MOSCOW STATE TEACHER`S TRAINING UNIVERSITY

# COURSE PAPER

## SPORT IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

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## **CONTENTS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

## **THE MAIN PART**

1. **The social importance of sport**
2. **Football ◆ Football pools**
3. **Rugby**
4. **Cricket**
5. **Animals in Sport**
6. **Racing**
7. **Gambling**
8. **Wimbledon**
9. **Other Sports**

* **CONCLUSION**
* **Questions**
* **The list of literature**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### Why

have I chosen such theme? Sport is supposed to be interesting

only for men, not for women. But I think it is a mistaken opinion. Sport is one of the most amusing things in the world, because of fillings, experiences, excitements connected with it. Particularly it is so when we speak about the UK.

Think of your favorite sport. Whatever it is, there is good chance that it was first played in Britain, and an even better chance that its modern rules were first codified in this country.

Sport probably plays a more important part in people’s life in Britain than it does in most other countries. For a very large number it is their main form of entertainment. Millions take part in some kind of sport at least once a week. Many millions more are regular spectators and follow one or more sports. There are hours of televised sport each week. Every newspaper, national or local, quality or popular, devotes several pages entirely to sport.

The British are only rarely the best in the world at particular sports in modern times. However, they are one of the best in the world in a much larger number of different sports than any other country (British individualism at work again). My course paper looks at the most publicized sports with the largest followings. But it should be noted that hundreds of other sports are played in Britain , each with its own small but enthusiastic following. Some of these may not be seen as a sport at all by many people. For most people with large gardens, for example, croquet is just an agreeable social pastime for a sunny afternoon. But to a few, it is a deadly serious competition. The same is true of the game such as indoor bowling, darts or snooker. Even board games, the kind you buy in a shop, have their national championships. Think of any pastime, however trivial, which involves some element of competition and, somewhere in Britain, there is probably a ‘national association’ for it which organized contents.

The British are so fond of competition that they even introduced it into gardening. Many people indulge in an informal rivalry with their neighbors as to who can grow the better flowers or vegetables. But the rivalry is sometimes formalized. Though the country, there are competitions in which gardeners enter their cabbage, leeks, onions, carrots or whatever in the hope that they will be judged ‘the best’. There is a similar situation with animal. There hundreds of dog and cat shows throughout the country at which owners hope that their pet will win a prize. There are a lot of such specific kinds of sport in the United Kingdom but I want to stop my thought on consideration of more widespread.

**THE MAIN PART**

#### The

British are great lovers of competitive sports; and when they are neither playing nor watching games they like to talk about them, or when they cannot do that, to think about them. Modern sport in Britain is very different. 'Winning isn't every­thing' and 'it's only a game' are still well-known sayings which reflect the amateur approach of the past. But to modern professionals, sport is clearly not just a game. These days, top players in any sport talk about having a 'professional attitude' and doing their 'job' well, even if, officially, their sport is still an amateur one. The middle-class origins of much British sport means that it began as an amateur pastime - a leisure-time activity which nobody was paid for taking part in. Even in football, which has been played on a profes­sional basis since 1885, one of the first teams to win the FA (Football Association) Cup was a team of amateur players (the Corinthians). In many other sports there has been resistance to professionalism. People thought it would spoil the sporting spirit. May be they are right.

# The social importance of sport

The importance of participation in sport has legal recognition in Britain. Every local authority has a duty to provide and maintain playing fields and other facilities, which are usually very cheap to use and sometimes even free. Spectator sport is also a matter of official public concern. For example, there is a law which prevents the televi­sion rights to the most famous annual sporting occasions, such as the Cup Final and the Derby, being sold exclusively to satellite channels, which most people cannot receive. In these cases it seems to be the event, rather than the sport itself, which is important. Every year the Boat Race and the Grand National are watched on television by millions of people who have no great inter­est in rowing or horse-racing. Over time, some events have developed a mystique which gives them a higher status than the standard at which they are played deserves. In modern times, for example, the standard of rugby at the annual Varsity Match has been rather low - and yet it is always shown live on television.

Sometimes the traditions which accompany an event can seem as important as the actual sporting contest. Wimbledon, for instance, is not just a tennis tournament. It means summer fashions, strawber­ries and cream, garden parties and long, warm English summer evenings. This reputation created a problem for the event's organizers in 1993, when it was felt that security for players had to be tightened. Because Wimbledon is essentially a middle-class event, British tennis fans would never allow themselves to be treated like football fans. Wimbledon with security fences, policemen on horses and other measures to keep fans off the court? It just wouldn't be Wimbledon!

The long history of such events has meant that many of them, and their venues, have become world-famous. Therefore, it is not only the British who tune in to watch. The Grand National, for example, attracts a television audience of 300 million. This worldwide enthu­siasm has little to do with the standard of British sport. The cup finals of other countries often have better quality and more entertaining football on view - but more Europeans watch the English Cup Final than any other. The standard of British tennis is poor, and Wimbledon is only one of the world's major tournaments. But if you ask any top tennis player, you find that Wimbledon is the one they really want to win. Every footballer in the world dreams of playing at Wembley, every cricketer in the world of playing at Lord's. Wimble­don, Wembley and Lord's are the 'spiritual homes' of their respective sports. Sport is a British export!

