

# The origins of sports

Sports like tennis, basketball and football are multi-billion pound industries today, but what are their origins and how did they become the sports we play today?

It's difficult to say exactly when football started, but there is scientific evidence of a game in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC in China called 'Tsu' Chu', where the players had to kick a leather ball through a 30–40 cm hole into a small net. But the major development of football was in the Middle Ages. At that time, there was no limit on the number of players and very few rules, and matches were often very noisy and violent. In fact, between 1314 and 1667 the authorities tried to ban football more than 30 times. The rules of football date back to 1660 in a book of sports where it talked about a pitch, goals and the basic positions for players.

The game of tennis probably started with French monks as a form of entertainment in the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century. At first, players hit the ball with their hands, then later with a glove until finally they used a racquet. The first ball was wooden, followed by a leather ball and later the bouncy rubber ball used today. Tennis was very popular in Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, especially in France. The name tennis probably comes from the French word *tenez*, meaning 'take'. At one time in England, tennis was so popular that the Pope tried to ban it. The modern rules of tennis date back to 1882.

Basketball started in the USA in 1891 when a teacher, James Naismith, had to invent a game for his school's athletes in winter. He used two fruit baskets, which he hung 10 feet up, and a football. As there was no hole in the basket, every time a player put the ball in the basket they had to climb up and get it out. Later they used a net with a metal ring and in 1906 they started opening the net to let the ball fall through. Because of its simple equipment, indoor play and simple rules, basketball became popular very quickly. Probably the most famous basketball team is the Harlem Globetrotters, who are famous for their basketball acrobatics and funny routines.

These three games are some of the most popular games in the world today, with football as the most popular with over three billion fans.

1 Before reading the text, decide which of these sports is the oldest and in which country they started.

basketball \_\_\_\_\_ football \_\_\_\_\_ tennis \_\_\_\_\_

2 Here are some numbers from the article. Match them with the correct information. Then read the article quickly to check your answers.

2	3	10	14	30	30–40	1314	1667	1906
---	---	----	----	----	-------	------	------	------

- In the game 'Tsu' Chu' players had to kick a ball through a \_\_\_\_\_ cm hole.
- The authorities tried to ban football \_\_\_\_\_ times between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- Tennis was very popular in Europe in the \_\_\_\_\_ th century.
- The first basketball game used \_\_\_\_\_ fruit baskets hung \_\_\_\_\_ feet up.
- In \_\_\_\_\_ they first opened up the net to let the basketball fall through.
- Football is the most popular sport in the world with over \_\_\_\_\_ billion fans.

3 Circle the correct words needed to complete the sentences below.

- In 'Tsu' Chu' players used a *rubber / leather* ball.
- In modern football, players *kick / hit* a ball into a *basket / goal*.
- The *instructions / rules* for football date back to 1660.
- In the Middle Ages, football *matches / competitions* were very noisy and violent.
- In modern tennis, players *kick / hit* the ball with a *racquet / glove*.
- In the first game of basketball, players put the ball into a *basket / net*.
- Later they used a *wooden / metal* ring.
- Basketball uses very simple *equipment / tools*.

## 4 Complete the sentences with the correct preposition.

about    as    in    for    from    of    on    through    to    with

- 1 There is scientific evidence \_\_\_\_\_ a game in China called 'Tsu' Chu'.
- 2 Players had to kick a ball \_\_\_\_\_ a 30–40 cm hole.
- 3 In the Middle Ages, there was no limit \_\_\_\_\_ the number of players.
- 4 The book of sports talked \_\_\_\_\_ a pitch, goals and the basic positions for players.
- 5 Tennis probably started \_\_\_\_\_ a form of entertainment for monks.
- 6 At first in tennis you could hit a ball \_\_\_\_\_ your hand.
- 7 Tennis was very popular \_\_\_\_\_ Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.
- 8 The modern rules of tennis date back \_\_\_\_\_ 1882.
- 9 The name tennis probably comes \_\_\_\_\_ the French word *tenez*, meaning 'take'.
- 10 The Harlem Globetrotters are famous \_\_\_\_\_ funny routines.

5 In the text there are words to show the order in which things happened. In what order did players do the following? Write sentences using *At first*, *then* / *later*, *finally*. For example, *At first players kicked ...*

- 1 Football – kick the ball into a goal / through a small hole in a net  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Tennis – hit the ball with a glove / their hands / a racquet  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3 Basketball – use a net with a metal ring / a net with a hole for the ball to fall through / fruit baskets  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 6 Discuss these questions with your partner(s).

- Think of three sports which are popular in your country. Why do you think they're popular?
- Which sports do you play or watch?
- What equipment do you need for your favourite sport / the most popular sport in your country?

## Glossary

- acrobatics** (*noun*) – balancing, jumping, and turning your body in skilful ways
- athlete** (*noun*) – someone who is good at sports and takes part in sports competitions
- ban** (*verb*) – to say officially that people must not do something
- development** (*noun*) – change, growth, or improvement over a period of time
- equipment** (*noun*) – the things you need for a particular job or activity
- evidence** (*noun*) – facts or physical signs that help to prove something
- hole** (*noun*) – a space in the surface of something that goes partly or completely through it
- invent** (*verb*) – to design or create something such as a machine or process that did not exist before
- monk** (*noun*) – a man who lives in a religious community away from other people
- origins** (*noun*) – the place or moment where something begins to exist
- routine** (*noun*) – a series of movements that a performer uses
- the authorities** (*noun*) – the people in official organizations with power to make people follow laws or rules
- the Middle Ages** (*noun*) – the period in European history between about the year 1000 AD and the year 1500 AD
- the Pope** (*noun*) – the leader of the Roman Catholic Church
- violent** (*adj*) – with fighting and people attacking other people