commercial field. That said, I recommend adult supervision, full goggles/face mask and the same care used playing with these markers as any other paintball marker.

A Word About Airsoft

Airsoft is not paintball. Airsoft guns look very much like the original guns they are designed to look like—and they shoot BBs, not paint-filled balls. Part of the allure of airsoft is its price to play. You can buy airsoft BBs for as little as \$2 per 1000 pellets, as opposed to paintballs that even at a great price are going to cost ten times that amount. In addition to the price of BBs most that play airsoft play the backyard variety which is another money saver. The down side is it's not paintball. And by that I mean the pellets don't break on target so there's no way to verify if a play has been hit. This essentially means there will probably never be a competitive side to the game of Airsoft like there is in paintball.

Many paintball fields have incorporated airsoft games and events into their schedules. These are "for fun games only." Because there is no mark to know if a player was hit, the competition part pales.

A true story...

The first time I played paintball (in 1985) the walk on fee was \$36 and a case of paintballs was \$250. Paintball guns back then used small disposable CO2 cartridges that cost about .25 cents each. A day's play back then would cost me an average of about \$90. That field I played at was Skirmish USA in Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania, and to be fair, their prices were not out-of-line compared to other fields like theirs at the time.

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Chapter 2

The Attraction to Paintball

Competition for All

What You'll Learn In This Chapter

- Why we're drawn to paintball
- How paintball is like chess
- Why we love games that are physically and mentally challenging
- Your son or daughter can jump right in

By nature most people are at least mildly competitive. You may not see yourself or your children as competitive but virtually every one of us has played some type of sport or game in our lives that has fed the need to compete. I bet even your kids play video games, board games or some level of sports. Whether it be playing high school football, vying for first chair in the middle school band, working towards a promotion at work, or playing chess, the spirit of competition lies somewhere in all of us and these things bring that spirit to the surface.

Psychologists have argued for years about the nature of competition within us. Is the need to compete biological, social, psychoanalytic or cultural? For you and I it probably doesn't matter. However, what all psychologists completely agree on is that the need for some sort of competition is embedded in us all—and if that competitive spirit is channeled correctly the benefits can be great. And if that need to compete is fulfilled in athletics, even better.

Playing sports can help develop leadership skills, teach teamwork, help develop discipline, teach kids sportsmanship, improve motor skills, teach thinking on the fly—and the physical benefits are infinite.

Physical or Mental?

Some games allow us to be physically competitive. Sports like running put a premium of physical fitness and less of an emphasis on the knowledge side of the spectrum. Other than having a basic concept of how to run safely and some basic knowledge of the type of disciplines you may be running in, there's not a lot of thinking involved in the sport. Games like chess are 100 percent brain oriented with virtually no physical aspects. And no, I don't consider moving the chess pieces physical activity—unless you're playing with those human sized chess pieces in Salzburg, Austria.

Both, and There's a Kicker

Paintball combines both the physical and mental aspects of sport. Being quick on your feet is great, but being able to *think* quickly on your feet is even better. Smart often wins in paintball, yet smart and physically gifted is the best combination. But there's a kicker with paintball. Unlike some sports that require months or years just to be able to play at the lowest level, anyone can play paintball literally five minutes after showing up at the field.

It's likely your son or daughter will be able to compete, even if just a little, on their first trip to the paintball field. By "compete" I mean they'll probably shoot somebody (game play term) sometime during the day. Maybe the person they shoot will be the big, strong football player type, or the brainiac middle-aged guy that they thought would be able to out think them. Maybe your son or daughter will secure their opponent's flag and be the hero.

For many kids that are overmatched in other sports or games, paintball can provide that sense of accomplishment in athletics and competition that they've never felt before. And the best part just might be how friendly, accommodating and helpful their field's staff and patrons will be. Paintball players are a welcoming bunch by nature. I guess that's another part of the attraction.

Not Just Competition

For many people the game paintball offers a lot more than competition. For those that play on teams or in groups, often the people you play with become a sort of second family. The weekly or monthly games often fill the desire to be part of something bigger than self. The camaraderie, working towards common goals, the brotherhood, and the group accomplishments appeal to many people. By nature people are drawn to interest groups—online forums, the Friday night poker club, bowling leagues, etc. Paintball fulfills that need for many. If you need proof of this just surf over to www.pbnation.com and you'll see that this online community of paintball players is almost a half million strong, with several thousand players online at any given time, 24/7.

Many are also drawn to the paintball "lifestyle." They wear paintball shirts, hoodies, hats, backpacks, and many listen to the same music, surf the same websites, and pack their clothes in luggage made by paintball companies. For the truly immersed, paintball even has its own lingo (which you'd be wise to catch up on by reading the Lexicon in this book). Paintball is big because it offers a lot to a lot. As a parent of a paintball player you'll recognize these things as your son or daughter gets more and more into the game.

A true story...

My oldest brother is not exactly the athletic type. God blessed him with the brains of the family and me with the athleticism. I remember when I was about six years old and he was sixteen or so, he tried to play soccer with some friends. It was probably a month into this new sport that he came home with a broken toe. That ended his soccer career. Later he and I took karate lessons together and virtually every time he kicked anyone or anything, all of his toes turned purple. Did I already say he was not the athletic type? So when I began playing paintball in the mid-1980s I got him to join me in a day of paintball at Skirmish USA. About half way through the day (which was going like his other days playing sports) something happened. He was hiding (and I mean that literally) behind a big, fat tree while the opposing team was inching closer and closer to us. He was so dug in that one of the opposing guys walked right past him without ever seeing him. When he finally figured out what had happened he jumped up and fired one shot into the player's back. Realizing he eliminated one of their last players he was so excited that he yelled, "I got you. I got you. I got you." For one moment in time he was the best and smartest player on the field and he knew it. He competed and he won. Finally.

Chapter 3

Parent's Responsibility

What You'll Learn In This Chapter

- If paintball will be a passing hobby for your kid(s)
- To keep your children physically and emotionally safe
- You've got a lot of encouraging to do

How Long Will They Play?

Probably for as long as you're willing to foot the bill

If you're a parent of a teen or tween you've probably already figured out that kids go through hobbies like they go through socks (ahhh, that might be a bad example knowing how often kids *don't* change their socks). Teenagers in particular, reinvent themselves on a yearly basis (or more). If you have a son or daughter that plays paintball or is considering playing, the likelihood is that they'll play only a few years or less. Even the most diehard 14 year old paintballer is often selling their equipment by 16 or 17 years old, usually to buy a car. Paintball is an expensive hobby for a kid (and even for adults) and sometimes the excitement of the game is dulled by the reality of what other things have to be given up in order to play regularly. But there are exceptions to the rule or course.

What is Your Role?

Assuming you've decided to allow your son or daughter to play, it's now time to think of what your role is in all of this. The first thing you're responsible for is to provide a *physically* safe atmosphere for them to play in. By *physically* safe I mean making sure they are using the proper safety gear, playing where there is a chronograph used, and always ensuring that adults are present. We'll cover this in detail in the *Safety* chapter. You'll also want to provide an *emotionally safe* atmosphere for your kids to play in. For example, you will probably not want 12-year-old Johnny playing with a group of 30-year-olds. Not only will Johnny be overmatched on the field, he'll probably be hearing a few words and discussions he's not ready for. But hopefully you would have figured this out on your own already.

