

WORLD OF SPORT

*An energetic exploration
of the sports we play*

Written by
Lawrence Alexander

Illustrated by
Violeta Noy

HOW SPORT BEGAN

People have always enjoyed getting together and competing to find out who's the strongest, fastest or best at something. Humans have been playing sport since ancient times.



Pelota purépecha was played in the ancient Mexican city of Teotihuacán as long ago as 1500 BCE. It was a bit like hockey except the ball was on fire!

In *chunkey*, played for centuries by Native Americans, a stone disc was rolled across the ground. Teams throw spears to predict where they thought it would land.

The ancient Mayan ballgame of *pitz* was invented sometime between 2,000 and 4,500 years ago. Competitors had to get a ball through a stone hoop without using their hands.

Sometimes rival cities settled disagreements with *pitz* instead of going to war.

Wall paintings made in caves in Lascaux, France, around 20,000 years ago, seem to show people running and wrestling.

Some ancient Egyptian tomb paintings demonstrate wrestling positions.

Stone *pitz* hoops can still be seen in ruined Mayan ball courts in South America.

WHAT WAS THE FIRST SPORT?

Can you see any ancient cave paintings on the map? We don't know for certain what the world's first sport was, but we can guess from these ancient artworks.

The army of ancient Rome played *harpastum*, a dangerous sport a bit like rugby, as a way of training their soldiers.

During the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046–771 BCE), archery was part of the education of wealthy men.

In *boat jousting*, two people in a boat would fight with long poles or 'jances'. Ancient Egyptian carvings show fisherman jousting. They tried to push each other into the river Nile!

The Māori of New Zealand participated in a competition known as the *Māori Games* – often between neighbouring villages. Men, women and children all competed in canoe races, athletics and martial arts.

GRAND BEGINNINGS

The first competitive sport we know about was recorded in a famous story, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, from 2100 BCE. In it King Gilgamesh fights a wild man to see who is stronger.

Mongolian cave paintings from 7,000 years ago show people wrestling in front of spectators.

Surfing has been popular in the Pacific for hundreds of years. In Hawaii, chiefs competed in fierce competitions, and good surfers could win high social status.

TRACK AND FIELD SPORTS

Track and field sports take place within an oval running track. Track events are running competitions and in field events, athletes compete in jumping and throwing contests.

JAVELIN

Javelins are descended from spears, one of humankind's oldest weapons. The first modern Olympic javelin event was in London, UK, in 1908. Women's javelin began in 1932.



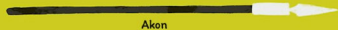
Competitors take a short run, then twist their bodies – but must not fully rotate – to get the best throw.

Javelins can reach speeds of up to 119 kilometres per hour.



The javelin throw is the only athletic throwing event not held in a ring, and special precautions are taken to prevent injuries to spectators.

Modern javelins are similar to the akon used at the ancient Greek Olympics, though they are made of metal rather than wood and they no longer have an ankle or strap.



Akon

Women's 600 grams



Men's 800 grams



JAN ŽELEZŇÝ

We don't know how far ancient Greek athletes threw their javelins, but world record holder Jan Železný (1966–present), of the Czech Republic, threw his javelin 98.48 metres in 1996.

LONG JUMP

The long jumpers at the first Olympic Games were accompanied by musicians playing flutes. Athletes also used heavy stones to give them momentum. Today's long jumpers don't use weights and there's rarely flute music playing while they compete!

Athletes spend as much time perfecting their run-up and take-off as practising the jump itself.



1. Athletes sprint along a short, narrow course.



2. They jump from a wooden take-off board into a sandpit. If they miss the mark, they are disqualified.



3. Accurate measurements are taken to determine the winner.



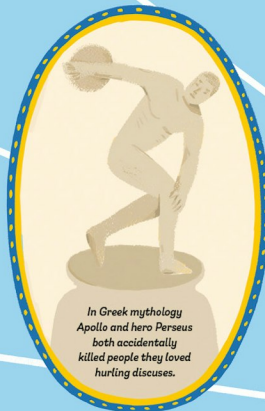
GALINA CHISTYAKOVA

Slovakian Galina Chistyakova's (1962–) women's world record of 7.52 metres has stood since 1988!

DISCUS

One of the most famous statues from the ancient world is called the Discobolus or 'discus thrower'. The original sculpture is lost but Roman copies show us how athletes used to throw the discus.

The discus throw has been around since the very first ancient Olympic Games.



In Greek mythology Apollo and hero Perseus both accidentally killed people they loved hurling discuses.

In today's sport, athletes start from a circle in the ground and whirl the discus while spinning themselves before letting go – a test of skill and control to send the discus as far as they can.



AMERICAN FOOTBALL

American football started in North American colleges in the late nineteenth century and evolved from rugby and soccer. It is still extremely popular and millions follow professional teams.

