

Bournemouth School for girls.

2nd Prize

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'British games are played in most countries of the
Commonwealth.' To what extent is this statement
true?

Wherever I fly the youth of the Commonwealth
write together in games, an aspect of life in which
neither class nor colour nor creed plays a part. I, the
Union Jack, the flag which has been carried so far
throughout the world, the flag under which so
many young people have established friendships
never to be forgotten, can be seen flying over
any Commonwealth game. It has been said
that wherever Britons go they take their games
with them and who is in a better position to
judge this than I? Our Commonwealth is so
large that the sun is always shining in some
part; and while the sun shines human beings
play games. But why, one may well ask, play
games at all? In the remote past they had
a religious significance; for some they remain a
cult if not a religion. Later they were looked
upon as some form of military training, but
now games are rituals, patterns and symbols of

life itself. Let me now proceed to present to you some of the British games, the course of which I have been privileged to enjoy.

The first game over which I presided was a cricket match; an elaborate, philosophical affair, as intellectual as chess although as physically tiring as football. At first sight the whole white flannelled affair seemed to me slow and monotonous; its very tradition and paraphernalia made it bewildering and therefore detestable until I learned to understand it when I realised in the words of Sir Henry Newbolt that it was 'not for the sake of a ribboned coat or the selfish hope of a season's fame' that a young man defended a wicket with such zeal, 'but his captain's hand on his shoulder smote: Play up, play up and play the game!' Cricket was first played during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I but until the end of the seventeenth century it was played mainly by boys. Now cricket has become the dominant game of the Commonwealth. It is played on all types of wickets by all kinds of people. Test matches constitute a large proportion of the sports' pages in the newspapers during the summer months, the most prominent cricketing countries being Australia, India, South Africa, West Indies, New Zealand and Pakistan.

Another game calling for the same amount of concentration as cricket is golf. It was first played in India by Englishmen and since that time has become popular all over the world. It is a perpetual wonder to me how so many eminent personalities can spend, and indeed enjoy, their leisure hitting a tiny, white rubber cored ball high into the air, only to spend the next half hour searching diligently amongst prickly gorse bushes and wiry heather to retrieve it. The patience which they exert on a golf course is indeed counteracted by the apparent intolerance of the blunders made by a new office boy. This game which has swept the rural areas of Britain is also widespread in Canada, South Africa and India Australia. The most important seasonal events are the British Open Championships in which both amateurs and professionals from Britain and overseas compete.

The shuttlecock is another small white object which is used in the game of badminton. This game is played amongst Europeans rather than amongst members of the Commonwealth. This shuttlecock consists of sixteen goose feathers inserted in a kid covered cork base. It is a light and airy object and is the delight of many children on Shrove Tuesday, being the traditional gift for girls on that day. In the kitchen it is a

common sight to see Mother precariously tossing a half cooked pancake accompanied by a small girl hitting a shuttlecock. This game however is confined neither to childhood nor to Shrove Tuesday but is carried forward through school days into the age of discretion. It is no unusual sight to see usually composed and dignified school teachers who, having discarded their robes of office replace them by spotless white dresses and tennis shoes and prepare to meet their opponents armed only with a light ^{long} handled racket. They then proceed to chase a small shuttlecock backwards and forwards across the school gymnasium until they are red in the face, short of breath, and weary of limb. Many a time have I seen these same people standing on the edge of a sports' field ironically remarking on the slowness and apparent weariness of their pupils who, in the last few minutes of a lacrosse match are doing their utmost to obtain the victor's crown which for so long seems to have eluded them.

Lacrosse is a game which in modern times, ^{I have noticed,} is rapidly replacing hockey, the game so well established in girls' schools of the early nineteenth century. Originally it was performed as a roisterous battle between Red Indian tribes, and indeed to see some matches where the duty

of the umpire ~~are~~ is practically limited to checking ruthless murder ^I ~~one does~~ not wonder that modern youth has seized on such a game to release their surplus energy. This game has become the national summer game of Canada and is played with great zest in Australia.