Encourage

As a parent you no doubt already know that kids need encouragement in everything they do. If your kid plays paintball there's no doubt they will have great days, good days and bad days playing. Encourage them in all of those days, but especially in the bad days. Paintball is a safe game when played within the established industry guidelines, but that doesn't mean they're not going to get a bit physically and emotionally beaten up from time to time. Keep an eye out for that.

What You Need To Do and Know

Most of these things are covered in other chapters, but their importance dictates reminding.

- Provide a physically and emotionally safe environment for your children to play in.

- Always make sure they are wearing the proper safety gear (covered in the *Safety* chapter)
- Make sure you understand how the gear works.
- Explain (and re-explain) the importance of using paintball markers only for what they are intended for.
- Know the airgun and paintball laws where you live.
- Realize that paintball and paintball equipment can be dangerous and that only playing within industry established guidelines will keep your kids safe.
- Be aware that people that play paintball or sell paintball equipment don't always know how to play the game safely. Don't leave it up to them to teach your kids.

A true story...

I was in an "X-Mart" department store a few years ago. There was a guy, probably in his 40s buying a paintball gun and accessories kit for his boy. He was looking for a goggle system to go along with the gun and air tank he picked out and when he couldn't find anything he asked the sporting goods clerk for help. Pointing to the shooting glasses he said, *"We only carry these for paintball. They're much lighter and smaller than those other kinds of paintball goggles. And they're cheaper too!"* I just happened to be there for that one and I'll guarantee if I hadn't been standing there for that conversation there would be a teenager missing an eye somewhere in Virginia a few weeks later.

Chapter 4

Paintball History

“Before we ever played that first game, Hayes and I each wrapped towels around our waists and shot each other to see how badly it would hurt. Hayes shot first and missed. Then I shot him in the butt. Once we realized it was going to be fairly safe, we talked about playing our first game.

–Charles Gaines, one of the founders of the game of paintball

What You’ll Learn In This Chapter

- How a few gin-and-tonics can make you famous (you, not your kid, okay?)
- How a conversation about survival became one of the largest participation sports in the world
- The who, what and where of the first game of paintball
- How many shots it took to win the first game ever
- Why it’s not always good to be the inventor

Before the First Game

The hunter versus the city boy

Jupiter Island, Florida, was the backdrop for probably the biggest moment in paintball history, although no one knew it then. While sipping gin-and-tonics and grilling freshly caught king mackerel one afternoon, Charles Gaines and his life-long best friend, Hayes Noel, got into a debate about Survival. Noel recently returned from a hunting trip which got him thinking. He wondered if a sharp, city-dwelling businessman would stand a better chance of surviving a “stalking” game than a true outdoorsman. Was survival a matter of instinct or was it a product of environment? Noel was a very successful stock broker in a very competitive New York market and he believed this would give him an advantage. While living in New York he was once “jumped” by three men and he actually scared them off by screaming and throwing trash cans at them. He believed that his instincts to act crazier than them may have saved his life.

Gaines, from New Hampshire, believed that an outdoorsman like himself would stand a better chance of “coming out alive” in a survival scenario. After all, he had hunted, fished and done everything else imaginable in the outdoors for years. Surely this would be an advantage over a city boy he thought. The two debated this for hours. A third friend, Bob Gurnsey, also from New Hampshire was brought into the debate. He too agreed that the outdoorsman would have the advantage.

A short time later the three were talking about a situation in a book written in the 1930s called *The Most Dangerous Game*. In the book an insane man lived on an island and invited guests to play a survival game. What the guests didn’t know was that they would become this crazy man’s prey. Later that night Gurnsey and Noel discussed doing an activity that would throw a series of adverse circumstances at the participants. They discussed several different whitewater scenarios that involved cliffs, rock climbing, and flags; they talked about having a BB-gun battle; they discussed wax-tipped .22 caliber bullets and just about anything else that would help them determine what type of person would perform best in these crazy scenarios.

The Nitti Gritty

Forget the wax tip bullets, let's use paint-filled balls

Months later a mutual friend named George Butler who was privy to the conversations between Gaines, Gurnsey and Noel saw a Nelspot marker in a farm catalog and phoned Gaines about it. Soon after being contacted by Butler, Gaines purchased several of these markers and the dream was about to become a reality

Gurnsey, Gaines, and Noel made a list of possible participants for this first game of paintball. They believed the list should be limited to those that were successful in their particular field as this would be the only real way to settle the argument. On the final list were stock brokers, writers, master hunters, surgeons, and others. There would be twelve players in all, each paying \$175 to cover expenses. The game was to be played on a 100-plus acre tract of land in Henniker, New Hampshire, and the object of the game was to collect as many flags as possible. Eliminating the opposition would be only a small part of the game, later proven by the fact that the game's winner never fired a shot.

The field was divided into four quadrants with three flags in each. The twelve players, each with their own unique strategies, crawled, ran, or sneaked around the property trying to eliminate players and/or capture the twelve flags. In the end it was Ritchie White who managed to grab all twelve flags, winning the first game of paintball ever played.

Some First Game Facts

If this doesn't prove anyone can win...

- Ken Barret surrendered to Jerome Gary, becoming the first player officially eliminated in the first paintball game ever.
- Dr. Bob Carlson eliminated five of the twelve players in what Gurnsey called a "stealthy, wiley, and cunning" manner.
- After being "bounced," Charles Gaines eliminated Lionel Atwell.
- Hayes Noel was eliminated by Bob Carlson.
- Ritchie White captured all necessary flags and won the game without firing a single shot.

The Game Becomes an Industry ...and the originators are driven out

According to Gaines, while speaking at the 2004 International Amateur Open tournament that I attended, *"After the Sports Illustrated article ran, I received hundreds of letters from people that wanted to know where they could buy the gear from. Somehow my address ended up the article. Gurnsey, Noel and I bought a bunch of Nelspots, shop goggles and pellets and packaged them together with our original rules and sold the kit for five times what we paid for it. We later included rules for a second variation which was similar to the Capture the Flag game that was and is still played."*

By the end of the summer of '81 Gurnsey and Gaines flew to Wisconsin and met with Charlie Nelson of the Nelson Paint Company where they reached a worldwide exclusive distribution agreement for selling their Nelspot paintguns to anyone, anywhere, as long as it was not for forestry or agricultural use. It sounded like a great deal and it probably was, but things did not go as planned for a long time. After paying attorney's fees and start-up costs to get the NSG going, Gurnsey's company was already struggling. Still Gurnsey stayed on course.

A few months later Gurnsey ran an ad in Shotgun News which generated about 200 sales, "*But I still wasn't making any money,*" Gurnsey recalled. One night Gurnsey got a call from an Oklahoma oilman named Carl McCown who heard about this paintball game. Gurnsey talked him into buying twenty kits which he rented to his friends. This got Gurnsey thinking that he should market and sell kits that included everything you needed to run games. He spent the next six months on the phone talking people into playing at his field, with the thought that they would purchase these paintball business start-up kits. The plan worked and by the beginning of '83 there were more than 350 National Survival Game fields across North America.

Meanwhile Gurnsey developed a team game concept that was catching on. This eventually led to the formation of the NSG Championships, a yearly team tournament held in places like Pittsburgh, Houston, and Nashville. Gurnsey's thought was, "*There would never be any real money in an individual game.*" Gurnsey's National Survival Game business lasted until 1993 when he decided to throw in the towel amidst lawsuits and mounting debt.

By this time however, the industry was booming and reaping the benefits of Gurnsey's hard work.

A true story...

