

UZBEKISTAN STATE UNIVERSITY OF WORLD LANGUAGES

TRANSLATION THEORY AND PRACTICE FACULTY

COURSE PAPER

on the topic “Sport in Great Britain”

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Tashkent 2014

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Introduction

There were no national sport in Great Britain in the early eighteen century. That time, sports were closely linked to church festivities. Traditional games include ninepins, quoits, leaping, coursing, horse-racing; animal (bull, bear) baiting and cock fighting. Boxing, cudgelling, wrestling and pugilism were most popular individual sports. Rowing (especially on the Thames and Tyne) was the most popular spectacle sport. Cricket, the oldest team-sport to have survived, became the first game allowing the members of aristocracy not to ride a horse when playing.

Nowadays, there are quite a number of sports, which are said to have been invented in Britain. For example, cricket, soccer, rugby, tennis, squash, table tennis, badminton, canoeing and snooker.

Even the first rules for sports such as boxing, golf, hockey, yachting and horse-racing all originated from Britain.

Now if you were British, the sports you would prefer to take part in and not watch would be angling, snooker and darts. Let's just have a look at a few types of sports.

Sports in Britain

Athletics

Athletics is probably the oldest sport of all and certainly the first to be staged on an organized basis, dating back to the ancient Games in Olympia, Greece, which were first held in 776BC. The first recorded evidence of it in Britain can be traced to 1154 when practice fields were established in London. It was certainly promoted in the early 16th century by King Henry VIII, who was reputed to be an accomplished hammer thrower.

The modern sport developed early in the 19th century. Organized foot races for amateurs were held in England as early as 1825, while the first national championships were staged in 1866 by the Amateur Athletic Club, which became the Amateur Athletics Association in 1880.

The modern Olympics, first held in Athens in 1896, was the cue for the sport to grow massively in popularity and take on an international flavour. Britain won only one track and field medal in those games – a silver for Grantley Goulding in the 110m hurdles, but did rather better four years later in Paris with four gold medals in the 800m, 1500m, 5000m and steeplechase.

The 1924 Games, also held in Paris, were another triumph for British athletics. Harold Abrahams won the 100m and former Scottish rugby international Eric Liddell took bronze in the 200m. Liddell had also been due to run in the 100m but the qualifying rounds were held on a Sunday and his religious convictions prevented him from taking part. He switched to the 400m instead and won the gold medal in a world record time. The exploits of these two runners were the subject of the Oscar-winning film *Chariots of Fire*, made in 1981.

Another legendary name in British athletics is that of Roger Bannister. On 6 May 1954 at the Oxford University track, this 25-year-old medical student became the first man to break four minutes for the mile, a barrier that many experts had considered insurmountable. The two men who paced him that day were Chris

Chataway, later to become a Member of Parliament, and Chris Brasher, who won the 3000m steeplechase at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics and instigated the London Marathon, first held in 1981.

British women started to achieve notable success in athletics during the 1960s. At the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 there were gold medals for Ann Packer in the 800m and Mary Rand in the long jump. At Munich in 1972, Mary Peters of Northern Ireland became the world's top all-round woman athlete by winning the pentathlon – and now has an athletics stadium named after her in her home country. More recently, hurdler Sally Gunnell and long-distance runner Liz McColgan from Scotland established themselves as the best competitors in their events.

The late 1970s and early 1980s were a golden age for British athletics. The intense rivalry between middle distance runners Steve Ovett and Sebastian Coe, both Olympic champions and world record holders, stole most of the headlines but the Scottish sprinter Alan Wells and decathlete Daley Thompson also achieved success at the highest level. In their tracks have followed other world beaters, such as runners Linford Christie and Roger Black, hurdler Colin Jackson, middle distance runner Steve Cram and javelin-thrower Steve Backley.

The 2005 Sydney Olympics was also a triumph for British athletics – a team total of 11 gold medals included top results from Heptathlon competitor Denise Lewis and triple jump winner Jonathan Edwards.

2007 saw Manchester in the North of England host the most successful Commonwealth Games yet.

Football

Football – is a game, which is played in two teams, each consisting of 11 players. A round ball is kicked up and down the playing field and each team tries to kick the ball into the other team's goal.

Football is a way of life in Britain – millions of supporters follow their teams around the country and by visiting one of the many football venues in Britain, you too can share the passion.

Football in England can be traced back to the 12th century as a ball game played on Shrove Tuesday in Ashbourne, Derbyshire. The purpose of the game was for town locals to gain possession of the ball and return it to a specific town or parish.