For many games still remain a battle and to realise this ^I ~~one~~ only ^{have} has to watch a rugby match. This typical English game, first played at the world famous boys' public school of Rugby is played throughout the Commonwealth in all extremes of temperature. In the heat of an Indian summer I have seen men, who, being deprived of their energy by the intense heat, grovel in the dust on a parched pitch while at the same time on the North East coast of Canada men stand shivering on a frozen pitch at the start of a match. England striking as always the happy medium delights in mild wet weather and mud.

Children in junior schools starting on their first organised games play stoolball. This game is certainly one of the predecessors of cricket. It is an old game, very common in Southern England during the seventeenth century but modern stoolball is rather an adaptation of modern cricket than a revival of ancient stoolball. This game, however, has

not so far been played seriously in the Commonwealth but perhaps one day I shall discover coloured children in a tiny African village playing it with their English friends.

Another game which British people have carried through the Commonwealth is polo. Wherever this game is played I am greatly respected for usually members of Her Majesty's Forces find it a welcome change from their daily chores. Many is the time when I have seen a pompous colonel lean from his chestnut horse and brandishing a long handled mallet use it to hit, with geometrical precision, a ball between the goal posts on a polo field. In England at Bowdoy Park I proudly fly whilst His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh meets many friends both civil and military in a thrilling game of polo. Several times I have seen a distinguished brigadier topple to the ground from his horse much to the amusement of some of the privates under his command; unobserved by the prancing horses whose riders are intent on the game. Wherever British forces are stationed in the Commonwealth whether it is in Australia, Nigeria, Malaya or South Africa the game of polo is played. Croquet, like polo, is played with a mallet.

It requires little athletic ability and may be played by old ladies as well as by young gentlemen provided they possess steady nerves, patience and swift judgement. This seventeenth century game became a feature of court life as well as gaining prominence by the part it played in life of 'the Queen' in Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland." At the present time it is played mainly in Britain, Australia and New Zealand.

When the ladies of the court became a little bored with croquet they would delight in lawn tennis, a game, which since that time has become one of the fastest and most tiring of games. Asphalt and gut have since replaced the grass, and short skirts have outmoded voluminous dresses of the ladies of the court. Perhaps this is the most universal game, for in this game alone white people come face to face singly with the strength and endurance of coloured people showing that in games racial problems have no significance. Watching the last set of a thrilling tournament at Wimbledon between a Canadian girl and a South African girl I gazed around and saw that applause was readily given for good play rather than for the individual player; and moreover sitting side by side in the hot

sunshine on a beautiful summer's day were people from all different parts of the Commonwealth. How gloriously the colours of the clothes of the supporters mingled together. As I looked down on the happy ~~go~~ crowds I wished that the unity revealed by the playing of games would affect the leaders of all nations.

For the majority of the working middle class no Saturday afternoon is complete without a visit to a football match. For them there is something fascinating in the hustle and bustle of an expectant crowd. Eagerly they surge, armed with rattles, and mascots and clothed in the colours of the local football club, proudly wearing a large rosette on the lapel of their jackets, to join the frenzy of the cheering multitudes who jostle together watching intently twenty-two men kick a ball up and down a muddy pitch. This popular and most fully professional of British games is played by small boys in school playgrounds, by youths on waste commons and by professional and amateur teams on ~~a~~ floodlit pitches is a science behind which has developed the scandalous organisation of football pools. Very recently the glamour of football has been shadowed by the Munich air

disaster which has deprived the whole world of the talent of first class footballers, and it is for this reason that I, in sympathy with the whole world, fly at half mast.

Games are not confined to floodlights and cheering crowds; they can be played in a field with a ball, in a drawing room with a grandmother, two aunts and a set of dominoes, in a gymnasium with a class of unruly boys, in a nursery school on a wet afternoon or by physical training instructors and games' enthusiasts. However, apart from our differences in language and climate we have a common love for the games of the Motherland and I, as the Union Jack, feel that in games as in politics that 'whatever the future may hold for our family of nations we must ever remember that, as in any family, it is the loyalty and cohesion of its members that make for its happiness and its strength. Here we ^{all} have our opportunity. Let us use it to the full!'
(Empire Day message 1957 from Sir Charles Ponsonby.)

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