I first met Charles Gaines in the early 2000s at the International Amateur Open tournament near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I really didn't know much about Charles, other than the fact that he was one of the game's founders. I found out that day that he was a professional writer with more than twenty books and hundreds of magazine features under his belt, including the multi-million best seller, *Pumping Iron*, which later also became a huge hit niche movie. *Pumping Iron* was a documentary book/movie that followed the professional bodybuilding circuit and most in the know will tell you the book was the catalyst that turned this small sport into a worldwide phenomenon. Charles has found himself at the birth of two alternative sports.

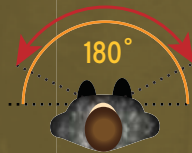
NEW

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VALOR PERFORMANCE GOGGLE

Enhanced Visibility, Comfort and Coverage

Spherical Lens with Anti-Fog Coating



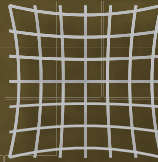
A PERIPHERAL ADVANTAGE

Designed to curve around the face, both horizontally and vertically, a spherical lens offers a greater amount of peripheral vision.



REDUCES GLARE

Glare occurs when the sun's rays hit your goggles at a specific angle, creating a blind area in your vision. The curves of a spherical lens make it better equipped to handle glare.



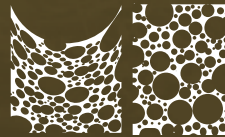
DECREASES DISTORTION

The spherical shape of your eyes allows the eye to better focus, enhancing your vision. In a similar manner, spherical lenses are better at preventing vision distortion while playing paintball.



Valor Black T295005
Valor Olive T295007

Comfortable to Wear



OPEN-CELL FOAM COMFORT

The soft, breathable open-cell foam instantly conforms to your face and bounces back to its original shape after use, time after time.



NON-SLIP HEAD STRAP

A silicone bead lines the adjustable head strap to keep your goggle in place. Whether you're indoors playing speedball or out in the woods for a scenario game - your goggle won't slip.

- Quick Release Lens System
- Additional Ventilation Optimizes Air Flow and Reduces Goggle Fogging
- Expanded Coverage Protects Chin, Jaw, Ears and Forehead
- Fits Replacement Single Pane Lens (TA95030) or Thermal Lens (TA95066)
- Chin Strap Included

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Chapter 5

Paintballs, Markers, Gear

What You'll Learn In This Chapter

- What makes a paintball biodegradable
- How to store paintballs
- To buy or rent the gear
- The details about guns, goggles and gear

About Paintballs

Paintballs are manufactured from a variety of biodegradable, non-toxic, non-caustic ingredients. The shell is manufactured from gelatin and glycerin. Gelatin is a purified form of collagen (animal hoofs, cartilage, etc) that is used as a gel-forming agent and a colloidal suspension agent in ice cream, cakes, candy, etc. Surprisingly, there is little or no water used in the manufacturing process of a paintball.

Internally, paintballs are made from several ingredients including food coloring and dyes that are similar to those used to color Easter eggs. Some completely environmentally safe pigments are used to "hold" the color in the fill. Glycerin (or Glycerol) is used as a sort of non-toxic "anti-freeze."

The materials used in manufacturing paintballs are important for a number of reasons. Of course there are the environmental issues, but safety issues are just as (or more) important. One of the main concerns in manufacturing paintballs is their effect on the goggle lenses. There can be no materials used in the manufacturing process that would break down the materials used for goggle lens manufacturing. Other concerns are how the materials affect your skin, the paintball marker used to fire the balls, and how they will store over time (shelf life).

Storing Your Paintballs

Paintballs are very sensitive to heat, sunlight, humidity, moisture, dirt, etc. We recommend that you store your paint in temperatures of 55 to 75 degrees, and in low humidity (50% humidity or less). If you're at the field you don't have the luxury of temperature-controlled storage. In the hot summer months, keeping your paint in a cooler is ideal. You don't want to cool the paint, just keep it away from the heat and humidity. While playing in the winter, keep your paint in the car. It is very important not to leave the paint in the cold for any extended period of time. Always keep your paint in sealed bags or containers.

To Buy or Rent

So much to choose from...

To buy or not to buy? Buying paintball gear versus renting it really comes down to two questions. How often do you play? And how competitive are you? If you're kid plays paintball once a year, buying a full setup is probably not a wise investment. Like skiing though, figuring out the point where owning your own gear will help you make the decision to buy or not.

Over the years the decision has gotten a lot easier however. Just a few years ago a good quality paintball gun, goggles, air tank, and hopper could easily set you back \$500 or more. Now you can buy a very good quality full setup for less than \$200. It doesn't take many trips to the paintball field to make that work out financially. Surf the net, visit your local paintball store and see what is available. For a full set up you'll need the gun, goggles/mask, CO2/high pressure air system, and hopper/loader to get started.

Paintball Guns

Paintball guns (also referred to as "markers") come in all shapes, sizes, and prices. There are a few basic types of paintball guns.

Pump guns require the user to "pump" the cocking handle to feed a paintball into the gun's chamber. Since pump guns are slow feeding and firing I would not recommend one for your kid unless he is specifically intending to play with other pump gun players. In most games these are rarely used.

Tip: Although it is possible to upgrade or convert a pump gun to an aut cocking semiautomatic marker, the cost is prohibitive. It's cheaper to just buy a semi-auto.

Semiautomatic (non-electronic) paintball markers are much more user-friendly. Simply load the paint into the gun, cock it *once*, and fire away. This is by far the most common type of recreational paintball gun. Two of the most popular brands/models that are non-electronic semi-auto are the Tippmann 98 Custom and Spyder Sonix. Most field rental markers are semiautomatic non-electronic gun. Typically these are the most durable and easiest to maintain, especially for field owners that are renting their equipment weekly.

Electronic markers are the highest tech paintball guns available. These types of markers use electronic internal components and a circuit board that control the function of the gun giving the user a lot of options. Most electronic guns can fire in semiautomatic, full auto, and special modes for tournament play. Electronic markers are the highest performance paintball guns and are used by the overwhelming majority of serious paintball players. Nearly 100-percent of all national-level tournament players use electronic markers.

CO2 or High Pressure Air?

Whether you use high pressure air or CO2 depends a lot on which type of marker you buy. Typically high-end electronic markers need high pressure air and not CO2. Conversely, lesser expensive guns work just fine with CO2. Others, like guns made by Tippmann, work well with either.

Goggle/Mask Systems

There are several brands of goggles made specifically for paintball. All paintball manufacturers make excellent and safe paintball goggle systems. Know that not all goggles are okay for paintball. Some companies make goggles for other industries that simply won't protect you adequately for paintball. Never allow your kid to wear ski goggles, shop goggles, shooting glasses etc. while playing paintball or working on their paintball gear.

There are a few things to look for when deciding on which paintball goggles to purchase. Single lens goggles will "fog" much easier than thermal lens (dual pane) goggles. Thermal lens goggles cost a little more though. There are goggles lens inserts available that will help prevent fogging on single lens

goggles and there are various “anti-fog” sprays available as well, but don’t expect them to be the cure-all of your fogging problems. If they worked so well there would be no need for double lens goggles.

Another thing to consider is the amount of *coverage* goggles offer. Some goggle systems offer minimal coverage (eyes, ears, mouth, cheek, etc.), while others provide coverage of even the back of the head. All are safe. The choice is more a matter of comfort.

Tip: Less expensive goggle systems for paintball are fine in terms of safety. It’s a matter of comfort and performance when it comes to price. Generally speaking, the more you spend the better performance and comfort you’ll get.

