


For skin divers, a new
version of hockey that's all wet

Octopush

One cold winter night in Portsmouth, England during the mid-'50s, a group of skin-diving aficionados were sitting around the bottom of the local indoor pool in their wet suits and weight belts, looking gloomily at each other through their face masks, and wondering if there wasn't a more exciting way to keep in shape for the summer diving expeditions. The result of their watery cogitations was a game they named octopush. It combines the best aspects of hockey and rugby football, and tests the skills and endurance of the most experienced diver. The object of the game is to push a lead puck called the "squid" into the opponents' goal or "gulley" with a paddle, thereby scoring a "gull." There are rules, but the game tends to be rough—it's difficult to call "foul" without coming up for air. Since the game is played entirely underwater, octopush isn't much of a spectator sport, but the players are devoted to it and it has now spread all over the world.

Flipped players fight for possession of the "squid" after a "bully-off" during a game in the Imperial College pool in London.



Southsea squashes Aquatic without the help of a ringer from LIFE

LIFE's London Bureau Chief Jordan Bonfante took the plunge during an octopush match between members of the Southsea team from Portsmouth and the Aquatic Club. This is what happened: "When the whistle blew for the bully-off, our lead man on the blue team outwrestled his opponent and managed to get the squid halfway into red territory near the side wall. I hovered strategically on the surface, waiting until the first duelists came up for air. When they disengaged, I took a breath and made my move, kicking masterfully down to the neglected squid. Apparently a red player had the same idea. We collided over it. Then I remembered the pirouette, the tactic that made Jim Boyle famous. With my pusher on the squid I spun around once, twice and again. I had him out of position and I was free and clear. Kicking like mad I headed for pay dirt. But suddenly a school of sharks descended on me and wrenched the squid away. They had blue pushers! What kind of treachery? I struggled to the surface. There I was, a Wrong-Way Corrigan gasping for breath a few feet from my own goal."

Linda Sell of the Aquatic Club arrives too late to stop a gull scored by John Bevan, a star and captain of Southsea (left). Below, a player heads toward opposing gulley with a defending player in pursuit.