There are a lot of sports in Britain today and of course, there is no use in considering all of them. I try to make a short review of the most famous in the world on the one hand and unusual sports on the other hand. And the first one is the most popular game in the world:

# Football

Football is the most popular team game in Britain. The British invented it and it has spread to every corner of the world. There is no *British* team. England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland compete separately in European and World Cup matches. The English and Welsh clubs have together formed a League with four divisions. The Scottish League has three divisions. The champions of the English First Division, and the Scottish Premier Division qualify to play in the European Cup competition.

British football has traditionally drawn its main following from the working class. In general, the intelligentsia ignored it. But in the last two decades of the twentieth century, it has started to attract wider interest. The appearance of fanzines is an indication of this. Fanzines are magazines written in an informal but often highly intelli­gent and witty style, published by the fans of some of the clubs. One or two books of literary merit have been written which focus not only on players, teams and tactics but also on the wider social aspects of the game. Light-hearted football programmes have appeared on television which similarly give attention to 'off-the-field' matters. There has also been much academic interest. At the 1990 World Cup there was a joke among English fans that it was impossible to find a hotel room because they had all been taken by sociologists!

Many team sports in Britain, but especially football, tend to be men-only, 'tribal' affairs. In the USA, the whole family goes to watch the baseball. Similarly, the whole family goes along to cheer the Irish national football team. But in Britain, only a handful of children or women go to football matches. Perhaps this is why active support for local teams has had a tendency to become violent. During the 1970s and 1980s football hooliganism was a major problem in England. In the 1990s, however, it seemed to be on the decline. English fans visiting Europe are now no worse in their behavior than the fans of many other countries.

For the great mass of the British public the eight months of the football season are more important than the four months of cricket. There are plenty of amateur association football (or 'soccer') clubs, and professional football is big business. The annual Cup Final match, between the two teams which have defeated their opponents in each round of a knock-out contest, dominates the scene; the regular 'league' games, organised in four divisions, provide the main entertainment through the season and the basis for the vast system of betting on the football pools. Many of the graffiti on public walls are aggressive statements of support for football teams, and the hooliganism of some British supporters has become notorious outside as well as inside Britain.

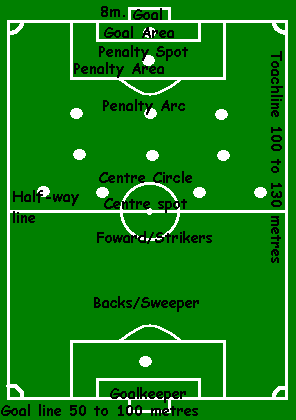
Football has been called the most popular game in the world, and it certainly has a great many fans in Britain. And now I want to mention the English terminology for football.

Association football (or soccer) is the game that is played in nearly all countries. A team is composed of a goalkeeper, two backs, three half-backs and five forwards.

Association football remains one of the most popular games played in the British Isles. Every Saturday from late August un­til the beginning of May, large crowds of people support their sides in football grounds up and down the country, while an almost equally large number of people play the game in clubs teams of every imagin­able variety and level of skill. Over the last 20 years though, the attend­ance at football matches has fallen away sharply. This is because of changing lifestyles and football hooligans about I have already written but I want to add that violence at and near the football grounds increased, there was an ever-increasing tendency for people to stay away, leaving the grounds to football fans.

After serious disturbances involving English supporters at the Eu­ropean Cup Finals in Brussels in 1985 which led to the deaths of 38 spectators, English clubs were withdrawn from European competitions for the 1985-1986 season by the Football Association. The Cup Final at Wembley remains, though, an event of national importance. Here is a drawing of a foot­ball field, or "pitch", as it is usually called.

The football pitch should be between 100 and 130 metres long and between 50 and 100 metres wide. It is divided into two halves by the halfway line. The sides of the field are called the touch-lines and the ends are called the goal-lines. In the middle of the field there is a centre circle and there is a goal at each end. Each goal is 8 metres wide and be­tween *21/2* and 3 metres high. In front of each goal is the goal area and the penalty area. There is a penalty spot inside the penalty area and a penalty arc outside it. A game of football usually lasts for one and a half hours. At half-time, the teams change ends. The refereecontrols the game. The aim of each team is obviously to score as many goals as possible. If both teams score the same number of goals, or if neither team scores any goals at all, the result is a draw.



The final of the football competition takes place every May at the famous Wembley stadium in London. Some of the best known clubs in England are Manchester United, Liverpool and the Arsenal. In Scot­land either Rangers, Celtic or Aberdeen usually win the cup or the championship.

Today, many people are only interested in football because of the pools and the chance of winning a lot of money.