Loaders, Pods & Packs

The loader (also called a “hopper” or “feeder”) attaches to the top of the paintball gun and its purpose is to hold paintballs, like a magazine on a real gun, and feed them into the gun’s chamber as the gun is fired. Hoppers come in all shapes, sizes and styles. The least expensive loaders feed paintballs using gravity. In other words paintballs simply fall into the chamber of the marker as each paintball is fired. The problem with this style of loader is the faster you fire the marker the more chance the loader has to jam. Shaking the marker will usually unjam the loader. Electronic loaders use a variety of methods to “force feed” paintballs into the marker’s chamber. This type of loader will cost anywhere from \$50 to nearly \$200 as opposed to gravity feed loaders which can be had for as little as \$10.

Pods (also called “tubes” or “guppies”) are used to carry extra paintballs onto the playing fields. Tubes come in a multitude of sizes, holding anywhere from 100 to 200 paintballs. Pods usually have a flip-top lid which when opened, allows the player to pour the paintballs into the loader. Pods are carried in bulk (from three to twelve pods at a time) using a “pack” (also called a “harness”) which attaches to the player’s waist.

Other Safety Gear

In addition to a good goggle system many paintball players wear any combination of elbow pads, knee pads, a neck guard, gloves, hi-top shoes, etc. For kids, especially younger ones I think the more protection they wear, the more fun they’ll have. At the very least elbow pads, gloves and a neck guard will minimize the pain of a close range hit playing the game. Something else to consider is buying your son or daughter a padded jersey/shirt or a chest protector. The few extra dollars spent can really help take away the sting of a paintball hit to the chest, stomach, back, shoulders and upper arms.

A true story...

What You'll Learn In This Chapter

- How paintball can be safe or not
- How to handle, store and keep paintball guns safely
- The importance of the chronograph
- About lyme disease
- How paintball is WAY different than airsoft

Safety Gear

Goggle System: The one piece of equipment you absolutely can't play without is a good quality paintball industry approved goggle system. There's no substitute for a goggle system made specifically for paintball. Good goggles should cover the entire face, eyes and ears.

Barrel Cover/Bag: A barrel bag or barrel cover slides over the front of a paintball gun's barrel and hooks onto the gun at the feed neck or other appropriate spot. Barrel covers are used to "catch" any paintball that is accidentally fired. Teach your paintball-playin' kid the importance of a barrel cover. All commercial fields legally require them on every marker.

Gloves: Paintball gloves serve a number of purposes including protecting the hand from a close-up shot, as well as from rocks or other things on the paintball field that can cause pain or injury. Paintball gloves are padded on the back side to protect the knuckles and are flexible enough to allow the wearer a full range of motion on the playing fields.

Neck Protector: There are several companies that manufacturer neck protectors made from a neoprene material that is protective, yet breathable. Only a handful of players use neck protectors but I highly recommend that you ask your son or daughter to wear one, especially in the new stages of playing the game. Neck shots are extremely painful without protection.

Chest Protector: Most players do not wear chest protectors on the field. They are a bit big and bulky but they do protect. Made from neoprene, paintball chest protectors are designed sort of like a baseball catcher's chest protector.

Jerseys/Pants: Paintball jerseys and pants have built in padding in the most important places—like in the elbow area, shoulders, knees, etc. They are also designed to withstand the rigors of paintball—the sliding, diving and crawling around that paintball players do.

Is it Really Safe?

Okay so you know paintball is safer than bowling, golf, and probably walking from your bedroom to the bathroom, you should also know that the study I mentioned in the *Introduction* of this book is based on "injuries per 1,000 participants." They based their safety statistics on "days of work missed" due to

injuries while playing any of the studied sports (there were more than 50 sports in the study). While I agree that paintball is very safe when played using industry safety standards, I also believe the survey to be a little misleading. The potential for a serious injury playing paintball is there. That said, almost all serious injuries that occur playing paintball happen because the person playing either was not wearing paintball goggles (and mask) or because they removed the goggle system during the game (on the field). Following the industry standards for safety is paramount.

Paintgun Safety

We're shooting AT people, right?

Someone that I used to work with in my family's business once said to me years ago, *"The moment you forget how dangerous this machine can be is the moment you'll get yourself hurt."* The same holds true with a paintball gun.

Here are a few safety procedures you should follow when using or working on your paintgun.

- Make sure your son or daughter's paintball gun always has a barrel cover (barrel bag) in place when the marker is not being used on the field.
- Never point a paintball gun at anyone not wearing paintball industry-approved goggles. Even at the lowest possible operating velocity, a paintball will cause serious injury should it hit someone in the eye area.
- Never look down the barrel of your gun with or without wearing paintball-approved goggles.
- Always disconnect your air-source and dry fire the gun before working on or cleaning your paintgun.
- Always have a qualified airsmith do repairs or modifications to your paintgun.
- Most paintguns are ready to fire when your air source is connected. Use the trigger safety whenever you're not playing and always use a barrel cover on your barrel until you enter the playing fields.
- Some paintball markers can fire a paintball even with the air source disconnected.
- Only play at playing fields that have a chronograph, referees, and clearly marked safe fields.
- Chronograph your paintgun before each game to ensure your gun is operating at safe velocities.

Remember, safety is the user's responsibility. Make sure the gun is not shooting at a dangerous velocity and all participants are wearing the proper paintball safety equipment.

Chronographs

300 feet per second = 200 miles an hour

A chronograph is an electronic device that is used to measure the speed of which a ball is fired from a paintgun. The chronograph gives you a reading in feet per second (fps). Three hundred fps is the industry standard limit for outdoor play, but some insurance carriers require a lower velocity than that. Commercial fields always have chronographs on hand for checking each player's velocity, keeping the games safe. Whether your son or daughter play at commercial fields or in backyard games, you cannot ensure everyone's safety without a chronograph. I can't state this strongly enough—no chronograph, no play.

Another thing to know is a gun's velocity can change several times during the day, regardless of whether you're using CO₂, nitrogen, or compressed air. There are many reasons for this including temperature changes, liquid CO₂ in your system, bad seals or o-rings, etc. I once witnessed a paintgun jump in velocity by more than 150 feet per second because the velocity adjusting screw backed out.

CO₂ and High Pressure Air Safety

No you can't use the propane tank from your grill...

All paintball guns use gas/compressed air to fire the paintball (some use gas to re-cock the gun as well). The most common gasses used in paintball are CO₂ and compressed air/high pressure air. Let me be clear, both CO₂ and high pressure air are very safe if the general industry safety guidelines for handling and use are followed. Some of the established safety guidelines for using and handling CO₂ and compressed air are:

- Always have your CO₂ or compressed air tanks filled at an established paintball store/retailer, paintball field, or qualified airsmith (a person that works on paintball guns)
- Never leave your CO₂ or compressed air tank near heat (ie, fireplace, heater, radiator, open flame, in your car, etc.)
- CO₂ and compressed air tanks have safety "burst disks" that are designed to rupture if your tank's pressure nears dangerous pressure levels. If the disk bursts you'll hear a loud pop and the release of the CO₂ or air. This is not dangerous. It is designed to protect the tank from rupturing. Always have a qualified airsmith or paintball store/retailer or field replace your burst disk. Never attempt to do this on your own.
- Always disconnect your CO₂ or high pressure air tank from the gun when not in use.
- When unscrewing your CO₂ or high pressure system from the gun always make sure the valve is not separating from the tank.

