

10-year-old boy helps sister with autism, wins toy contest

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Image 1. Kusa Xiong is the inventor of a new game called Aeropong. His older sister Pahnuly was the inspiration for the game. Photo from: Leila Navidi/Minneapolis Star Tribune/TNS.

Kusa Xiong has looked out for his big sister his whole life.

At school, he helps her unpack her things at her locker. At home, they read together and make up games. They practice counting together, too.

Kusa is 10 years old. His sister, Pahnuly, is 12. Pahnuly has autism. People with autism often have trouble talking with others. They might repeat things over and over, or be interested in only one subject.

It was because of Pahnuly that Kusa came up with a winning idea one day. The family was playing ping-pong, which is hard for Pahnuly. Kusa wanted to find a way to make it easier for her to play.

Toy Company Buys Boy's New Game

Kusa came up with a new game based on ping-pong. It is called Aeropong because the ball seems to float in the air. His game is getting attention across the country. Now, a toy company is making it!

In Aeropong, a ping-pong ball hangs from a frame. The players hit the ball back and forth. It's kind of like tennis, but no one has to go chase the ball.

Kusa's invention has improved Pahnuly's hand-eye coordination. It has also given the siblings a new activity to share. Kusa said the game is meant to make people smile, especially his big sister.

"When she scores," he said, "she dances."



Important For Siblings To Play Together

Jennifer Reinke works at the Autism Society of Minnesota. Reinke said that it's important for people with autism and their siblings to play together.

Play helps build important skills, she said. It teaches kids to work together, take turns and feel empathy. Empathy is when someone is able to understand how another person feels and share in that feeling.

Kusa's idea won a national toy contest. He will get a \$2,500 scholarship. A scholarship is money that you can use for college. Kusa will also make money for every game that is sold. This month, Kusa will travel to New York City to see his game on display at a major toy fair.

"My son just wants my daughter to have fun, too," said Kusa's dad.

Frustrated With Ping-Pong

The idea came to Kusa in 2016. Pahnuly was frustrated with ping-pong, and Kusa wanted to help her practice hitting. Kusa asked his dad to help him hang a ping-pong ball from a door frame.

At first, Pahnuly wasn't interested. But soon, Kusa heard a sound coming from the front room: Clack, clack, clack.

The family made a frame for the ball. Then they came up with rules and ways to score points.

Word spread at school about Kusa's game. His teacher, Kristin Stasica, asked him to tell his class about Aeropong. Kusa is usually shy. But when he talked about his game, his face lit up with excitement, Stasica said.

"Simple Genius"

Mark Carson is one of the founders of Fat Brain Toys, an educational toy and game company. His company ran the contest that Kusa won. Carson called Kusa's game "simple genius."

Kusa's family loves Aeropong. They wear matching T-shirts with the game's name on the front. The family has also made YouTube videos of the two children playing. Pahnuly watches the online clips nearly every day. At the end of one clip, she jumps up and down. She is celebrating winning at Aeropong against her dad. She waves her pink cat paddle in the air. Cats are Pahnuly's favorite animal.



Sister Sparks Ideas For Other Inventions

Kusa dreams of becoming an inventor and a businessman one day. He said his big sister has already sparked ideas for other inventions.

"Most products are created by accident," Kusa said. "But there has to be a reason Aeropong came to us."

Quiz

1 Read the section "Toy Company Buys Boy's New Game."

Select the paragraph from the section that explains how Aeropong is played.

- (A) Kusa came up with a new game based on ping-pong. It is called Aeropong because the ball seems to float in the air. His game is getting attention across the country. Now, a toy company is making it!
- (B) In Aeropong, a ping-pong ball hangs from a frame. The players hit the ball back and forth. It's kind of like tennis, but no one has to go chase the ball.
- (C) Kusa's invention has improved Pahnuly's hand-eye coordination. It has also given the siblings a new activity to share. Kusa said the game is meant to make people smile, especially his big sister.
- (D) "When she scores," he said, "she dances."

2 Read the section "Simple Genius."

Which sentence helps the reader understand why Pahnuly jumps up and down in one of her family's videos?

- (A) Mark Carson is one of the founders of Fat Brain Toys, an educational toy and game company.
- (B) They wear matching T-shirts with the game's name on the front.
- (C) The family has also made YouTube videos of the two children playing.
- (D) She is celebrating winning at Aeropong against her dad.

3 Complete the sentence.

Because of the invention of Aeropong, _____.

- (A) people with difficulty playing ping-pong can now play something similar.
- (B) children who invent similar games can win up to \$2,500 to pay for college.
- (C) Kusa takes his new game around to different schools to talk about it.
- (D) Pahnuly will be able to travel to New York City to see her invention on display at a fair.

- 4 How does Aeropong work?
- (A) Players must keep a ball from falling off a table.
 - (B) Players play a game similar to ping-pong but sitting down.
 - (C) A ball is suspended in the air and gets hit back and forth.
 - (D) A ball is suspended in the air and players try to knock the ball off.