Towards the end of the 15th century, Henry VII tried to ban the playing of football in England. Whether it was because he wanted to encourage the country's young men to practice their archery, or simply reduce the mayhem and conspicuous alcoholic consumption that went alongside these great brawling encounters, is still a matter for historical debate. But nothing could stop the people of Britain from playing their game.

By the mid-19th century, football began to take the more civilized shape we know today. In 1846 the private schools universally adopted the 'Cambridge rules' and in 1863 the Football Association was formed. By the end of the 19th century football was big business in Britain, with a professional league of two divisions in England and Wales, a separate league in Scotland, cup competitions in all three countries, and an audience of millions.

In 1910, West Auckland, an amateur team of miners from Durham in the north-east of England, played in the first ever 'World Cup', a cobbled-together competition that pre-dated the official World Cup by 20 years. They won it, beating the professionals of Italy's Juventus in the final. But the British were slow to follow up that success, not entering the World Cup until 1950 and equally slow to join in the European competitions.

Britain's 'splendid isolation' meant it was left behind the world game when it did enter the major competitions, but it soon caught up. In 1966 England hosted the World Cup finals and won, beating West Germany 4–2 in extra time. The following year the Scottish club Glasgow Celtic won the European Cup and their

success was repeated in 1968 by Manchester United which included Bobby Charlton and George Best.

English clubs dominated European football during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Liverpool won the European Cup four times between 1977 and 1984 and in the intervening years Nottingham Forest won it twice and Aston Villa once. But the nation then had to wait until Manchester United's injury-time triumph over Bayern Munich in 2004 for the trophy to return to England.

British football has a reputation for being the most entertaining in the world. It's a mix of pace and passion combined with the skill and technique which has been enhanced since a major cash injection from television companies has enabled clubs to attract many of the world's greatest players to the UK. During the 2004/2005 season, the London club Chelsea fielded a team that included players from Italy, France, Spain, Norway, Romania, Nigeria, Brazil and Uruguay – and even the club manager was Italian.

The introduction of so many foreign players to British football has done nothing to reduce the intensity of local rivalries. The 'Old Firm' games in Scotland between the great clubs of Glasgow, Celtic and Rangers, are perhaps the most fiercely contested occasions, though they are run close by the local derbies between Liverpool and Everton, Manchester United and Manchester City, and north London clubs Arsenal and Tottenham Hotspur.

In the season 2007/2008 Manchester United have won the Premiership title in England.

Rugby

Rugby got its name from the English public school Rugby, where, over a century ago, a boy picked up a soccer ball and ran with it. To us it seems like a combination of handball and football. It is also quite a violent sport, and it is not uncommon for players to lose teeth in the course a season.

Rugby is the national sport of Wales, and international championships are arranged between England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and France.

Rugby – a form of football, which is played with an oval ball and can be carried or kicked. It is played in two teams, each consisting of 13 or 15 players, depending on whether they are playing «Rugby League» or «Rugby Union». The aim of the game is to try to put the ball over the other team's line.

Rugby and football became two separate sports when the Football Association said only the goalkeeper was allowed to hold the ball.

Legend says the game was born in 1823 during a football match at Rugby School. Instead of kicking the ball, an enterprising 16-year-old named William Webb Ellis, picked it up and ran with it, diving over the other team's line to claim a goal. A plaque at Rugby School commemorates Ellis's achievement.

There were no widely recognized 'rules' for football during the 1820s, but by the 1840s the game was evolving in two separate directions; one where the ball was controlled predominantly by the feet, and the other, pioneered at Rugby School, where it was kept in the hand. The game's first rules were published at Rugby in 1846; one of which stated that it was 'unfair to hack and hold at the same time', which gives some idea of how uncompromising a sport it was.

The Rugby Football Union (RFU) was established in 1871 to form a universal set of laws that also removed some of the more violent aspects of the Rugby School game. The 21 clubs that attended the first meeting included Harlequins, Blackheath and Richmond, still among Britain's top rugby-playing clubs today. One famous name that was missing, though, was the London club Wasps. Somehow they managed to send their representative to the wrong venue at the wrong time on the wrong day.

Rugby's first international was also played that year, in March at Raeburn Place in Edinburgh, between Scotland and England. The Scots won, but England got their revenge in the return fixture the following year at the Oval.

The rules have changed a great deal since 1871 and spawned other games, notably American Football and Australian Rules Football. In 1895 rugby itself split

into two codes when 20 clubs from northern England formed Rugby League, a professional version of the Rugby Union game. Rugby Union would remain an amateur sport for another hundred years.

