**Sports in Great Britain, the USA and Russia**

The British like sport very much. They are fond of all kinds of sports. Many sports were invented in Great Britain and then spread throughout the world. Sports became popular long ago. In the 19-th century sport was organised at public schools so that young people could develop their physical abilities. But shortly afterwards the idea was borrowed by businessmen who started to organise football and other sports for their workers. From the 1960s commercial companies began to sponsor different British sports and activities. The national British sports are: football, golf, cricket, tennis, racing, darts. Like everyone else the British adore football. Moreover, the Englishmen invented it.

Nobody can say for sure when people started playing football on the British Isles. It is important however, that current uniform rules of the game were settled only in the 19-th century. At that time there was a great debate, whether one could use his hand to kick the ball or not. Those who wanted to permit the players to carry the ball with their hands united to form rugby. Rugby is played by teams of 15 men with an oval ball. Those who insisted on playing with feet and head only had the majority and that was the beginning of football as everybody knows it today. In Great Britain and more often in the United States football is called soccer to distinguish the game from American football, the game that has much in common with rugby.

Soccer, played almost in all countries, remains one of the most popular games in Great Britain. Each team consists of field players and one goalkeeper. Only the goalkeeper is permitted to take the ball into his hands. The game lasts for 90 minutes with a 15 minute break between two halves 45 minutes each. Most British towns and cities have a football team. Every year, each team in England plays in the Football Association competition. The two best teams play in the Cup Final at Wembley Stadium in London. It is one of the biggest sporting events of the year.

Another traditional British game is cricket. Unlike football cricket is not widely spread outside the British Isles. Cricket is a summer game, it is played in schools, colleges, universities. Cricket is a very long and a very slow game. There are two teams. Each team consists of eleven men. The "bowler" throws the ball, and a "batsman" hits it with his bat.

Tennis is also very popular in Britain. Two different games that do not have much in common bear the name of tennis - lawn tennis and table tennis. Both games first appeared in England, but today the British prefer lawn tennis to table tennis. Every summer, in June, the biggest tournament in the world takes place at Wimbledon. This world centre of lawn tennis is located in a suburb of London. Millions of people watch the Wimbledon Championship on TV. Table tennis originated in England in 1880. But the British players are not lucky in table tennis international championships.

Englishmen like all kinds of racing. Horseracing, motorcar racing, boat racing, dog-racing, donkey racing are very popular in England. The most famous boat racing in England is between Oxford and Cambridge. It first started in 1820 and has been held almost every spring since 1836. A lot of people come to watch this competition between England's leading universities.

Americans are interested in different sports and activities. The major American sports are ice hockey, baseball, American football and basketball. The large choice of sports in America can be explained by the variety and size of the country, its different climates and the people's love of competitions of any type. The seasons of the "four major sports" often overlap.

Baseball is the most popular summer sport in America. But the first baseball games start in warm, sunny regions like Florida and Arizona in winter. The first American baseball match was held in 1839 in New York. There is an opinion that baseball comes from a much older game, played in Europe for many years. To play baseball, two teams of nine players are needed. The "pitcher" throws the ball, and the "batter" hits it with a bat. Americans start playing baseball young. There are "leagues" which children of eight can join. The top players become big stars.

Americans play most international sports, but they do not play football in the same way as the rest of the world. American football is a game that does not have much in common with soccer. The players can run with a ball, touch and push each other. The field is not traditional, and even the shape of the ball is different. American football players wear helmets on their heads, because the game is very dangerous. American football teams have eleven players.

Basketball was invented in the United States. A schoolteacher designed the rules for a game that his students could play indoors. There are only five players in a basketball team. Usually basketball players are very tall and they show that basketball can be exciting. Ice hockey is America's favourite winter game. It is very fast. It can be dangerous and its players wear helmets too. Other sports and activities attract millions of participants and spectators in the USA. These are swimming, tennis, marathons, bowling, crosscountry skiing, skating, and badminton. Now triathlon is one of the most popular sports in the USA. Ч comprises swimming, bicycle racing and long-distance running.

