

Ragtag – The World’s Greatest Game

If there’s a single game that embodies the joy of summer and the family’s love of Lake George, it’s the iconic game of Ragtag. Tag with a rag. As simple as that. I’m It; I throw the rag at you; you’re now It.

Reasons why Ragtag is The World’s Greatest Game

The venue. Ragtag is played in delicious Lake George, far from shore, on what the family calls the Raft. Calling the Raft a raft is a misnomer, as the raft doesn’t float. The 14’ by 14’ platform is secured to the bottom of the Lake by four metal posts that attach to a wooden crib submerged four feet below the water’s surface. And while the features of the Raft have changed over the years (a springboard, a slide, a multi-tiered diving tower, a single tier diving tower, one ladder to climb on the raft, now two ladders), one key feature remains immutable – the ability to HIDE under the raft and seek protection from It.

The game goes as follows: a movement to play forms on the dock, at which time the players swim to the Raft, with the last person out being It. It either takes aim from the water or climbs onto the raft, at which point the other players jump in the water to get away. When It throws or tags another player with the Rag they become the new It. And so the game goes on. And on. And on.

A review of the Rules

One of the many reasons Ragtag is one of the world’s greatest games is its simplicity. There are only three immutable rules. (1) As already mentioned, the last person to the Raft is It, (2) no pushing players off the raft (safety first), and (3) no immediate tag backs. If It tags you, you need to give the tagger sufficient time to make a suitable escape.

There are a couple discretionary rules that get set with each new group of players. The big one - it ok to use an implement, typically a broom, to toss the rag off the Raft into the water just as It approaches? The Traditionalists say “no” - an implement is an extension of the person and therefore not allowed. The Modernists acknowledge the world can be cruel, and a taunting fling is permissible.

Are there boundaries? Traditionalists say “no” - if a player chooses to play it safe and tread water halfway to Pudding Island, that’s their prerogative. Also, boundary setting undermines the classic chase scenario. The Modernists argue boundary setting speeds up the game, since drawn out chases leave other players out in the cold, both literally and figuratively.

More reasons why Ragtag is the World’s Greatest Game

In addition to the spectacular setting and the simplicity of the rules, there are other reasons for Ragtag’s popularity:

- 1) Everybody wins. There are no losers in Ragtag. Sure, there’s an occasional Big Miss, where an ambitious throw goes awry, the rag sinks to the bottom of the Lake, and It has a humiliating retrieval. But then there’s the emboldening recovery, where It eventually tags another player and the game rolls along.
- 2) All ages can play. If you can swim to the raft, you’re in.
- 3) Adults don’t coach. No soccer moms or lacrosse dads telling players what to do. Players work things out themselves.

Ragtag anyone? Last one out is It!!!