Characteristics of CO₂ and Compressed Air

CO₂ is a bit volatile compared to high pressure air. The fact that CO₂ can convert from gas to liquid and visa-versa easily is a real problem for paintball players and their equipment. CO₂ is greatly affected by temperature changes. In fact, a properly filled CO₂ tank will have an internal pressure of about 850 pounds per square inch (psi) in 70 degree (F) temperatures. A temperature increase of one degree will cause the pressure in your tank to rise by 11 psi. So if you're playing in a cool summer morning of about

70 degrees, when the hot afternoon temperature comes your tank pressure can rise 400+ psi with no trouble at all. This will probably cause your gun to shoot "hot." Possibly even dangerously high. So it's important to have your gun's velocity checked (chronographed) several times each day.

High pressure air (a/k/a compressed air) is around 78 percent nitrogen and 21 percent oxygen. Under normal conditions, nitrogen and compressed air are unaffected by temperature changes and fluctuations. Unlike CO2 which boils at about 89 degrees Fahrenheit, nitrogen boils at the very high temperature of 196 degrees Celsius. So for paintball, no matter how hot or cold it gets or no matter how many shots you fire off rapidly, your gun will be supplied with consistent pressure from the regulated tank (assuming your equipment is working properly). This means that your velocity will stay much more consistent than you've come to expect using CO2.

On-Field General Safety

You're NOT Superman

Okay now that you know that paintball is safer than golf, bowling, tennis, sleeping, walking, breathing..... whatever, it's time for me to drill home the other side of those stats. When was the last time you heard of someone breaking an ankle golfing? How many bowlers do you know that have torn ligaments while practicing for the big bowl-o-rama event? Let's be realistic.

Let's just say right now that if your child is wearing paintball goggles with ear, eye, face, and cheek protection, they are not going to get seriously hurt playing paintball unless they do something really unintelligent. Paintball goggles are defined as a goggle/mask system manufactured specifically for paintball use. In other words ski goggles, motocross goggles, shop goggles, or your favorite Ray-Bans will not work playing paintball. At 200 miles per hour, a paintball hit won't even be slowed down by any of those.

So now little Bobby is on the field wearing good quality paintball goggles and he's in the flag station waiting for the game to start. He could already be in trouble. I always recommend that before you (generic you, not you, you) play on a particular plot of land, that you check it out first. I've seen barbed-wire, glass, boulders, and everything else that doesn't belong on the field....on the field. Check out the field before you play it so at the very least, you can avoid it during the games.

Is Bobby still in the flag station? Is everyone there with him wearing their goggles? If not why is his barrel cover off? Ready to start the game? Okay, Bobby made it to his bunker. Let's say it's ten minutes into the game and he's still playing. Oops, now he's hit. Bobby needs to know that he cannot remove his goggles under any circumstances. Just because he's hit, he can never assume that the eight other people will stop shooting at him. They can't tell whether he's hit or not. Goggles on, always.

I'm going to guess that in the next game Bobby won't be eliminated. Actually he's going to get a flag pull. Cool, eh? Now he's in that same bunker, but this time he figured how *not* to get eliminated. Whatever skill he used to get to his bunker to start the game will probably get him to his next move--safely. Now is no time to be climbing trees to get a better angle on someone. This is not the time to jump over a bunker either. It's not a good idea for Bobby to turn up his velocity so he can get the guy way in the back part of the field. As a matter of fact, he should never do any of those things on the paintball field. The rules don't allow it and neither should his brain.

Still with me? Good. He just pulled the flag and he wants to go hang it and be the hero. Bobby's just like me. Unless he's in excellent shape (and I don't mean "round") and has Superman qualities he probably doesn't want to sprint back to the flag station at full speed, jumping over fallen trees and small streams. Again, safety is just a matter of common sense.

You know, playing paintball is pretty safe if you use common sense. It's just like bowling, minus the elbow and wrist problems.

Ticks & Lyme Disease

Ticks are one of paintball's real summer-time headaches, especially in the east. If you've played paintball for any length of time you probably have seen many ticks. For the most part people see ticks as an annoyance more than an actual threat. Let me throw some scary numbers out at you though. According to the *Centers for Disease Control*, more than 16,000 cases of Lyme disease were reported in 1996 alone, and tick-borne diseases were reported in 43 of our United States. That's worth taking seriously, especially if you plan to spend the next decade or so of weekends in the woods.

Ticks are most active from late April until late September in most states--doesn't that figure. The best ways to reduce the risk of coming in contact with ticks are as follows.

- Stay out of the Northeast, North Central, and Pacific coast woods during peak tick season (yeah right).
- Use insect repellent that contains a high percentage of DEET, but make sure to keep it away from your face and eyes.
- Tuck your pant legs into your boots or use pants that have a tight elastic leg bottom.
- Wear long sleeve shirts.
- Wear a hat.

If you are bitten by a tick, remove it as soon as possible. This is best (and safest) done by pulling straight out with a tweezers. Don't try to burn it off with a match, pour oil on it, or anything else that might "scare" the tick. A scared tick will release its venom and you could develop a rash, infection, etc. If you've been bitten by a tick pay particular attention to the area the tick was attached. If red rings or any other rash develops, see a doctor immediately.

Paintball is NOT Airsoft

As discussed earlier, airsoft is a game that at first appears to be similar to paintball in that players fire balls at each other using air-powered markers. The similarities end there however. Airsoft uses very small hard balls that do not "break" on their opponent. Most airsoft players use masks that have "screens" to protect their eyes since the balls bounce and do not break. Never allow your child to use airsoft goggles while playing paintball. Airsoft goggle screens will not stop a paintball and offer absolutely no protection to the eyes from a paintball hit.


A true story...

Okay another brother story, but this one is about my younger brother Jason. A real brother from another mother. Back in the last millennium and before masks were part of goggle systems, people sometimes got creative to keep themselves safe. Jason had the brilliant idea to wear a Halloween mask

under his goggles. His thinking was the rubber mask would dull the pain of a face shot—and he may have been right, but not on this day. We'd been playing for about three hours that day and were in the middle of a particularly heated battle with our opponents. After rattling off a few shots Jason began to yell repeatedly, "You're hit! I know you're hit!" Then he suddenly got really quiet and I noticed he was kind of choking. He got behind a tree and lifted the mask just enough to spit, puke, whatever... I'm not sure what else. When the game ended I found out that during his yelling, someone fired a well-placed shot right through the mouth opening in the Halloween mask, hitting the back of his throat, causing him to gag for ten minutes. Not pretty.



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Chapter 7

Cost To Play

What You'll Learn In This Chapter

- What paintball field fees are
- How much paintballs cost
- What the one true consumable is
- How many paintballs your son or daughter will need to buy

Field Fees

Just like golf, skiing and bowling you have to ante up to play

Field fees at commercial paintball fields vary a bit based on what the field offers, where they are located, and a few other factors. Generally speaking fields charge a walk-on or field fee price, usually in the \$10-\$20 range, then a marker rental fee of \$10-\$15 (if you don't own your own gear), and they sometimes charge players for CO2 or compressed air fills. Some fields include the CO2 and air fills in the rental or walk-on field fees. In addition to your walk-on fees, rental gear fees and air fill costs, you'll need to buy paintballs. Some fields include a small amount of paintballs with their walk-on fees.

Tip: Some fields offer season passes that can save you a lot of money in the long run if you play often. Expect to pay \$75+ for a year-long season pass (which equates to paying roughly 5 to 7 field fees).

