Hula Hoop Encyclopedia Article

Hula Hoop

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Hula Hoop

Think of American fads of the 1950s and what comes to mind? Hula hoops! And oddly enough, the hoops came from Australia. In the 1950s, Australian gym classes used three-foot bamboo rings for calisthenics. In 1957, this form of exercise caught on outside school gymnasiums, becoming a popular form of Aussie entertainment. The owners of the American novelty company Wham-O, Richard P. Knerr and Arthur K ("Spud") Melin, heard about the craze and decided to investigate. Knerr and Melin introduced the hula hoop to neighborhood kids and cocktail party guests in America and discovered that they loved playing with the toy. Immediately, Wham-O began production of the American version of the Australian ring. Christened the "hula hoop" and made of vividly-colored polyethylene plastics, they cost fifty cents to make and sold for $1.98 a piece. By 1958, the hula hoop was the subject of an international hysteria. Japan's Prime Minister Kiahi received a hula hoop for his sixty-second birthday. Parisian novelists posed for photographs with them. A Belgian expedition bound for Antarctica brought along twenty of them. German world heavyweight champion Max Schmeling gyrated the hula hoop ringside. Although their popularity has waned in the decades following their initial craze, hula hoops are still in production and remain stocked in many toy stores around the world.