**What is better watching sports or participating in sports?**

Nowadays sport and recreation have become an important feature in the people's life. But tastes differ and different people have different attitudes to sport and recreation. Some people prefer to watch different sports events, others choose to participate in them actively. Watching other people playing is a popular leisure activity. Large crowds attend numerous national and international occasions; millions watch them on television.

Among the most popular sports are football, hockey, basketball, tennis, and motor racing. Many people assemble to watch these competitions. World Football, Hockey and Basketball Championships attract people from all over the world who cover great distances in order to support their favourite team. Wimbledon Championship is the most important tournament of lawn tennis, while Grand Prix is the major motor racing competition. But of cause the most important sport event is the Olympiad that takes place every four years.

Most of the important games are shown on TV. In many countries there are special TV channels that broadcast sports programmes for 24 hours. The major sporting competitions, such as the Olympic games, are shown on the central TV channels attracting millions of people who can be thousands of kilometres away from the event. Popularity of sports differs from country to country. In Latin America football stadiums are always crowded, while the Russian fans are so disappointed with the poor performance of our football teams that many prefer not to watch the games even on TV.

I can not agree that it is good to disapprove of watching sports events and approve of participating in sports. The desire to follow the example of sports stars induces people to take up sports that they used to watch seriously. For example many young Russians are fond of playing football. Even if the Russian teams are far from being the best in the world, Brazilian, Italian and French players become the example that young people try hard to follow.

In the past decades people's involvement in sport and recreation have grown considerably. Now there is a large variety of available opportunities and facilities. Sport is the best and the shortest way to health and fitness. Increasing number of people are involved today in activities that help them keep fit and enjoy life. Physical recreation tends to be informal and non-competitive and may include, for example, cycling, boating, jogging. Dancing has become a very popular recreation. Many Russians have started learning Latin American dances, such as samba, rumba, cha-cha-cha.

Sport and recreation facilities provided at schools and universities enable young athletes to develop their talents. In Russia schools and universities participate in sports tournaments, for example in football and basketball. Many facilities are made available by local clubs and parks. There are commercial facilities, which include bowling centres, skating rinks, tennis courts and riding stables.

According to the latest figures the most popular activity of all is walking. It is a well known fact that walking for an hour every day is more healthy than rare and irregular participation in any of the more active physical activities. To keep fit some people attend special classes or take part in aerobics or yoga, do some kind of weight training in a gym. Others play football, badminton, tennis.

Evidently participating in sports has more advantages than simply watching sports competitions. At the same time these two kinds of activities are tightly interconnected. Professional sport is important not only for the professional athletes, one of its missions is to propagandise and popularise sports activities on the everyday level. At the same time it is always an individual preference. And only the individual has the right to decide what is better for him. But whatever the choice is, the pleasure is undoubted.

- Do you like to watch sports events on TV?

- Yes, of course. It is wonderful that television is bringing all kinds of sports to our homes. Sometimes I go to the stadium to watch a game, but more often I stay at home and watch matches on TV.

- What sports do you prefer to watch?

- Football and tennis are my favourite sports. I try not to miss the most important football and lawn tennis tournaments and watch them on TV. The fact that I prefer to watch sports competitions on TV does not mean that I am lazy. Unfortunately, Russia is not the major football or tennis power. There is only one important tennis tournament that is held in Moscow - the Kremlin Cup, and the best football teams do not come to Moscow to play too often. Thus, if I want to see really good matches I shall either go abroad or watch TV. For example, in the summer of 2002 there was a World Football Championship that took place in Japan and Korea. Although it would have been nice to visit those countries, was the best possibility of seeing the strongest football teams play simply turning on the TV set.

- Do you play football or tennis yourself?

- Yes, I do, although not very often. Several years ago I used to do tennis. Once I was even thinking of pursuing a professional career, but now all that is in the past. I prefer watching others play tennis to playing myself. As for football, I have been a football fan from my childhood. My grandfather was the first to teach me to play football. Since then thousands of times I have played football with my friends and classmates. I think that the best time for playing football is early autumn and late spring. After classes my friends and I go to the playing ground, take a ball and we can really play for hours. In summer my friends are out of Moscow, while the Russian winter does not induce to playing football.

- Do you admire any athletes?

- Yes, I do. Eugeny Kafelnikov is my favourite tennis player. He is really good in tennis and ranks among the best tennis players of the world. Kafelnikov was the first Russian tennis player who managed to defeat the strongest Western athletes. I hope Eugeny will show excellent results for many years to come. I think that the example of Kafelnikov should inspire many young Russians to play tennis. As for football, I can not, unfortunately, say that there is a particular Russian player whom I admire. My favourite football player is Gabriel Batistuta. He is an Argentinean, but now he is playing in the Italian championship. He is a really gifted athlete, he loves football and makes thousands of fans adore him. At the same time he neither shows any pride nor demonstrates contempt for his fans. This is also very important. Batistuta serves me an example not only as a sportsman but as a personality too.

- Do you have any friends who go in for sports professionally?

- Yes, I do. I have one friend who is doing professional tennis. We started to play tennis together. While I quitted, he continued to pursue a sport career. He works very hard under the supervision of his coach. He takes part in various competitions. He tries to achieve good results, but sometimes they are not perfect. In either case he is pretty sure that one day he will become a good tennis player. His dream is to play with Kafelnikov. My other friends do not take sport seriously. Just for fun they play football or badminton, and I think that they are right. Sport is good while there is not too much of it.