

Mesoamerican Ballplayers

The people of Mesoamerica played an early team sport, the ballgame. They played on a court that was shaped like a capital letter I. The long central alley is where the teams played the game. The goal of the game might have been to get the ball past the other team, or to hit stone carvings that were placed along the side of the alley. Players were not allowed to use their hands.



The ballgame was dangerous! The ball was heavy and could break bones. Players had to wear special gear for protection.

Can you think of games we play today that require special protective gear?



Formative, Olmec: Rattle in the form of a ballgame ball, 1200–1900 B.C. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John A. Sokes Jr. in appreciation of the museum's contribution to the study of the art of the ancient Americas through the presentation in 1995 of the definitive exhibition *The Olmec World: Ritual and Rulership* (2004-8)

Labeling Activity:

Below is a ballplayer in full uniform. He wears a spectacular bird headdress painted a brilliant blue and set into a crown of feathers. These headdresses might have been used to distinguish one team from another or one player from another.

See if you can label the different pieces of his uniform by filling in the blank boxes with the words in bold below.



Jaina, Northern lowlands, Maya area, Campeche, Mexico, Late Classic, Maya: Ballplayer figurine, A.D. 600–800. Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund, in honor of Gillett G. Griffin on his seventieth birthday (1998-36). Photo: Bruce M. White.

Sash

Jade necklace

Loincloth

Bracelets

Yoke

Anklets

Bird headdress