



# AFRICA



## Donga (Ethiopia)

- Name of sport (game):

Donga

- Place of practice (continent, state, nation):

Omo Valley of Ethiopia (Suri tribe)

- Description:

One of the main Surma / Suri customs is stick fighting. This ritual and sport is called Donga or Sagenai (Saginay). Donga is both the name of the sport and the stick, whereas sagenai is the name of the stick-fighting session. Stick





with 20 to 30 people on each side, and can end up with hundreds of warriors involved. Suri are famous for stick fighting, but they are not the only ones to respect such a custom, as the neighbor tribe, the Mursi, also practice these traditional fights. The day before the sagenai, fighters have to purge themselves. They do it by drinking a special preparation, called dokai, which is made of the bark of a special tree, which is mixed with water. After taking it, warriors make themselves vomiting the drink. The water is supposed to bring with it many of the body's impurities. After this ritual they don't eat until the following morning. Warriors walk kilometers to come fighting at Sagenai, which takes place in a clearing. They stop when crossing a river in order to wash themselves, before decorating their bodies for the fight. They decorate themselves by sliding the fingers full of clay on the warrior's bodies. This dressing up and decoration is meant to show their beauty and virility and thus catch the women's attention. The phallic shape ending the sticks contributes to that virile demonstration. Fighters arrive on the Donga field all together, carrying the strongest man, dancing and singing. Some fighters wear colourful headdresses sometimes with feathers on it, and also knee-protectors. But most of them use no protection at all and fight completely naked in order to show their bravery. They also wear strings of decorative coloured beads around their necks given by the girls and waist, but their genitals are most of the time uncovered and they are barefoot. All of them get a chance to fight one on one, against someone from the other side. In the beginning each fighter looks for an opponent of the same stature, and exchanges a few held back blows with him in order to test him. If both fighters feel they have found a match, they suddenly throw themselves into the fight, hitting ferocious fast strokes with their sticks. If one of the warriors knocked out or puts paid to his opponent, he immediately declares himself the winner. Sagenai consists in qualifying rounds, each winner fighting the winner of a previous fight, until two finalists are left. It is strictly forbidden to hit a man when he is down on the ground. During these fights there are referees present to make sure all rules are being followed. Many stick fights end within the first couple of hits. Nevertheless the fights are really violent, and it is quite usual to see men bleeding. Stick fighting has proven to be dangerous because people have died from being hit in the stomach. Loosing an eye or a leg during the fight is quite common, although it is strictly forbidden for a fighter to kill his opponent, and if a fighter gets killed during the fight, his opponent and all his family are banned from the village for life. For the other locals, especially teenagers, sagenai is a great outing. Girls watch the fights, but it is also the



source: <https://pt.pinterest.com/pin/313492824036632565/>

- Importance (for practitioners, communities etc.):

The Suri is a proud people who live in the southwest of Ethiopia, far away from and unaffected by modern, contemporary civilisation. They honor centuries-old traditions, such as the annual Donga. During the annual traditional stick fights, also called the Donga, the naturally peace-loving Suri men show a very competitive side to gain prestige within the tribe. The aim is for young men to duel with stick fights in order to show their strength and masculinity and to gain respect from their family and the community. And of course they conquer the hearts of young girls before marriage. The groups sometimes consist of hundreds of men, coming from different villages. They use their best warriors and approach the battlefield in a large clearing. They do this while singing and try to impress their opponents.

The duel winners continue to fight each other until one last victor remains. Losers are expected to accept their defeat gracefully and withdraw from the field. The last victor is carried on a platform with poles and taken to a group of unmarried young girls, one of whom will choose him as her future husband.

Source (text Henk Bothof): <https://pureofftheroad.com/donga-traditional-stick-fighting-of-the-suri-people/?lang=en>

- Sources of information :

Articles:

<https://goingawesomeplaces.com/mursi-tribe-donga-stick-fighting-tournament-brutal-unexpected/>

<https://pureofftheroad.com/donga-traditional-stick-fighting-of-the-suri-people/?lang=en>

<https://detayphoto.com/ethiopia-stick-fighting-saguine>

Photos:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/mytripsmypics/albums/72157628274797523/>

Video:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_jmN5RiEBVs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_jmN5RiEBVs)

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<https://www.thesun.ie/news/896855/ethiopian-fighters-are-pictured-drinking-raw-cow-blood-for-strength-as-they-prepare-for-the-suri-tribes-ferocious-stick-fighting-festival/>

<https://goingawesomeplaces.com/mursi-tribe-donga-stick-fighting-tournament-brutal-unexpected/>

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