###### Football pools

"Doing the pools" is a popular form of betting on football results each week. It is possible to win more than half a million pounds for a few pence.

The English have never been against a gamble though most of them know where to draw the line and wisely refrain from bettingtoo often. Since the war the most popular form of gambling is no doubt that of staking a small sum on the football pools. (The word "pool" is connected with the picture of streams of money pouring into a com­mon fund, or "pool" from which the winners are paid after the firm has taken its expenses and profit.) Those who do so receive every week from one of the pools firms a printed form; on this are listed the week's matches. Against each match, or against a number of them, the opti­mist puts down a I, a 2 or an x to show that he thinks the result of the match will be a home win (stake on fun’s team), an away win (stake on a team of opponent) or a draw. The form is then posted to the pools firm, with a postal order or cheque for the sum staked (or, as the firms say, "invested"). At the end of the week the results of the matches are announced on television and published in the news­papers and the "investor" can take out his copy of his coupon and check his forecast.

# Rugby

There is another game called rugby football, so called because it originated at Rugby, a well-known English public school. In this game the players may carry the ball. Rugby football (or 'rugger') is played with an egg-shaped ball, which may be carried and thrown (but not forward). The ball is passed from hand to hand rather than from foot to foot. If a player is carrying the ball he may be 'tackled' and made to fall down. Each team has fifteen players, who spend a lot of time lying in the mud or on top of each other and become very dirty, but do not need to wear such heavily protective clothing as players of American football.

There are two forms of rugby - Rugby Union, which is strictly amateur, and Rugby League, played largely in the north, which is a professional sport. Rugby Union has fifteen players, while Rugby League has thirteen, but the two games are basically the same. They are so similar that somebody who is good at one of them can quickly learn to become good at the other. The real difference between them is a matter of social history. Rugby union is the older of the two. In the nineteenth century it was enthusi­astically taken up by most of Britain's public schools. Rugby league split off from rugby union at the end of the century. There are two versions of this fast and aggressive ball game: rugby union and rugby league. Although it has now spread to many of the same places in the world where rugby union is played (rugby union is played at top level in the British Isles, France, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand; also to a high level in North America, Argentina, Romania and some Pacific islands). Rugby can be considered the 'national sport' of Wales, New Zealand, Fiji, Western Samoa and Tonga, and of South African whites. Its traditional home is among the working class of the north of England, where it was a way for miners and factory workers to make a little bit of extra money from their sporting talents. Unlike rugby union, it has always been a profes­sional sport.

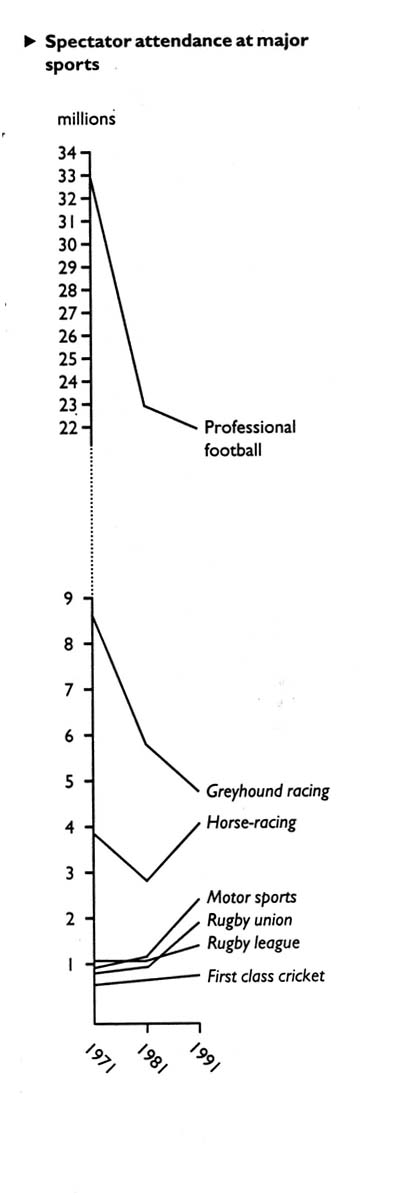
Because of these social origins, rugby league in Britain is seen as a working class sport, while rugby union is mainly for the middle classes. Except in south Wales. There, rugby union is a sport for all classes, and more popular than football. In Wales, the phrase 'interna­tional day' means only one thing — that the national rugby team are playing. Since 1970, some of the best Welsh players have been persuaded to 'change codes'. They are 'bought' by one of the big rugby league clubs, where they can make a lot of money. Whenever this happens it is seen as a national disaster among the Welsh.

Rugby union has had some success in recent years in selling itself to a wider audience. As a result, just as football has become less exclusively working class in character, rugby union has become less exclusively middle class. In 1995- it finally abandoned amateurism. In fact, the amateur status of top rugby union players had already become meaningless. They didn't get paid a salary or fee for playing, but they received large 'expenses' as well as various publicity con­tracts and paid speaking engagements.

