



## NEWS RELEASE

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## **The History of the Ball, Big Wheel<sup>®</sup>, and the Nintendo Game Boy<sup>®</sup> 2009 Inductees into the National Toy Hall of Fame<sup>®</sup>**

### **The Ball**

Rolling, throwing, kicking, catching, bouncing, and batting. The ball is nearly as old as civilization itself. History abounds with stories and evidence of ball play. The ancient Mesoamericans played ball in elaborately constructed ball courts. In Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House in the Big Woods* (1932), Laura and Mary Ingalls played ball with an inflated pig's bladder. Ancient Greek legends referred to ball play in Odysseus (Od.vi.100), and songwriters Norworth and Tilzer scored a hit with 1908's *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*. Literature and culture are full of references to people playing with balls. And it is appropriate. Like few other playthings, the ball facilitates and promotes free play among people of all ages.

While baby's first toy may be a soft and safe cloth ball, many adults enjoy playing catch with a hardball. Ball play of every kind is pervasive. Children play with jacks and a ball. Kickball dominates a playground and dodge ball rules the gym class. The ball challenges the abilities of young people and develops physical skills. And from cricket to water polo, ball play encourages systematic understanding and teamwork among older individuals. Later in life, a businessperson's reward for a week's work may be a round of golf. Or, a group of friends may get together annually to watch the Super Bowl and rekindle their bonds of friendship. In all these ways and countless more, ball play is here to stay. Play ball!

### **The Big Wheel<sup>®</sup>**

In the 1960s, Ray Lohr, head designer for Louis Marx & Co., took apart a tricycle, mixed up the parts, and reassembled them into an upside down trike that handled like a race car. The new kind of trike owed its novelty and high performance to its design. On old steel tricycles, the rider perched on a seat above the drive wheel—and pitched over on sharp turns. And traditional tricycles did not have much speed. But the Big Wheel rode only a few inches off the pavement, allowing high-speed skid-outs on slanted or uneven surfaces. Molded plastic construction cushioned the jolts. Kids on Big Wheels sought out bumps, corners, and pavements where they could pick up speed. Even older children thrilled at the g-forces. The Big Wheel also gave them mobility along with a measure of independence.

## 2—History

The Marx Company launched its Big Wheel at the 1969 Toy Fair in New York City in two sizes: a model with a sixteen-inch front wheel for larger kids and nine-inch version for smaller ones. By the following Christmas, children all over the country delighted in riding their new “muscle” trikes. At about \$15 for the larger version, the Big Wheel remained Marx’s big seller for a decade, a stabilizing factor during changes in corporate leadership and ownership transfers. The Big Wheel’s popularity outlived the company that first introduced it. When Marx went out of business in 1985, Carolina Enterprises, known later as Enterprise Industries, produced the Big Wheel for a second generation of mobile American kids. Coleco offered a similar vehicle, as did Playskool, Gearbox Toys, General Foam Plastics, and Razor USA. Today, the Big Wheel has been revitalized by Alpha International, Inc. of Cedar Rapids, IA, to carry new generations of kids on sidewalk adventures.

### **Nintendo Game Boy®**

The innovative Nintendo Game Boy transformed the electronic games market by popularizing handheld gaming. No video-game platform did more to put gamers “on the go” than Nintendo Game Boy. And go they did—bringing their gaming experience to school, to summer camp, and to the back seat of the family automobile. Over the past two decades, Game Boy has become synonymous with portable gaming fun.

Following the enormous success of their NES home console, Nintendo launched Game Boy in 1989 and the system became an instant hit. The secret to Game Boy’s success was not driven by advanced graphics or processing power, but rather by simple and efficient design, head-to-head connectivity, and scores of intriguing games. Game Boy’s Game Link cable allowed simultaneous multiplayer gaming—a first for a portable system. The classic puzzle game *Tetris* came bundled with Game Boy and it appealed to a diverse audience, ranging from children to grandparents. Additional launch titles included *Super Mario Land*, which featured Nintendo’s already-iconic character Mario. The hit titles kept coming as the system evolved.

Gaming technology advances quickly and Game Boy remained relevant through a series of smaller, more powerful versions with enhanced gameplay features. These advanced platforms incorporated backward compatibility, wireless communication, and unique peripherals devices. From its original configuration through to the tiny Game Boy Micro, the Game Boy line of video-game platforms popularized portable handheld gaming.

**For more information about toys in the National Toy Hall of Fame® at Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, New York visit [www.museumofplay.org](http://www.museumofplay.org)**