AIM OF THE GAME

The aim of the game is to get the ball past opponents and score a 'touchdown', worth six points. A touchdown can be 'converted' into a goal, worth two points, if the team kicks it over the goal posts.

MEET THE TEAM

There are 11 players on the field for each team at one time, and lots of different positions to play. The offensive team has the most roles. It is made up of running backs, a fullback, a centre, offensive linemen, wide receivers, guards, a tight end and only one quarterback.

The opposite team try to 'tackle' the player with the ball to stop them scoring points.

Special teams come onto the field for plays that involve kicking such as field goals.

American football has always been dangerous so players wear protective gear. Look at the player below to see each piece.



MAKING A PLAY

Offensive players try to score a touchdown using a complicated series of moves called 'plays'. Defensive players have to stop the other team scoring a touchdown.



TOM BRADY

One of the greatest quarterbacks to ever play football, Tom Brady (1977-) led his team to win a record-breaking seven Super Bowls. It's no wonder he was voted the Super Bowl MVP (most valued player) five times!

RUGBY

According to legend, rugby was invented in 1823, at Rugby School, England, UK, when a pupil caught the ball in his arms and ran with it during a football game. No one knows if this is true, but the school established the rules in 1845.

Rugby is played with an oval ball, which players can carry as they run. Players can score points by touching it down behind the goal posts (a 'try').

A try is worth five points.

After a try, one player has to kick the ball over the high goal posts. This is known as a 'conversion'.

Rugby players have to be good at dodging!

Wheelchair rugby used to be known as 'murderball' and is just as tough and combative as rugby. To score, the player must have a firm hold of the ball and two wheels of a player's wheelchair must cross the line.

New Zealand's All Black's Rugby Team is famous for performing a Haka - a Māori war dance - before games.

The opposite team tackle the player with the ball to stop them.

RYLEY BATT

Ryley Batt (1989-) became the youngest ever wheelchair rugby player to play in the Paralympics. He led his team to win gold at the 2012 London Paralympics, the 2014 World Championships and the 2016 Rio Paralympics.

A conversion is worth two points.

BASEBALL

Baseball grew out of two games – cricket and rounders – brought to New England, USA, in the eighteenth century. The game is played by two teams, each with nine players. Batters on one team try to hit a ball thrown by a 'pitcher', then run around the four bases of the pitch before the fielding team recovers the ball.



Baseball is played on a diamond-shaped pitch.

Each baseball game is divided into nine periods, called innings.

When fielding, players wear a special giant glove to help them catch the ball.

If a batter runs around all the bases, they score a 'home run'.

After a batter hits a ball, they run between bases to score points, called 'runs', for their team.



BABE RUTH

Seven-time World Series Champion George Herman 'Babe' Ruth (1895–1948) is still widely regarded as baseball's greatest-ever player.



MITHALI DORAI RAJ

One of the greatest female cricketers of all time, Mithali Dorai Raj (1982–) scored a world record 10,868 runs.

CRICKET

Cricket has been played in England, UK, since at least the sixteenth century (although women's cricket was not played until 1926). Today, 125 countries regularly play the game. Some games, known as 'Test' matches, can take up to five days! Recently, shorter versions such as One Day and Twenty20 have become popular.

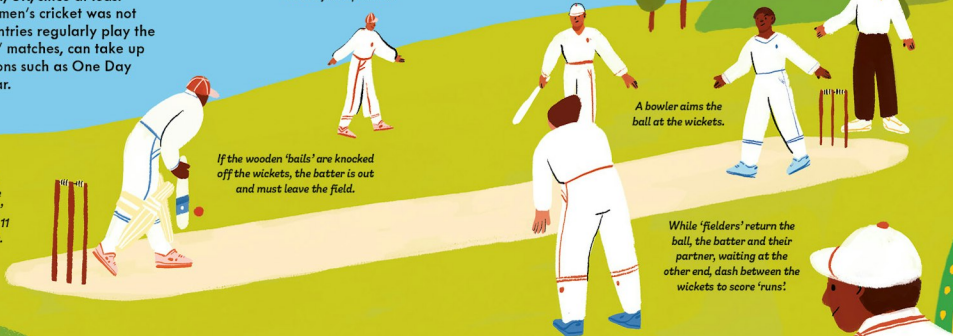
Cricket is played on a large field with a small, rectangular 'pitch' in the middle. This has 'wickets' at each end. Two teams of 11 players take turns to bat.

If the wooden 'bails' are knocked off the wickets, the batter is out and must leave the field.

The top batter has to protect the wickets by hitting the ball as far as possible.

A bowler aims the ball at the wickets.

While 'fielders' return the ball, the batter and their partner, waiting at the other end, dash between the wickets to score 'runs'.



Cricket's most famous tournament is the regular 'Ashes' series between England and Australia. The ashes inside the trophy urn are the burnt remains of balls from 1882!