# Cricket

The game particularly associated with England is cricket. Judging by the numbers of people who play it and watch it (🡻 look at *‘Spectator attendance at major sports’*), cricket is definitely not the national sport of Britain. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, interest in it is largely confined to the middle classes. Only in England and a small part of Wales is it played at top level. And even in England, where its enthusiasts come from all classes, the majority of the population do not understand its rules. Moreover, it is rare for the English national team to be the best in the world.

Cricket is, therefore, the national English game in a symbolic sense. However, to some people cricket is more than just a symbol. The comparatively low attendance at top class matches does not give a true picture of the level of interest in the country. One game of cricket takes a terribly long time, which a lot of people simply don't have to spare. Eleven players in each team. Test matches between national teams can last up to five days of six hours each. Top club teams play matches lasting between two and four days. There are also one-day matches lasting about seven hours. In fact there are millions of people in the country who don't just enjoy cricket but are passionate about it! These people spend up to thirty days each summer tuned to the live radio commentary of ‘Test’ (= international) Matches. When they get the chance, they watch a bit of the live television coverage. Some people even do both at the same time (they turn the sound down on the television and listen to the radio). To these people, the commentators become well-loved figures. When, in 1994, one famous commentator died, the Prime Minister lamented that 'summers will never: be the same again'. And if cricket fans are too busy to listen to the radio commentary, they can always phone a special number to be given the latest score!



Many other games which are English in origin have been adopted with enthusiasm all over the world, but cricket has been seriously and extensively adopted only in the former British empire, particularly in Australia, New Zealand, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the West Indies and South Africa. Do you know how to play cricket? If you don't live in these countries you won't learn it at school. English people love cricket. Summer isn't summer without it. Even if you do not understand the rules, it is attractive to watch the players, dressed in white playing on the beautiful green crick­et fields. Every Sunday morning from May to the end of September many Englishmen get up very early, and take a lot of sandwiches with them. It is necessary because the games are very long. Games between two village teams last for only one afternoon. Games between counties last for three days, with 6 hours play on each day. When England plays with one or other cricketing countries such as Australia and New Zea­land it is called a test match and lasts for five days. Cricket is played in schools, colleges and universities and in most towns and villages by teams which play weekly games. Test matches with other cricketing countries are held annually.

Cricket is also played by women and girls. The governing body is Women's Cricket Association, founded in 1926. Women's cricket clubs have regular weekend games. Test matches and other international matches take place. The women's World Cup is held every four years. But There is The Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) and Lord's cricket ground in the United Kingdom. The MCC was founded in 1787, and is still the most important authority on cricket in the world. As a club it is exclusively male. No woman is allowed to enter the club buildings. There are special stands for members and their wives and quests.

Organised amateur cricket is played between club teams, mainly on Saturday afternoons. Nearly every village, except in the far north, has its cricket club, and there must be few places in which the popular image of England, as sentimentalists like to think of it, is so clearly seen as on a village cricket field. A first-class match between English counties lasts for up to three days, with six hours play on each day. The game is slow, and a spectator, sitting in the afternoon sun after a lunch of sandwiches and beer, may be excused for having a little sleep for half an hour.

When people refer to cricket as the English national game, they are not thinking so much of its level of popularity or of the standard of English players but more of the very English associations that it carries with it. Cricket is much more than just a sport; it symbolizes a way of life - a slow and peaceful rural way of life. Cricket is associated with long sunny summer afternoons, the smell of new-mown grass and the sound of leather (the ball) connecting with willow (the wood from which cricket bats are made). Cricket is special because it com­bines competition with the British dream of rural life. Cricket is what the village green is for! As if to emphasize the rural connection, ‘first class’ cricket teams in England, unlike teams in other sports, do not bear the names of towns but of counties (Essex and Yorkshire, for example).

ANIMALS IN SPORT

Traditionally, the favourite sports of the British upper class are *hunting, shooting and fishing*. The most widespread form of hunting is foxhunting — indeed, that is what the word *‘hunting’* usually means in Britain. Foxhunting works like this. A group of people on horses, dressed in eighteenth century riding clothes, ride around with a pack of dogs. When the dogs pick up the scent of a fox, somebody blows a horn and then dogs, horses and riders all chase the fox. Often the fox gets away, but if not, the dogs get to it before the hunters and tear it to pieces. As you might guess in a country of animal-lovers, where most people have little experience of the harsher realit­ies of nature, foxhunting is strongly opposed by some people. The League Against Cruel Sports wants it made illegal and the campaign has been steadily intensifying. There are sometimes violent encounters between foxhunters and protestors (whom the hunters call 'saboteurs').Foxhunting is a popular pastime among some members of the higher social classes and a few people from lower social classes, who often see their participation as a mark of newly won status. The hunting of foxes is sport associated through the centuries with ownership of land. The hounds chase the fox, followed by people riding horses, wearing red or black coats and conforming with various rules and customs. In a few hill areas stags are hunted similarly. Both these types of hunting are enjoyed mainly by people who can afford the cost of keeping horses and carrying them to hunt meetings in 'horse boxes', or trailer vans. Both, particularly stag-hunting, are opposed by people who condemn the cruelty involved in chasing and killing frightened animals. There have been attempts to persuade Parliament to pass laws to forbid hunting, but none has been successful. There is no law about hunting foxes, but there is a fox-hunting seasons – from November to March.

