Founded by Wisconsin native Dick Chudnow, ComedySportz originated in Milwaukee in 1984, and has grown to include troupes in 21 cities nationwide, with another based in Manchester, England. As its name implies, this stage entertainment turns the art of improv into something of a team sport. (In America, at least, the show even begins with the singing of the National Anthem.)

In a typical 90-minute performance, two selected groups of players - the red team and the blue team - face off in a series of improvisational games officiated by a referee, while members of the audience provide prompts and suggestions. After both teams perform, audience members vote on which team was the funniest, points are accumulated, and the team with the highest score wins, leaving the losing team to mourn - often in weeping, slow-motion hysteria.

Donning black-and-white stripes and a whistle, the ref is in charge not only of explaining the games' rules to the audience, but making sure those rules are adhered to, occasionally calling fouls on players who break them. Yet the referee's parameters extend beyond those on-stage. Since its inception, ComedySportz has been designed as a family-friendly show, and anyone who ventures beyond the limits of good taste - comedian or audience member alike - will be called out on a "brown-bag foul," and forced to wear a brown paper bag over his or her head for as long as the referee deems necessary.

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