Paintball Costs

The real consumable

Paintballs are the main consumable product that paintball players use. Whether you own or rent your paintball gun you need to buy paintballs. The least expensive way to do this is to buy your paintballs by the case. Cases of paintballs are usually 2,000 balls and costs vary from about \$35 to \$75, depending on brand, quality and where you buy them. Like anything else, paintballs that cost a little more will fly a little straighter, break less often in the gun, and in general, perform a bit better. That said, don't go overboard if you son or daughter is a new player. They probably won't notice the difference between a cheap or premium paintball. One thing to consider is some paintball fields do not allow players to bring their own paintballs. Usually these fields charge a little less walk on fee and more for the paint.

The cost to play can vary greatly based on how much paint your son or daughter shoots during a day's play. Most players shoot around 500 paintballs the first time they play. The more comfortable they get, the less they "hide" and the more they shoot. An experienced walk on player will shoot 1,000 to 1,500 paintballs per day.

Paintball Marker Rentals

Once you've paid your walk-on entry fees and you've bought your paint, you'll need to rent a marker if you don't own one. The majority of paintball fields charge around \$10-\$15 for a basic semiautomatic

marker rental, which will include the hopper (which holds the paintballs). Some fields will include “all day air fills” in the \$10 fee. Some fields charge a little more for air. The field may also include a “belt pack” that holds two or three tubes of extra paintballs that can be carried onto the field for reloading during the game. Goggle systems always come with marker rentals.

The Extras

Don't go hungry

Paintball fields generally have drinks and snacks for sale. Very few commercial fields sell much more than that. Either call ahead to make sure they have food or bring a sandwich and a few snacks. You may also want to pack a few drinks. Staying hydrated in the warm summer months is very important. Running around the woods for four to six hours can be very taxing.

A true story...

When I first began playing paintball in 1985 there were no goggle systems that had attached masks. Players wore goggles that only protected the eyes, not the face. In my third game of the day, the first day I had ever played paintball, I was walking down a path of a gigantic playing field when someone jumped out from behind a huge boulder and shot me square in the cheek from less than six feet away. My face bled for hours but I had so much fun playing that I knew that day I would play paintball for the rest of my life.

Chapter 8

Where To Play

What You'll Learn In This Chapter

- What commercial fields offer
- Field & game variety
- Choosing the field
- Where you hang out

What Paintball Fields Offer

Earlier in this book, I talked a little bit about commercial fields versus backyard games and some of the differences between the two. Let's take a closer look at what commercial fields offer (or should offer) over the backyard games.

First, most commercial fields offer safely run games with referees that are there to start, stop and organize the activities as well as maintain the safety. For the day's play your child will either be made a part of a walk-on group, or if you brought an entire group, you will have your own ref or two assigned to you for the entire day. Besides running the games the assigned refs will also escort the group from field to field giving players a variety of games of play.

The refs will also help players on the field with basic things like game strategy for new players, playing tips, minor marker fixes, etc. In many ways paintball refs are not like traditional refs for other sports. While they are running the games and watching for safety, they are also helping everyone on the field have the best day of play possible.

Also at most commercial fields there are people, including the refs, that can help you with the playing gear should a problem arise--even if it is your personally-owned gear.

Choosing the Field

Choosing the commercial field to play at will take just a few minutes of research. The first thing I recommend is going to www.PBReview.com and checking out the field reviews from your area. The reviews at this website are written by players so for the most part you'll get honest reviews, not press releases. Once you've narrowed down your choices, take a look at pricing. Like I mentioned in Chapter 7, pricing and services do vary greatly from field to field. Most commercial fields cater to the new player because it's the bread-and-butter of their business. To further figure out a field that works best with new players, look for these "keywords" when you read the reviews: church groups, corporate groups, and birthday parties.

Another consideration when looking for a commercial field is their variety of playing fields. Most commercial fields will have large wooded fields. For greater variety, some commercial fields build "fort or castle" fields and some sort of smaller arena type of fields. The consideration for you to is that the

larger wooded fields are generally more fun for new players. Because the paintball battle is held on a larger field the game moves at a slower pace, giving new players the time to be accustomed to the game and how it's played. It's also likely that if your child is "shot" during a game played on a large field that the shot would come from a further distance. Of course, any field with a castle or fort also offers a fun playing experience.

Another part of a commercial field is the staging area. This is where players can set up their "home base" for the day of play. Some fields offer staging areas with better security. Some fields simply set up tables scattered around. Some fields have players "stage" out of their vehicles. The staging area is where players gear up between games and where the "war stories" get told and retold. If you are not playing, this is often where you will set up for the day to hear the "war stories" as soon as your child is off the field.

The last thing I want to touch on is comfort. Some of the more established paintball fields have indoor bathrooms, lounges, and places to get in from the cold or wet weather. But the majority of fields in the United States do not. If you are lucky enough to have a paintball field like this in your area you can hang around and read a book or possibly surf the 'net while your boy or girl plays. But it will be more likely that your vehicle will serve as your lounge. While not swanky, hearing the "war stories" as soon as your child gets off the field is worth it.

Other websites I recommend to find commercial fields are www.pbnation.com and the field and store listing at my magazine's website, www.PaintballX3.com.

A true story...

By the time I was playing paintball for ten years I had already played at more than 100 paintball fields in the U.S. and many other countries. I'd seen and played the most amazing playing fields in the world—fields like Skirmish and its 350 acres in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania, SC Village in southern California, and many others. But it wasn't until 1997, when my team flew to Sydney, Australia, that I played on the most intricate and amazing field ever. The field, which I believe is now closed, had about 15 playing fields and I remember one in particular that is etched into my memory forever. The field was probably 8-10 acres in size and throughout the entire landscape there were eight-foot deep trenches that were all connected. You could literally make your way from one side of the field to the other in any number of routes and never be seen by your opponent. And situated across these trenches were randomly placed old yellow school buses—and each of these buses had a hole in the bottom and a ladder that dropped down into the trench. Players could snake their way through the trenches and in and out of the above ground buses looking for their opponents. It was truly amazing.

Chapter 9

A Day At The Field

What You'll Learn In This Chapter

- What it is like
- What commercial fields offer
- Field & game variety

The Paintball Field Staff

Commercial fields have their own unique vibe, no matter where it is you are playing . Field owners are very friendly by nature—it's just the type of person that runs this kind of service business. Most paintball fields do a very good job training their refs and staff as well. Again I'll draw an analogy to skiing. You'll pretty much find smiling faces at the check-in counter, the ski lift and in the lodge. Paintball is no different.

The usual staff order at a paintball field is you have an owner that will check in on the games and players a few times during the day. There's a head referee that will be in charge of everyone else. Usually the head ref will be with you all day if you're the only group playing. Some large fields have several groups playing at the same time on different fields so there will be field refs that will start, stop and run your games all day. And you may see a few employees at the field that will be selling drinks, food (if available), paintballs, supplies, and air fills.

Before any games start all players are required to sign an insurance and/or liability waiver. If your child is under 18-years of age, the field will require someone over 18-years old to also sign the waiver. For the most part a waiver of liability is just a formality. If an injury occurs as a result of negligence on the part of the field staff (which is beyond rare), you have not signed your rights away by signing the waiver.

At this point you (or your child) will now pay your field fees and rental fees, buy their paintballs (start with about 500), and head to a central location for the day's safety, rules, and games briefing. Please make sure your son or daughter pays attention to the briefing. Otherwise they will be asking questions all day about things they should have already known. At the end of the briefing you will get directions as to when and where the first games will be played.