Many sports are popular in Russia. There are many stadiums and public sports facilities here. Numerous national and international matches and competitions are regularly held in our country. They attract large numbers of fans. Most of the important games are shown on TV. Football is believed to be Russia's favourite sport in summer, while many young people play ice hockey in winter. Our country has been successful in different sports, especially in ice hockey. During the Olympic Games the Russian athletes prove the reputation of Russia as world's leading nation in sports. The national team of Russia has many times won the World Hockey Championships.

In Russia much attention is paid to organised sports and this shouldn't overshadow the many sporting activities which are part of daily Russian life. School children spend their free time playing football, basketball and other sports. In winter many Russians go in for skiing and skating. There are many skating rinks in the cities.

- Is sport popular in your country?

- Today there is widespread interest in sport in Russia.

- What games do you play at school?

- -During PT classes pupils play football, basketball, volleyball. Pupils also do many exercises that help them to keep fit. In winter schools organise skiing competitions.

- What games are popular in Russia?

- Football, ice hockey and volleyball are sure to be the most popular games in Russia. A lot of fans go to the stadium to support their teams. When it is not possible to go to the stadium to support the favourite team people can watch competitions on TV. Television has made sports available to all. The emphasis on sports is evident in evening news programmes.

- What football teams are popular in Russia?

- There are many good football teams in Russia. Moscow "Spartak" is the strongest and the most popular team in Russia. Thousands of "Spartak" supporters go to the stadium to see their team play. As for me, I prefer another Moscow team, "Locomotive." There are good players in "Loco" and this team has a great potential. I am sure that soon "Loco" will take the place of "Spartak" as the nation's champion.

- What British football teams do you know?

- In Great Britain there are four football championships that are held separately: in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The best players are in England. Many football players from continental Europe come to play for English teams. I guess that today the strongest football team on the British Isles is Manchester "United", although London "Arsenal" and "Chelsea" as well as Blackburn "Rovers" are fearful rivals. Scotland is noted for its Glasgow "Rangers."

- Is football popular in the United States?

- Yes, it is. Football is extremely popular in the United States, but they have different rules of the game. The fact is that in the United States when they say football they mean American football, while European football is usually referred to as soccer. In the recent years soccer is gaining its popularity in the United States as well. In 1994 World Football Championship took place in the United States. Nevertheless in the United States soccer is especially popular among girls, while boys prefer sports that are more traditional for their country - American football, baseball and basketball.

- Are you keen on sport?

- Although sport plays an important role in my life, I do not go in for it professionally. My choice of the sports depends upon the season. In summer I like to swim in the lakes and rivers and in winter I like to skate. Skating is a widespread activity among my friends. There are many skating rinks in our town. As for jogging I do it every morning all year round.

- Is sport important for your family?

- Yes, it is. Our family is doing sports on the amateur level. My father is an avid chess player. My mother likes walking in the parks. My sister prefers to get fit at home. She has a lot of books and video-cassettes with instructions how to do home exercise programmes. Although I do not go in for sports, I am fond of such activities that allow me to keep fit at home. I prefer jogging. We also like to watch football, ice-hockey and tennis matches on TV.

- What do American school and colleges use sports activities far?

- American schools and colleges use sports activities as a way of teaching social values. Among these are teamwork and sportsmanship. The average high school offers its students a great variety of sports, including rowing, wrestling, tennis and golf. That is why Americans have done well in many kinds of sports.

- What is regarded as an ideal in the USA?

- Being intelligent and being good in sports are regarded as an ideal. There are many colleges that have excellent academic reputation and are also good in sports.

- What worries professional American athletes today?

- Today sport becomes more and more professional. But it is possible to show high results only at a certain age. Many sportsmen have to terminate their professional career in their thirties. At present professional athletes are concerned with getting a good education that will allow them to find good jobs when their playing days are over.

- Are there special "universities" for sports in the USA?

- There are no separate "universities" for sports in the USA. Everyone in America can participate in sports activities. Public sports facilities have always been available in great number for participants.