Killing birds with guns is known as *'shooting'* in Britain. It is a minority pastime confined largely to the higher social classes; there are more than three times as many licensed guns for this purpose in France as there are in Britain. The birds which people try to shoot (such as grouse) may only be shot during certain specified times of the year. The upper classes often organize 'shooting parties' during the 'season'. The British do not shoot small animals or birds for sport, though some farmers who shoot rabbits or pigeons may enjoy doing so. But 'game birds', mainly pheasant, grouse and partridge, have traditionally provided sport for the landowning gentry. Until Labour's election victory of 1964 many of the prime ministers of the past two hundred years, along with members of their cabinets, had gone to the grouse moors of Scotland or the Pennines for the opening of the shooting season on 12 August. Since 1964 all that has changed. Now there are not many leading British politicians carrying guns in the shooting parties, though there may be foreign millionaires, not all of them from America. Some of the beaters, whose job is to disturb the grouse so that they fly up to be shot, are students earning money to pay for trips abroad. But there is still a race to send the first shot grouse to London restaurants, where there are people happy to pay huge amounts of money for the privilege of eating them.

The only kind of hunting which is associated with the working class is hare-coursing, in which greyhound dogs chase hares. However, because the vast majority of people in Britain are urban dwellers, this too is a minority activity.

The one kind of ‘hunting’ which is popular among all social classes is *fishing*. In fact, this is the most popular participatory sport of all in Britain. Between four and five million people go fishing regularly. When fishing is done competitively, it is called ‘angling’. The most popular of all outdoor sports is fishing, from the banks of lakes or rivers or in the sea, from jetties, rocks or beaches. Some British lakes and rivers are famous for their trout or salmon, and attract enthusiasts from all over the world.

Apart from being hunted, another way in which animals are used in sport is when they race. Horse-racing is a long-established and popular sport in Britain, both ‘flat racing’ and ‘national hunt’ racing (where there are jumps for the horses), sometimes known as ‘steeple­chase’. The former became known as 'the sport of kings' in the seventeenth century, and modern British royalty has close connec­tions with sport involving horses. Some members of the royal family own racehorses and attend certain annual race meetings (Ascot, for example); some are also active participants in the sports of polo and show-jumping (both of which involve riding a horse). The steeplechase (crosscountry running) is very popular in most European countries. The first known organized crosscountry race in 1837 was the Crick Run at Rugby School. Originally, crosscountry running took place over open countrywhere the hazards were the natural ones to be found in the country. These included hedges, ditches, streams and the like. Schools and some clubs still run over open country. Sometimes, however, the competitors run off the course as, on one occasion, happened to all the runners in a race. Because of this, the organization of these races has to be very strict. Nowadays, crosscountry races (or steeplechases) are often run in an enclosed area where the hazards are artificial. This makes organization easier.

The chief attraction of horse-racing for most people is the oppor­tunity it provides for gambling (see below). Greyhound racing, although declining, is still popular for the same reason. In this sport, the dogs chase a mechanical hare round a racetrack. It is easier to organize than horse-racing and ‘the dogs’ has the reputation of being the ‘poor man's racing’. Greyhound racing has had a remarkable revival in the 1980s, and by 1988 it accounted for about a quarter of all gambling. Its stadiums are near town centres, small enough to be floodlit in the evenings. Until recently the spectators were mostly male and poor, the surroundings shabby. The 1980s have changed all this, with the growth of commercial sponsorship for advertising. There are fewer stadiums and fewer spectators than in 1970, but the old cloth cap image has become much less appropriate. But one thing has not changed. The elite of Britain's dogs, and their trainers, mostly come from Ireland.

INFORMATION:

# *Famous (horse) race meetings*

*The Grand National:* at Aintree, near Liverpool, in March or April It is England's main steeplechase (race over fences). The course is over seven kilometres and includes thirty jumps, of which fourteen are jumped twice. It is a dangerous race Jockeys have been hurt and horses have been killed.

*The Derby:* at Epsom, south of London, in May or June. It is England's leading flat race (not over fences).

*Ascot:* near Windsor in June. Very fashionable. The Queen always attends.

As I have mentioned horse-racing, I think it will be good to draw attention to racing in hole.

RACING

There are all kinds of racing in England — horse-racing, motor­car racing, boat-racing, dog-racing, and even races for donkeys. On sports days at school boys and girls run races, and even train for them. There is usually a mile race for older boys, and the one who wins it is certainly a good runner.

Usually those who run a race go as fast as possible, but there are some races in which everybody has to go very carefully in order to avoid falling.

