

TYPICAL SPORTS

Each year, millions and millions of people pack stadiums around their country to attend sporting events. Sports fans in English-speaking countries spend an incredible amount of money to see their favourite sports stars perform, and even love to be active amateur sportsmen themselves.



America

Sports play an important part in the lives of Americans. Some sports are popular all over America, while other sports, such as lacrosse or ice-hockey, are popular in certain regions. However, the big three sports still are American football, baseball, and basketball.

American football

Two teams, wearing helmets and pads, throw and run with an oddly-shaped ball (similar to a rugby ball). They block with their bodies and try to help other players on their team gain more ground. If they cross a goal line at the end of the field, they score a touchdown, which is six points.

American football is a very strategic game, and also very rough; many players become injured each year. The biggest football stars of today include: Peyton Manning of the Indianapolis Colts, Donovan McNabb of the Philadelphia Eagles, and Priest Holmes of the Kansas City Chiefs.

Baseball

Baseball is similar to the English game of cricket. Nine players on each team take turns, trying to hit a leather ball with a wooden bat. After the ball is hit, the player runs, stepping on bases, before he returns to where he was when he hit the ball, and scores a run (point) for his team. If the other team touches him with the ball, he is "out" and must leave the field (until his next turn).

Successful baseball players from this past season include: Barry Bonds of the San Francisco Giants, Randy Johnson of the Arizona Diamondbacks, and Pedro Martinez of the Boston Red Sox.

James Branam (USA)

Ireland

Apart from Gaelic football, which has gained significant popularity in Ireland today, hurling, a game similar to hockey, has been a uniquely Irish sport for the last 2,000 years. Played with a small ball and a curved wooden stick, it is Europe's oldest field game, and was brought to Ireland by the Celts. One of the most celebrated hurling players, Cuchúlainn, was the son of the Celtic God Lugh. His exploits on the playing field are still remembered in Irish myth and legend.

John McKeown (Great Britain)



Great Britain

Football continues to be one of the most popular spectator sports today. Teams such as Manchester United and Liverpool battle it out every Saturday afternoon for the league title. Stars such as David Beckham and Michael Owen play for England.

Amongst the minor sports, taekwondo is increasingly popular and together with judo is an Olympic sport. In this fighting event, competitors blend grace and agility with explosive power. They wear protective helmets and body padding. The contest lasts for three rounds, each of which lasts three minutes. Judges decide the winner according to the number of technically correct kicks or blows to the head and body.

Rowing has become popular as a result of the British rower Steve Redgrave achieving gold medals in the Olympics in every Olympic year from 1984 to 2000. In boats designed for two, four or eight people, rowers can reach speeds of up to 36km/h. Each year in March, Cambridge and Oxford universities compete on the River Thames.

Nigel Haward (Great Britain)





New Zealand

Ball-oriented sports are very popular in New Zealand. In winter, Kiwis (New Zealanders) enjoy rugby and indoor netball. In summer, cricket and touch rugby (a gentler form of rugby) are popular, and netball (the outdoors version) becomes commonplace too. Rugby involves all the aspects of ball play - catching, running and kicking. The aim of the game is to try to get the rugby ball across to the other side of the field, between the goalposts. This is usually done through a 'try', which is when a player runs to the posts and puts the ball between them. You have to be strong physically for this game. There are lots of knocks and spills.

The most famous New Zealand player is Jonah Lomu, a very big and strong player who could move exceptionally quickly. He's not playing at the moment though because he had a serious operation last year.

Netball, traditionally a women's game, is now popular with both sexes. It's similar to basketball but the rules are stricter and not as much movement is allowed. The New Zealand team is the best in the world at the moment.

Briony Hill (New Zealand)

Australia

Because of the climate, water sports are popular in Australia - sailing and surfing in coastal areas and water-skiing on rivers and lakes. Summer is the time for tennis, cricket and golf. In winter, cricket grounds make way for the sport unique to Australia - Aussie Rules Football. It began in Melbourne and is now perhaps the biggest national sport.

Two teams of eighteen players kick or punch the oval-shaped ball to each other, but they may not throw it. When a player is running with the ball it has to touch the ground every fifteen meters or it will be given to the other team.

Apart from goals, the highlight for the crowd is when a player takes a 'specky' - i.e. he climbs on the back of another player to catch a high-kicked ball.

Jane Mitchell (Australia)



Canada

All Canadians play and love hockey. Everybody knows Wayne Gretzky, Mario Lemieux, or Tim Horton, Canadian hockey stars. Horton was a tough star defenseman who some say was the strongest man to ever play in the NHL. He joined the Toronto Maple Leafs in 1958 and helped them win the Stanley Cup in 1962, '63, '64, and '67.

However, the national sport in Canada is an indigenous game called lacrosse. It is a field game where each player carries a long-handled racket, called a "crosse." The ball is caught with the crosse and carried on it, or tossed from it, the object being to carry it or throw it through one of the goals placed at opposite ends of the field.

Gerald Taylor (Canada)