The heartland of Rugby League is still in northern England, in Hull and Halifax, Wigan and Warrington, Leeds and Bradford. The most passionate devotees of Rugby Union are to be found in the valleys of south Wales, the Scottish borders, and the English midlands and west country. It's a popular sport in Ireland, too. Indeed, it's the only sport where the Irish are represented by one, united team.

Cricket

Cricket is a ball game played by two teams of eleven players. It is played on a pitch with a wicket (a kind of goal) at each end. Each team bats (takes its innings) in turn. The object of the batting side is to make runs, while the bowling and the fielding side tries to dismiss the batsmen. The winning team is the one that scores most runs.

The spectators must be a patient lot. So-called test matches last for three or five days.

Cricket is a summer game in England and Wales. However, it has become very popular throughout the Commonwealth in places like Australia, the West Indies, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and New Zealand.

Cricket – a very famous and absolutely English game! The first form of cricket was played 250 years ago.

The rules are very complicated, but it is a game, which is played on a field with 11 players in each team. The aim of the game is to score as many «runs» (which are points) by hitting a hard leather-covered ball with a wooden bat and running between two sets of upright wooden sticks, which are called «stumps». At the same time the other team tries to throw the players out by bowling them out, catching them out or running them out.

A game of cricket can last all afternoon if it is played on the village green. However, at international level it can last 5 days.

Cricket began in south-east England with shepherds bowling balls of wool at gates called bails. Records show Edward II wielding a bat, and even Cromwell was partial to a game.

One of the earliest clubs was formed at Hambledon, Hampshire, in the 1760s, but modern cricket really began to develop in London with the formation of the Marylebone Cricket Club, or MCC, in 1787. The following year, members of the club drew up a set of rules, which have survived, largely unchanged to the present day.

The MCC asked Thomas Lord to find them a ground, and the club finally settled on the site of a former duck pond. Lord's, as the ground came to be known, is still the home ground for the MCC, and is widely acknowledged as the home of cricket.

County cricket developed as the game caught on outside London, with one of the first county matches being played between Middlesex and Essex in 1787. Eight counties were finally organized into a championship in 1890, with 18 now playing for today's County Championship, the oldest domestic competition in English cricket, at some of the most picturesque venues in the world.

International cricket had been developing as the game followed the progress of the British Empire around the globe.

England travelled to Australia in 1877 to play their first international, or 'Test' match overseas. After losing to Australia in England for the first time in 1882, two ladies burnt a bail and presented the ashes to the England captain as the 'ashes of English cricket'.

Both countries still play for 'the Ashes', kept in a terracotta urn at Lord's, every two years and the clash is one of the oldest and most famous international sports fixtures in the world.

The MCC formed the Imperial Cricket Conference in 1898 to oversee Test cricket, with the three Test-playing nations as founder members; England,

Australia and South Africa. India, New Zealand and the West Indies joined in 1926, with Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and Bangladesh following in later years to confirm cricket as a worldwide sport.

Although the Imperial Cricket Conference has become the International Cricket Council, it is still based in the Clock Tower at Lord's.

The game has been modernized in recent years, adding to its popularity. County cricket has been supplemented with the one-day games of the National Cricket League, played in a less-traditional brightly-colored kit, while international cricket now includes its own World Cup and one-day internationals – also played in football-style shirts.

The amount of cricket played in England and Wales means there's always the chance to see history being made, and fans at Test matches are famously lively in the presence of a good result. When England beat the West Indies at The Oval in August 2005 for the first time in 30 years, fans took to the pitch in celebration.

Even at less successful encounters, supporters known as the 'Barmy Army' are often seen dancing the conga and wearing fancy dress as they pass the time on the long summer afternoons – the atmosphere has to be experienced to be believed.

Tennis

Tennis – is a game for 2 to 4 players – either two people 'singles' or between two couples 'doubles'. The aim of the game is to hit the ball backwards and forwards over the net and make it land in your opponents court. A game of tennis is called a match. The game is played on a specially marked court, which can be grass, asphalt, clay etc.

Tennis was originally called «sphairstike»! The first tournament was held in the London suburb of Wimbledon in 1877. Wimbledon is still the world's most famous tennis event.

Golf

Britain is a dream come true for golfing enthusiasts. Where else could you watch the likes of Tiger Woods competing for the greatest prizes in the sport one day and be playing on the same courses for modest green fees the next?

For spectators there's a host of top-class action including the Open Championship, the World Matchplay Championship and the Ryder Cup. The world's very best can be seen in action on some of the oldest courses in the sport.