Again no matter where your child is playing there will almost always be a friendly staff and a welcoming group of players. Every field I've been to, and I've been to more than 300 of them, has always had a handful of players ready to take newbies under their wings—and that really is a good thing. Once you're child has made his/her way to the playing fields they will get all the pre-game coaching they can handle. That's just the nature of team sports and paintball in particular.

Once the first game is played the likelihood is that all of the game's players will head back to the staging area to reload paintballs, grab a drink, and get ready for the next game. This will be covered in the day's safety and information briefing. There's usually about ten minutes between games and for most players these breaks are the best part of the day. This is where the players all talk about what happened on the field—kind of a cross between war stories and “fish” stories.

The Rest of the Day

The rest of the day will go much the same as the first game and between-game time. Most fields play around 8 to 10 games in a day, but I have been to some fields where playing 15 games is not unusual. Your son or daughter is not obligated in any way to play all of the day's games. They can take a break at any point and they can leave for the day at any point. Sometime around noon the games will stop for about 45 minutes for lunch. After lunch more games are played and at some point the head ref will call it a day. At that point you'll turn in your rented gear, get back your driver's license if you were asked to leave one as collateral for the rental gear, and you're ready to pack up and go home. Enjoy the war stories and excitement.

A true story...

When I first moved to Virginia in 1991 there was a guy everyone called “Ninja Dave” playing the local paintball fields. Dave got the *Ninja* tag from his playing days in the mid-1980s, where he would sneak around the woods like a ninja, eliminating players left and right with his basic pump paintball gun. As the '80s turned into the '90s and semiautomatic paintball guns became the dominant marker on the fields, Dave refused to go high tech, yet he was still one of the best players on the field on any given Sunday. By 1993 there was literally one player on the NPPL circuit, the highest level of competitive paintball, still using a pump gun--Ninja Dave. That year Dave and his team Avant Guard won the Amateur division NPPL World Cup, the Super Bowl™ of paintball in its day. I ran into Dave, now in his mid-50s, at the 2009 World Cup. He, now living in Florida, is still playing paintball like he owns the fields and he's still using only a simple pump gun from the '80s.

Acting Responsibly

Ignorance is no excuse

What You'll Learn In This Chapter

- Kids are arrested every day somewhere for using their paintball guns illegally
- You may be held responsible
- How using a paintball gun can get you charged with attempted murder
- Ignorance of the law is no excuse
- It may not be legal to shoot a paintball gun in your own yard

If you do a Google News search using the word “paintball” you may be surprised to see that many of the search results you get will be stories of people that have been arrested for various crimes using paintball markers. You’ll see stories about kids being arrested for shooting at cars and buildings, and you’ll probably read about some jogger somewhere being shot by someone with a paintball marker getting seriously hurt in the process. Every day somewhere, someone uses a paintball marker illegally and gets caught doing so.

Shoot at a Car, End Up in Jail

I tell you this because ultimately you’ll be the one handing over the paintball gun to your child—or at the very least, allowing them to own it. For some kids (and adults) the thought of shooting their paintball gun at other people, cars, birds, dogs, cats and other thing that moves is just too tempting but it is still extremely stupid. Let me repeat myself, extremely stupid. Doing this most often ends in an arrest. Most jurisdictions treat firing a paintball gun at a person not while playing the game the same as firing a real weapon at someone. The offender will be arrested, arraigned, and prosecuted for anything from assault to attempted murder. Most of these cases end in damages being owed to someone and I’ll take a guess that it probably is the parents paying the bill. Sad to report but this happens nearly every day. In fact a quick Google search today gave me results for 21 different paintball related arrests in the past week. And in one case the offender was sentenced to 16 years in prison for seriously injuring someone. My point is not to scare you into walking away from paintball. It is to let you know that one stupid decision can have serious consequences.

Know the Law

Shooting a paintball gun in your backyard may be illegal

You should also know that all areas of the United States have paintball gun or airgun laws and they all vary greatly. In New York City for instance, firing an airgun (and this includes paintball guns as well as BB airguns) is illegal anywhere. Shooting a target in the backyard of your Brooklyn house can land you in jail for the night or get you fined. More rural areas have laws that state that a gun or airgun can only be

fired at a distance of “X” feet from a road or walkway. No matter where you are located, it’s good to know the local laws and regulations. As they say, “ignorance is no excuse.”

Tips:

- Your child should always carry his paintball marker in a closed bag or carrying case in public. The barrel cover should always be on.
- Go over the “rules” of owning a paintball gun in your house.
- Teach your child to play safely at all times.
- Let your child know upfront that using their paintball gun for anything but playing paintball will result in lost privileges in your house and will probably in the end get them a new address that starts with “Prisoner ID #...”

A true story...

Back in my pro tournament days, I was flying home from Orlando, Florida and one of the guys on the team was recalling a game that we played. Our team had about four rows in the middle of the plane. He was talking about a player he shot that just wouldn’t come off the field. He was animatedly recalling the story saying something like, “I shot this guy in the back of the head and he just wouldn’t move. I shot him again and still nothing. I turned to the right and shot the guy in the middle of the field and then got the heck out of there.” I noticed about halfway through the story that the flight attendant and a handful of other people were literally staring at my teammate with fear in their eyes. He finally noticed too and excused himself saying, “It’s okay, we’re just talking about a paintball game.”

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Chapter 11

Alternative Games

What You'll Learn In This Chapter

- There are smaller paintballs
- And the benefits are?
- Drawbacks?
- Paintball pistols
- Intro to airsoft

Smaller Paintballs

The standard size paintball is .68 caliber (slightly smaller than $\frac{3}{4}$ " in diameter) and this is the size paintball that is used at all fields currently. That said, over the years there have been several attempts at making and using smaller paintballs. At one time .60 caliber paintballs were fairly popular, especially in the western states. More recently Kingman, makers of the Spyder, have released their Chaser and Eraser markers, both of which shoot .43 caliber paintballs. A few years ago .50 caliber paintballs were introduced but didn't really catch on—and for what it's worth I don't understand why not. The smaller ball causes less impact (as discussed earlier), is less expensive to make and sell, ships cheaper, and still shoots pretty well. Maybe with the JT SplatMaster line being introduced there will be a renewed interest in .50 caliber. We'll see.

Pistol Games

Over the last few years paintball "pistols" have become very popular. Most pistols shoot a much more limited amount of paintballs inherently so playing pistol games is much less expensive. As mentioned in the last paragraph, Kingman's .43 caliber Eraser and Chaser are two very popular paintball pistols. Tippmann's TPX pistols are popular as well. In addition to being Tippmann-tough (all of their markers are extremely durable) their TPX is .68 caliber which allows you to switch between your "regular" marker and the TPX without having to have two different size paintballs on hand.

Laser Tag (Using paintball guns)

In the past few years Tippmann has developed and perfected a laser tag component that allows the user to easily convert his/her Tippmann marker into a laser tag gun. A simple drop-in component is attached to the Tippmann marker and the gun is ready to be used for laser tag. More info on this can be found at PaintballLaserTag.com.

Airsoft

We touched on airsoft earlier in the book and I'm honestly hesitant to even talk about it here. It's not paintball—it's a completely different game. In many ways airsoft looks like paintball but in this case looks can be deceiving and dangerous. As I mentioned, goggle systems used for airsoft are different from paintball. Also airsoft balls are much lighter and hit with much less impact than paintball. So again, goggles/masks made for airsoft simply won't work for paintball.