There is the "three-legged" race, for example, in which a pair of runners have the right leg of one tied to the left leg of the other. If they try to go too fast they are certain to fall. And there is the egg-and-spoon race, in which each runner must carry an egg in a spoon without letting it drop. If the egg does fall, it must be picked up with the spoon, not the fingers.

Naturally animals don't race unless they are made to run in some way, though it often seems as if little lambs are running races with each other in the fields in spring.

Horses are ridden, of course. Dogs won't race unless they have something to chase, and so they are given a hare to go after, either a real one or an imitation one.

The most famous boat-race in England is between Oxford and Cambridge. It is rowed over a course on the River Thames, and thou­sands of people go to watch it. The eight rowers in each boat have great struggle, and at the end there is usually only a short distance between the winners and the losers.

The University boat-race started in 1820 and has been rowed on the Thames almost every spring since 1836. At the Henly Regatta in Ox­fordshire, founded in 1839, crews from all over the world compete each July in various kinds of race over a straight course of 1 mile 550 yards (about 2.1 km).

Horse racing is big business, along with the betting which sustains it. Every day of the year, except Sundays, there is a race meeting at least one of Britain's several dozen racecourses. Nine-tenths of the betting is done by people all over the country, by post or at local betting shops, and it is estimated that a tenth of all British men bet regularly on horse races, many of them never going to a race course.

Horse racing accounts for about half of all gambling, dog racing for a quarter (after increasing by 27 per cent in 1987-88). The total gambling expenditure is estimated at over three billion pounds a year, or nearly 1 per cent of the gross domestic product - though those who bet get about three-quarters of their stake back in winnings. There is no national lottery, though premium bonds are a form of national savings, with monthly prizes instead of interest. About half of all households bet regularly on the football pools, although half of the money staked is divided between the state, through taxes, and the operators. People are attracted by the hope of winning huge prizes, but some winners become miserable with their sudden unaccustomed wealth. Bingo sessions, often in old cinemas, are attractive mainly to women, and have a good social element. More popular are the slot machines in establishments described as 'amusement arcades'. There has been some worry about the addiction of young people to this form of gambling, which can lead to theft.

Gambling

Even if they are not taking part or watching, British people like to be involved in sport. They can do this by placing bets on future results. Gambling is widespread throughout all social classes. It is so basic to sport that the word 'sportsman' used to be a synonym for 'gambler'.

**A nation of gamblers**

In 1993 a total of £12.7 billion was wagered by the British - that's £289 for every adult in the country. £9.5 billion was won. The government took just over £1 billion in taxes. The rest was kept by the bookmakers. About half of all the money bet in 1993 was on horses or greyhounds. 74% of all adults gambled at least once during the year.

At least once every two weeks:

•39% did the football pools;

•20% played on gaming and fruit machines;

•18% played bingo;

•14% put money on the horses.

In Britain in 1993, there was one betting shop for every 3,000 adults.

There were also:

120 casinos;

120,000 fruit machines;

1,000 bingo clubs;

1,000 lotteries;

59 racetracks;

37 greyhound stadiums.

When, in 1993, the starting procedure for the Grand National did not work properly, so that the race could not take place, it was widely regarded as a national disaster. The £70 million which had been gambled on the result (that's more than a pound for each man, woman and child in the country!) all had to be given back.

Every year, billions of pounds are bet on horse races. So well-known is this activity that everybody in the country, even those with no interest in horse-racing, would understand the meaning of a ques­tion such as 'who won the 2.30 at Chester?' (Which horse won the race that was scheduled to take place at half past two today at the Chester racecourse? The questioner probably wants to know because he or she has gambled some money on the result.) The central role of horse-racing in gambling is also shown by one of the names used to denote companies and individuals whose business it is to take bets. Although these are generally known as 'bookmakers', they some­times call themselves 'turf accountants' ('turf is a word for ground where grass grows);

Apart from the horses and the dogs, the most popular form of gambling connected with sports is the football pools. Every week, more than ten million people stake a small sum on the results of Saturday's professional matches. Another popular type of gambling, stereotypically for middle-aged working class women, is bingo.

Nonconformist religious groups traditionally frown upon gambling and their disapproval has had some influence. Perhaps this is why Britain did not have a national lottery until 1994. But if people want to gamble, then they will. For instance, before the national lottery started, the British gambled £250,000 on which company would be given the licence to run it! The country's big bookmakers are willing to offer odds on almost anything at all if asked. Who will be the next Labour party leader? Will it rain during the Wimbledon tennis tournament? Will it snow on Christmas Day? All of these offer opportunities for 'a flutter'.

Apropos of the Wimbledon tennis tournament: Wimbledon is a place to which every tennis-player aspire. And I want to write some words about it.

**WIMBLEDON**

People all over the world know Wimbledonas the centre of lawn tennis. But most people do not know that it was famous for another game before tennis was invented. Wimbledon is now a part of Greater London. In 1874 it was a country village, but it had a railway station and it was the home of the All-England Croquet Club. The Club had been there since 1864. A lot of people played croquet in Eng­land at that time and enjoyed it, but the national championships did not attract many spectators. So the Club had very little money, and the members were looking for ways of getting some. "This new game of lawn tennis seems to have plenty of action, and people like watching it," they thought. "Shall we allow people to play lawn tennis on some of our beautiful croquet lawns?"