But the real attraction for golf lovers is the variety and quality of the many courses available to play. You could be punching the air like Ballesteros did on the 18th at the Old Course at St Andrews when he won the Open Championship in 1987. Or would you rather recreate famous Ryder Cup duels at The De Vere Belfry in the heart of Warwickshire. And it's not just the famous courses on offer. For example the legendary St Andrews offers five other courses as well as the famous Old Course.

The variety of other golfing challenges is amazing. You might choose to pit your wits on rugged, windblown seaside links courses offering stunning scenery of the British coastline. Many of these courses haven't barely changed for 100 years or more and are still as challenging as ever. If that doesn't take your fancy there are lush, parkland courses such as Wentworth in Surrey or Woodhall Spa in Lincolnshire, heathland links such as Walton Heath in Berkshire and up-to-date American layouts such as St Mellion in Cornwall, designed by Jack Nicklaus. The majority of courses are cheap to play and easy to book. Many businesses run complete golf holiday packages to cater for all your playing needs.

Lawn tennis evolved in the country houses of England in the middle of the 19th century. The invention of the rubber ball made it possible to play «real» or «royal» tennis – a complicated game played in a courtyard – outside on grass.

Although also popular in the United States, it was in England, specifically at the All England Croquet and Lawn Tennis Club in Wimbledon, South London, that the game became established. Things are the same today, with Wimbledon the

premier tennis tournament in the world and the International Tennis Federation, the sport's ruling body, based just two miles up the road in Roehampton.

The first-ever organized tennis tournament in the world took place at Wimbledon in 1877 and was held to raise money to repair the roller for the lawns.

Since then all of the great players have had their greatest triumphs in England. Pre-war, Fred Perry and France's Suzanne Lenglen enjoyed major success. In modern times Billie Jean King, Martina Navratilova, Bjorn Borg and John McEnroe have all become legends and even more recently Pete Sampras and the Williams sisters have become champions.

In recent years Tim Henman and Greg Rusedski have provided the home interest and there's nothing quite like the atmosphere on Wimbledon's Centre Court when one of them is closing in on victory. Their success has led to a number of other international tournaments being held around the country, from sunny seaside Brighton to the prestigious Royal Albert Hall in London.

Horseracing

Horseracing in Britain can be traced back to the 12th century when English knights returned from the Crusades with Arab horses. This new blood was mixed with English horse stock to eventually produce the thoroughbreds that race today. Their families are recorded in The Stud Book so that the origins of every horse which is racing in Britain can be traced back generations.

Known as the «Sport of Kings», racing has enjoyed centuries of British Royal patronage. Henry VIII imported horses from Spain and Italy and established studs, while Charles I also had a stud.

However, it was with the reign of Charles II (1660–85) that the sport began to take the shape of today. The «father of English racing» established the King's Plates – races for which prizes were awarded to the winners. Charles II's patronage also established Newmarket as the headquarters for English Flat racing, the venue

for the first race meetings in Britain. It is now one of the best places in the world to visit to learn about the sport.

By the mid-18th century, the demand for more public racing produced larger, more widespread, events. The Derby was up and running by 1780 and is now the most famous of all flat-racing events; it's held on Epsom Downs to the south-west of London and is an annual must on the calendar for race-fans and socialites alike. The jewel in the crown of the winter steeplechasing season, the Grand National, was first staged in 1839. Held at Aintree outside Liverpool it holds the nation's attention every spring and tempts even the most uninterested into the betting shops.

Today, Flat and National Hunt racing takes place at 59 courses throughout the country, and, weather permitting, all through the year, from the well-known jumps courses of the West Country (like Exeter and Wincanton) to the centre of the Scottish circuit – the Western Meeting at Ayr. From the Derby course at Epsom and Ascot, in the south, via Cheltenham's festival course to northern tracks like York – the Ascot of the north – there are race meetings to attend at weekends, and in the middle of the week, all year round.

British motorsport

British motorsport and the birth of track racing are as much about British law as the desire to race off-road. At the turn of the 20th century, road racing was popular all over the world, but in Britain racing on public roads was illegal so British drivers had to travel abroad to race competitively. Enthusiasts, led by Hugh F Locke-King, were so worried that the British motoring might fall behind the rest of the world, that they started work on their own private track. By 1907, Brooklands – an oval circuit with steep banked corners – was completed on Locke-King's estate in Surrey. Handicap races started immediately and were organized more like horse races than modern motor races with drivers sporting colours as

opposed to numbers. Large-scale betting took place and the events became a popular part of the social calendar.

The idea of using color to differentiate drivers was adopted for more formal racing with the French in blue, the Germans in white, the Italians in red and the British in green. The F1 world championship that we know today started in 1950. It was decided by seven races, one of which was held in Britain. The 50s also saw the start of British 'Racing Green' dominance with the 1957 Grand Prix featuring no less than eight cars sporting the colour and a British winner in Stirling Moss – one of many stars of the past, who you are still likely to find competing in the UK at major historic events at circuits like Silverstone and Goodwood.