Okay with that out of the way I will say that there's nothing inherently wrong with airsoft. It's a fun game and thousands of people around the world play the game regularly. It's cleaner than paintball, cheaper (the guns and balls are less expensive than paintball), and it doesn't take quite as much to get a game going. The guns are powered differently so air fills are not necessary. The down side to airsoft is that the balls don't break, so players operate on the "honor system" to call themselves out of games. Many paintball fields are now also offering airsoft games on the same fields. If this is something that interests your son or daughter by all means go watch a few games.

A true story...

Back in the very early years of paintball there was a .60 caliber paintball gun called the Tippmann SMG-60, which was the first fully automatic paintball marker ever made. The first time I played in Florida was also the first time I saw the SMG-60 (which by the way, stands for Sub Machine Gun 60 Caliber). I remember being completely intimidated by it. After all, I was used to shooting a gun that had to be manually cocked before firing each ball and this new gun could fire 15 rounds in a second or two. Anyway, I was on the field and I heard what sounded like a very loud two-second drum roll and when I realized what that sound was I was even more intimidated. It was the sound of the SMG-60 unloading a clip of paintball in a ridiculously short amount of time. Later in the day I would end up facing a player shooting a "Smg" as they were called back then, and he shot a clip of paintball at me, but I was well covered. A few seconds later he fired another clip, then another, and another. It took me a few minutes but I finally realized that once he emptied his clip of paintballs it took at least ten seconds to reload another clip. So... I waited for him to fire and the second the clip of paintballs was emptied, I got up, charged him (he was about 50 feet away) and shot him from ten feet away before he could reload. Remember how I told you being smart and quick-thinking are huge assets for playing paintball?

Chapter 12

Closing

For me the game of paintball is the most exciting, invigorating, and fun games I have ever played—and I played competitive organized sports my whole life. Paintball has elements of almost every sport/game I've ever played. It has the camaraderie of team sports like baseball and basketball, the hard-hitting aspect of a game like football, the strategy of a game like chess, and the ability to develop game skills like most other sports/games.

All of that said paintball is proven to be safer than almost every sport your child may participate in, provided they play within the established guidelines established over the game's thirty-plus years of existence. If you compare the injuries while playing paintball to games like football, soccer, and even baseball, you'll find paintball to be very safe.

Take a look at this graphic: http://www.familiesafield.org/pdf/Injury_page.pdf.

Admittedly this graphic is a bit old, but the fact remains that paintball is one of the safest games/sports, provided it is played to industry standards. That said paintball injuries are on the rise the last ten years or so and the increase in injuries is almost undeniably related to participants removing their goggles (or not wearing them in the first place) on the playing fields. So I can't stress enough that teaching your child the safe and correct way to play the game is the most important thing you can do before they play their first game.

Like any game or sport that requires physical activity of some kind, respect the safety guidelines of the game but don't fear the game itself.

Final Thoughts

The game of paintball for many is as fun to talk about as it is to play. Our company, PaintballX3 LLC provides a safe, fun place to do that. Our social network, PaintballX3Social.com is a place to share stories, learn about the game, share/post photos and video and meet people of all ages that share a passion for the game of paintball.

Contact Me

If you have any questions about paintball or your child playing the game, feel free to email me anytime at john_amodea@hotmail.com and I'll be happy to answer them the best I can.

Paintball Lexicon

50: 50, 40, 30 and 20 are, like football, references to yard lines not by distance but based on the midline of the field always being the 50 no matter how far away; adding "our" means this side of the field.

1 for 1, 2 for 1: One for one refers to a penalty in which one player's infraction leads to that player and a team mate also being removed; two for one leads to the penalized player and two team mates being removed for the penalized player's infraction.

Agg: Simultaneously means a player or thing with style, or something too weak to survive; originally from the "A Lifestyle" insult; recently, attempts to give it a different source (like an "aggressive" player is agg) have emerged.

Airsmith: Paintball's version of a gunsmith, someone who can repair or tune markers, loaders and air tanks.

Bonus Ball: Extra shots illegally fired at an opponent beyond the rules or after they are eliminated; also called bonus balling.

Breakout: The start of the paintball game. Players are at the start point and "breakout" when the signal is given. Tournament paintball literally has plays like football has plays. The breakout is the start of one of those plays. But more simply, the breakout happens in every game whether it is tournament or not.

Bunker: Man-made object placed on field with boundaries to provide protection to players; also, bunker is used as a verb to run up to and/or past an opponent and shoot at them; to bunker is same as bunkering.

Gogged: Hit in the lens; also intentionally shooting a mask-wearing ref to blind them.

Hyperball: Also seen as hyp'air'ball, possibly from the word "pipe." Hyperball fields use large plastic corrugated sewage pipes either standing on end, lying on ground, or smaller pipes stacked or grouped to form bunkers.

Lane: The line of sight parallel to the side of the playing area; an alley between you and the far end parallel to the edge of the playing area; "to lane" is to fill that area directly ahead of you with paint.

Longball: Lobbing; long balling is to elevate the muzzle and shoot long distance "mortared" shots in an attempt to get a lucky elimination.

Max: A max score is achieved by eliminating all opponents without losing any players and hanging the flag in time.

Medic: Scenario role of a player who can revive an on-field eliminated player.

Mirror: The bunker in your lane that is the same distance from their starting point as you are from yours; someone or a bunker in your lane; shoot your mirror is to put paint on the opponent or bunker that is the mirror to yours on the far side in your lane; opposite of cross.

Outlaw: Same as renegade or backyard ball; playing at a place other than an insured field or a promoted tournament or scenario location; not always trespassing but usually illegal; unfortunately, rarely use a chrono and therefore risky to sport's reputation.

Pod: A cylindrical container for balls carried onto the field and used to reload hoppers; also called tubes or guppies.

Primary: Target bunker to run to first; "their primary" is a guess at where the other team will want to put a player early.

Resurrect: Scenario rule in which an eliminated player who left the field can return at a certain station during a certain time window; the time window is typically at least every half hour to hour and lasts from five to twenty minutes; same as reincarnate.

Run Through: When a shooting player completes a bunkering and keeps running and shooting up the field attempting more bunkerings regardless of hits already on them.

About the Author

John Amodea played his first game of paintball in 1985 in the wooded fields of Skirmish USA in Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania. Three years later he was playing not only recreational paintball games, but traveling the northeast and competing in regional paintball events. In 1989 he opened a paintball field in Virginia called Virginia Badlands and shortly thereafter won a national title in the NPPL as a high level amateur player on the team Phantom Force. In 1991 John joined professional competition paintball team Bad Company, traveling around the U.S. and to places like Australia, England and mainland Europe on the pro circuit.

In 1991 John founded a magazine called *Paintball Consumer Reports International* (PCRI) which was instrumental in the development of safety in the paintball market and he has worked in paintball publishing ever since. In 1993 he cofounded Pev's Paintball Supply, a retail store chain that at its peak had more than ten locations around the United States. In 1996 John was voted one of the top 50 players in the world by *Paintball Games International* magazine. He is also the author of the *Survival Guide* series of paintball gun tech manuals and he has served as the paintball guide at About.com, one of the world's largest information websites.

In 2004, as editor of Paintball 2Xtremes Magazine, John was the main script writer for the magazine's television show, *Paintball 2Xtremes TV*, which aired originally on Spike TV and later on the Outdoor Life Network (OLN). John is currently the President and editor for PaintballX3 Magazine (PaintballX3.com).