In 1875 they changed the name of the Club to the "All-England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club", and that is the name that you will still find in the telephone book. Two years later, in 1877, Wimbledon held the first world lawn tennis championship (men's singles).3 The winner was S. W. Gore, a Londoner. There were 22 players, and 200 spectators, each paid one shilling. Those who watched were dressed in the very latest fashion — the men in hard top hats and long coats, and the ladies in dresses that reached to the ground! The Club gained £ 10. It was saved. Wimbledon grew. There was some surprise and doubt, of course, when the Club allowed women to play in the first women's singles championship in 1884. But the ladies played well—even in long skirts that hid their legs and feet.

The Wimbledon championships begin on the Monday nearest to June 22, at a time when England often has its finest weather. It is not only because of the tennis that people like to go there. When the weather is good, it is a very pleasant place to spend an afternoon. The grass is fresh and green, the players wear beautiful white clothes, the spectators are dressed in the latest fashion, there may be members of the Royal Family among them, and there are cool drinks in the open-air cafes next to the tennis courts. Millions of people watch the championships on television.

**OTHER SPORTS**

Almost every sport which exists is played in Britain. As well as the sports already mentioned, hockey (mostly on a field but also on ice) is quite popular, and both basketball (for men) and netball (for women) are growing in popularity. So too is the ancient game of rounders.

*Rounders*

This sport is rather similar to Amer­ican baseball and ancient Russian lapta, but it certainly does not have the same image. It has a long history in England as some­thing that people (young and old, male and female) can play together at village fetes. It is often seen as not being a proper ‘sport’.

However, despite this image, it has recently become the second most popular sport for state schools in Britain. More traditional sports such as cricket and rugby are being abandoned in favour of rounders, which is much easier to organize. Rounders requires less special equipment, less money and boys and girls can play it together. It also takes up less time. It is especially attractive for state schools with little money and time to spare. More than a quarter of all state-school sports fields are now used for rounders. Only football, which is played on nearly half of all state-school fields, is more popular.

The British have a preference for team games. Individual sports such as athletics, cycling, gymnastics and swimming have comparat­ively small followings. Large numbers of people become interested in them only when British competitors do well in international events. The more popular individual sports are those in which social­izing is an important aspect (such as tennis, golf, sailing and snooker). It is notable in this context that, apart from international competitions, the only athletics event which generates a lot of enthu­siasm is the annual London Marathon. Most of the tens of thousands of participants in this race are 'fun runners' who are merely trying to complete it, sometimes in outrageous costumes, and so collect money for charity. The biggest new development in sport has been with long-distance running. *'Jogging'*, for healthy outdoor exercise, needing no skill or equipment, became popular in the 1970s, and soon more and more people took it seriously. Now the annual London Marathon is like a carnival, with a million people watching as the world's star runners are followed by 25,000 ordinary people trying to complete the course. Most of them succeed and then collect money from supporters for charitable causes. Many thousands of people take part in local marathons all over Britain.

*The Highland Games*

Scottish Highland Games,at which sports (including tossing the caber, putting the weight and throwing the hammer), dancing and piping competitions take place, attract large numbers of spectators from all over the world.

These meetings are held every year in different places in the Scottish Highlands. They include the clans led by their pipers, dressed in their kilts, tartan plaids, and plumed bonnets, who march round the arena.

The features common to Highland Games are bagpipe and High­land dancing competitions and the performance of heavy athletic events — some of which, such as tossing the caber, are Highland in ori­gin. All competitors wear Highland dress, as do most of the judges. The games take place in a large roped-off arena. Several events take place at the same time: pipers and dancers perform on a platform; athletes toss the caber, put the weight, throw the hammer, and wrestle. There is also a competition for the best-dressed Highlander.

Highland dancing is performed to bagpipe music, by men and women, such as the Sword Dance and the Reel.

No one knows exactly when the men of the Highlands first gathered to wrestle, toss cabers, throw hammers, put weights, dance and play music. The Games reflected the tough life of the early Scots. Muscle-power was their means of livelihood — handling timber, lifting rocks to build houses, hunting. From such activities have developed the contests of tossing the caber, putting the weight and throwing the hammer. Tossing the caber originated among woodmen who wanted to cast their logs into the deepest part of a river. Tossing the caber is not a question of who can throw it farthest. For a perfect throw the caber must land in the 12-o'clock position after be­ing thrown in a vertical semicircle. The caber is a very heavy and long log..

*Conker Contest and British Marbles Championship*

Every year, usually on the Wednesday nearest to 20th October, about a hundred competitors gather to take part in the annual conker competition in a chosen place. The conkers are collected by children from an avenue of chestnut trees. The conkers are carefully examined and numbered on their flat sides, then bored and threaded on nylon cord. Each competitor is allowed an agreed number of "strikes", and a referee is present to see fair play. There are prizes for winners and runners-up. The contest usually starts at about 7 p. m.

