

Sport

Sport (or sports) is all forms of physical activity which aim to use, maintain or improve physical ability and skills. The history of sports dates from ancient times. Several thousand years ago in ancient Egypt sports included javelin throwing, the high jump, wrestling, swimming, and fishing. Polo, jousting and martial arts originated in Persia. A wide range of sports was already established by the time of Ancient Greece, and the military culture and the development of sports in Greece influenced one another considerably. The Greeks created the Olympic Games, which were held every four years in a small village called Olympia from the 8th century BC to the 4th century AD. The idea of the modern Olympic Games was brought back to life by Pierre de Coubertaine, the founder of the International Olympic Committee, in the 19th century. Later, industrialisation brought more leisure time to the citizens of developed countries, and increasing accessibility to sports allowed citizens to attend and follow spectator sports and participate in athletic activities. Mass media and global communication have helped promote the popularity of sport. Professionalism became prevalent, and sports fans began following the exploits of professional athletes through radio, television, and the Internet. On the other hand, many people enjoy the exercise and competition associated with amateur participation in sports.

Various kinds of sports provide entertainment both to the participants and spectators. Participation in sports can require at least two participants, competing as individuals or teams. Sport can be undertaken on an amateur, professional or semi-professional basis. Some sports retain a policy of allowing only *amateur sport*. The amateur participation in sport at lower levels (where enjoyment is the main reason for participation) is called *grassroots sport* and goes in line with a “sport for all” mentality.

Sports are usually governed by a set of rules or customs. They serve to ensure fair competitions. Winning can be determined by physical events, such as scoring goals or crossing a line first, or by the determination of judges who score a technical performance or artistic impression.

Unfortunately, participants can break these rules in order to get advantage. They may choose to cheat in order to satisfy their desire to win, or they may attempt to improve their performance through the use of performance-enhancing drugs. Gambling on the results of sports matches has created the motivation for match fixing. In *organised sport*, records of performance are announced or reported in sport news. Sport is a major source of entertainment for the non-participants, i.e., the spectators. The competitive element of sport has resulted in the popularity of watching sport being played and has led to the specific phenomenon of *spectator sport*. Large crowds arrive at venues to support their favourite sportsmen and teams, or people listen to sports broadcasting at home. Both attendance in person and viewing remotely can involve a substantial charge, such as an entrance ticket, or pay-per-view television broadcast. *Youth sports* provide children with opportunities for fun, socialization, forming peer relationships, physical fitness, and athletic scholarships.

Sports and politics can influence each other to a great extent. Nationalism is often evident in sports events and their reporting. National tensions can lead to violent confrontations among players or spectators. Fortunately, many fans support the fundamental ethos of sports being carried on for its own sake and for the enjoyment of its participants.

Answer the questions:

1. What images spring to mind when you hear the word “sport”?
2. Why do so many people like sport?
3. Why are some people not interested in sport?
4. Would you like to play a sport for a living? Give reasons.
5. What is your country’s national sport? Do you like it?
6. Do you think sports stars have the best life? Explain.
7. Do you play sport for pleasure or to win at all costs?