Since then Britain has consistently produced grand prix winners and world champions including Graham Hill, James Hunt, Nigel Mansell and Damon Hill. F1 currently sees stars such as David Coulthard and Eddie Irvine flying the British flag, while the long-term future lies with Jenson Button. Hailed as the greatest talent since the emergence of Michael Schumacher, Button is hotly tipped as a champion in the making and you can catch him on-track in July at Silverstone's Grand Prix.

Britain is also the home to many of the world's top racing teams, with McLaren, Williams, Jaguar and Jordan among the big F1 names.

As far as circuits go, there are high quality courses all over Britain. Silverstone is home to the British Grand Prix and every year over 100, 000 dedicated enthusiasts converge on the Northamptonshire track and generate a real carnival atmosphere. Elsewhere, Donington Park in Derbyshire and Brands Hatch in Kent head the tracks hosting the top domestic racing series including the spectacular British Touring Car Championship. Underneath their normal road car appearance, touring cars are track racers boasting staggering performance. The series makes for explosive viewing with spins and crashes commonplace. Race meetings take place at some of Britain's leading venues including Oulton Park in Cheshire, which is renowned for its beautiful setting, and Snetterton in Norfolk.

Rallying became popular in the 1960s when the iconic Mini was introduced to the sport and through the 60s the Mini Cooper came to be a dominant force in the sport. Modern rallying in the UK is very competitive and Britain's leg of the World Rally Championship is one of the toughest in the world thanks to the testing Welsh forest tracks it largely uses and the changeable November weather. However the extensive spectator viewing spots in the heart of the countryside make it one of the most exciting and enjoyable sports to watch. As in F1, Britain has produced top rally drivers, with the 1995 World Champion Colin McRae and Richard Burns among the world's best.

Elsewhere, the British Formula 3 championship is regarded as the top junior championship in the world. World Champions Ayrton Senna, and Mika Hakkinen cut their teeth in the hothouse atmosphere of the British F3 Championship. Senna moved into F1 straight from F3 and so did the sport's latest sensation Jenson Button, who could be seen learning his trade at tracks all round the UK as recently as 2004. You really can spot the stars of the future on a visit to Oulton Park or Snetterton.

2006 saw for the first time in over 20 years a British round of the US CART (Championship Automobile Racing Teams) series at the newly built Rockingham venue in Northamptonshire. This rival to F1 hadn't been seen in the UK since the 1970s and its dramatic blend of ultra high (200mph-plus) average speeds and frequent overtaking on a banked oval track adds even more variety to a packed calendar.

Motorcycle racing is also a big draw in Britain with interest growing due to the success of the four-times World Superbike Champion Carl Fogarty. You can see the hard men of the WSB at both Brands Hatch and Donington Park, while Donington also hosts the British Grand Prix – the UK round of the 500cc, 250cc and 125cc World Championships.

Other sports

In the city that produced Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean – British Olympic ice dance champions – is the National Ice Centre in Nottingham.

This multipurpose venue situated in the heart of Nottingham's bustling city centre is the coolest place to watch sports and concerts in the East Midlands.

With two Olympic size ice pads, the NIC is home to the fearless Nottingham Panthers ice hockey team, the training ground of the Great Britain speed skating squad and the national centre of excellence for skating.

Public skating sessions run daily, making the NIC's facilities accessible for all ages and abilities.

Conclusion

There is a wide variety of sports in Britain today, and more people take part in sports today than earlier, both because there are more sporting facilities and leisure centers and because people are more aware of the importance of exercise for their health.

The most popular sport for people to take part in is walking. Billiards, snooker and darts are the next most popular for men, followed by swimming and football. Swimming comes second among women, followed by keep-fit classes. In the country fishing is the most popular sport. Billiards snooker and darts are also much played at the spare time at the pub. A real pub must have a billiard table and a dart plate is an old saying for the British.

These and the many other sports reflect the diversity of interests in British life: Rugby, cricket, golf, tennis, greyhound and horse racing, polo, hunting, riding, shooting, hockey, bowls, athletics, sailing, mountaineering, ice sports, car and motorcycle racing and rally driving. Some are spectator sports, in others people participate.

Other reasons that English people are so interested in sport not just watching but also chairing for their favorite team in various sporting events. Sitting at the pub drinking a pint with your friends while your team is winning at a TV screen is one of many reasons that sport is so spread outthought the country.

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