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UMBRELLA GAMES

Go for the gold in Vancouver's true Olympic sport

By *Wendy Podgursky*

Please note: This feature article is from a past issue of WHERE magazine. Please be aware that the information in this article may be out of date and should be verified before planning your trip.

Vancouver is known for its walkability and its rain—1,000 mm (40") annually. But all that wet stuff doesn't stop locals from getting out and trekking through town, toting their portable personal shelters. Yes, the beloved bumbershoot, known more commonly as the umbrella. (Fun fact: nearby Seattle, Washington, a contender for Vancouver's annual rainfall record, named its annual music and arts festival Bumbershoot.)

For visitors, hitting our rain-soaked streets can be daunting. So many pedestrians are contending for the limited airspace above their heads that umbrella-wielding can become a full-contact activity. In fact, bumbershoot is a sport—Vancouver's true Olympic sport!

When stepping out onto the damp bumbershoot field (the sidewalk), you face off against competitors (other pedestrians), not all of whom play fair. Competitors must deke and manoeuvre their way to the gold medal. What is the ultimate goal of bumbershoot? To stay dry. And how you wield your bumbershoot on the streets of Vancouver determines how you medal in this precipitous event.

Nearly every Vancouverite participates, wittingly or not, in the great umbrella continuum, passing around what seems to be the same nondescript black umbrella, leaving it behind for others to find under car seats and on the floors of buses or the SkyTrain.



Liquid sunshine doesn't stop locals or tourists from strolling along downtown's picturesque seawall, umbrellas in hand. Image © KK Law

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SOURCING EQUIPMENT



Umbrella also known as Bumbershoot, Broolly, Canopy, Gamp, Parapluie

Image © Caroline Toth

If you're a casual bumbershoot competitor, you can source a basic broolly at stores such as [London Drugs](#), [Shoppers Drug Mart](#), [The Bay](#) and [Sears](#). If you're a serious contender seeking a quality 'shoot (a simple updraft can send a bargain broolly to the bin, dousing the hopes—and hairdos—of even the most competitive bumbershooters), head to [The Umbrella Shop](#) or [Gumdrops](#). Purists favour the classic black stick umbrella, but these specialty shops also carry colourful brollies and custom options perfect for medal hopefuls seeking corporate sponsorship. (Fun fact: in the arrivals area of Vancouver International Airport is an umbrella vending machine. Perhaps this is where Mary Poppins found her fancy flying model.)

What does it take to compete in bumbershoot? A day filled with liquid sunshine, a few ground rules and an umbrella.

(UN)Official Bumbershoot Rules

1 Follow equipment size regulations. Use an umbrella designed for the playing field, the sidewalk. Robson Street is not a golf course; therefore, if spotted sporting a golf or Olympic-sized umbrella better suited for a patio, you will be immediately disqualified.

2 Stay within the defined playing area. To remain in the competition, walk on the outer edge of the sidewalk, allowing umbrella-less pedestrians to stay dry under building and store awnings. The double-up coverage manoeuvre—walking with your umbrella under the awning—will likely result in karmic puddle-splash retaliation.

3 Uphold approved angle. Your umbrella is designed to shelter you from rain, which falls from above. Carrying your umbrella jauntily resting on your shoulder or at any angle other than parallel to the ground not only reduces your manoeuvrability and peripheral vision, but also fails to fulfil the main goal of bumbershoot: to prevent the water falling from the sky from falling on you.

4 React to your competitors. When meeting or passing other umbrella-wielding competitors on the playing field, if you are taller, raise your umbrella; if you are shorter, lower yours. This up or down salute will help fulfil your Olympic dream of a dry arrival, avoiding the nasty splatter caused by mid-field canopy collusions.

5 Manage water effectively. When nearing your destination, stow your equipment carefully. Retract, then shake the rain off your umbrella, doing so away from defenceless spectators.

6 Use approved equipment storage. Managing your dripping umbrella at your destination is the last leg of competition. Stow your umbrella in the stands provided at shop and office entrances; be sure to leave with the same brolly you brought. Use plastic bumbershoot wrappers, if provided. Remember, the goal is to stay dry. Sporting your umbrella indoors is sure to ruin your chances of a podium finish.

Follow these simple rules of the game, and you'll place yourself head and shoulders—and umbrellas—above your Vancouver bumbershoot competition.

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