It is said that in Elizabethan times two suitors for a village beauty settled the matter by means of a marbles contest. What is now the Marble Championship is believed to be a survival of that contest. The game of marbles dates back to Roman times. Teams of six compete on a circular, sanded rink. Forty-nine marbles are placed in the centre of the rink, and the players try to knock out4 as many as possible with their marble. The marble is rested on the index finger and flicked5 with the thumb. The two highest individual scores battle for the champion­ship with only thirteen marbles on the rink. Similar contests are now held in some other English-speaking countries.

INFORMATION

*The well-known sporting events*

*The Boat Race:* (between Oxford and Cambridge universities), on the River Thames

in London at Easter. The course is over seven kilometres. Oxford have won 64

times, Cambridge 69 times.

*The Wimbledon Tennis Tournament:* in July, at Wimbledon, south London, regarded

by many tennis players as the most important championship to win. There is great

public interest in the tournament. Many tennis fans queue all night outside the

grounds in order to get tickets for the finals.

*The Open Golf Championship:* golf was invented by the Scots, and its headquarters

is at the Royal and Ancient Golf Club, St. Andrews, Scotland.

*Henley (Rowing) Regatta:* at Henley on the Thames (between London and Oxford).

An international summer event. It is a fashionable occasion.

Cowes *Week:* a yachting regatta. Cowes is a small town on the Isle of Wight,

opposite Southampton, and a world-famous yachting centre.

**CONCLUSION**

At the end of my course paper I want to make a short review of what I have already written and write what I haven’t written.

Many kinds of sport originated from England. The English have a proverb, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." They do not think that play is more important than work; they think that Jack will do his work better if he plays as well, so he is encouraged to do both. Association football, or socceris one of the most popular games in the British Isles played from late August until the beginning of May. In summer the English national sport is cricket. When the English say: 'that's not cricket' it means 'that's not fair', 'to play the game' means 'to be fair'.

Golf is Scotland's chief contribution to British sport. It is worth noting here an interesting feature of sporting life in Britain, namely, its frequently close connection with social class of the players or specta­tors except where a game may be said to be a "national" sport. This is the case with cricket in England which is played and watched by all classes. This is true of golf, which is everywhere in the British Isles a middle-class activity. Rugby Union, the amateur variety of Rugby football, is the Welsh national sport played by all sections of society whereas, elsewhere, it too is a game for the middle classes. Association football is a working-class sport as are boxing, wrestling, snooker,darts and dog-racing. As far as fishing is concerned it is, apart from being the most popular British sport from the angle of the number of active participants, a sport where what is caught determines the class of a fisherman. If it is a salmon or trout it is upper-class, but if it is the sort offish found in canals, ponds or the sea, then the angler is almost sure to be working-class.

Walking and swimming are the two most popular sporting activi­ties, being almost equally undertaken by men and women. Snooker (billiards), pool and darts are the next most popular sports among men. Aerobics (keep-fit exercises) and yoga, squash and cycling are among the sports where participation has been increasing in recent years.

There are several places in Britain associated with a particular kind of sport. One of them is Wimbledon — a suburb to the south of Lon­don where the All-England Lawn Tennis Championships are held in July (since 1877). The finals of the tournament are played on the Cen­tre Court. The other one is Wembley — a stadium in north London where international football matches, the Cup Finals and other events have taken place since 1923. It can hold over 100,000 spectators. The third one is Derby, the most famous flat race in the English racing calendar, it is run at Epsom near London since 1780.

Having written my course paper I think that I have proved sport’s deserving attention. Especially sport is a very interesting theme concerning the United Kingdom. Of course, I couldn’t illustrate all Britain sports, but which I still do reflect Britain’s life with all contradictory combinations. Both life is calm and exciting, and sport is calm with golf’s followers and exciting with football’s fans.

**QUESTIONS**

1. Which is the English summer national sport?
2. Which kinds of sport can you name in English?
3. Which game can be called the most popular game in the world?
4. How many players are there in a football team?
5. What has given British football a bad name recently?
6. What is a football pool?
7. Football is played chiefly with the feet. What about rugby?
8. How do Rugby Union and Rugby League differ from each other?
9. What is called a test match in cricket?
10. Which place in Britain is associated with lawn tennis champion­ships?
11. Which place in Britain is associated with a yachting regatta?
12. Which famous horse-race meetings does the Queen call on?
13. What kinds of racing do you know?
14. What events take place at Scottish Highland Games?
15. Where is the Royal and Ancient Golf Club located?
16. What was about half of all money bet on in 1993?
17. What is a ‘conker’?
18. What is ‘jogging’?
19. What is more important in sports: the ability to win a victory or the ability to lose without anger; absolute fairness or physical power?
20. What English idioms which have come from the world of sport do you know?

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