

English for Life in the UK.

Episode 7: Sport in the UK.

Welcome to episode seven of English for Life in the UK. This podcast is for intermediate level learners of English who want to improve their English and, at the same time, learn more about life in the United Kingdom. It is produced by a group of volunteers from the St Augustine's Centre in Halifax Yorkshire. Today's episode is a short one on the subject of sport in the UK. It is presented by Christine and John

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Christine: OK John, last week on the 16th of January I know you covered sport...

John: Yes

Christine: ...with the class but I wasn't there and nor was Mark. So can you tell us a bit about what you covered?

John: Yeah...I covered... well first off we had a picture matching exercise with short pieces of text and we covered 11 sports that were invented, well, invented or codified, in the UK. So the sports we looked at were football, rugby union, rugby league, rowing, darts, tennis, squash, badminton, table tennis, golf and cricket.

Christine: Wow, wow....and you said, you said they were invented or codified. Could you explain what you mean by that?

John: Yeah...We looked at the sports, you know, games with people kicking a ball or throwing a ball obviously have been played all over the world for hundreds or thousands of years. And rowing, for example, obviously, that's something that's been going on for thousands of years all over the world. But we looked at the idea of codifying a sport. That's where you take a sport like, we explained, that football would have played...been played... a similar game but with very different rules in different parts of England and Scotland and different parts of the world. And what happened towards the end of the nineteenth century ... from the mid nineteenth century onwards, sports would be given specific sets of rules and they would set up organisations to enforce these rules and oversee competition between different teams, for example. So, famously, the Football Association emerged, the Rugby Football Union and similar bodies that oversaw the rules in competition in tennis, rowing, cricket etc.

Christine: And did you discuss football?

John: We did..... we looked at ... as I said, 11 sports. Far and away the most popular sport in the UK and internationally is ... is association football of course, soccer as the Americans call it. We have in our class people from Senegal, from Iran from many parts of the world that are ... just as fanatical about football as we are in ... in the UK. So ... there were a lot of interest in that. So, back to the, sort of, Victorian era, we looked at the setting up of the football league in 1888 and there were some quite surprising things in that for some of the students because we... one of the reading exercises included the 12 founder members of the football league which was founded in the north of England in 1888 and they are, as you probably know Christine: Accrington, Aston Villa, Blackburn, Bolton Wanderers, Burnley, Derby County, Everton, Notts County, who are the oldest team in the

world still playing, Preston North End, Stoke, West Brom and Wolverhampton Wanderers.

Christine: Well, I certainly didn't know that but I have heard of them all, I have heard of them all.

John: (Laughs)..well this is very interesting ... obviously all still playing in one form or another in various divisions but what the students were very quick to realise ... was that there were no London clubs, there were no Chelsea, Tottenham, Arsenal. There were none of the Manchester Uniteds or Liverpools. So we went on to explain that, you know, that the founder clubs and ... the real big clubs at the beginning of the game were focused very much in the West Midlands and the North West, Lancashire and this was due to the large industries that were thousands and thousands of people who wanted to watch football and the clubs grew out of ..out of the *Northern Powerhouse* as it was at the time. They found that quite interesting, yeah.

Christine: Hmm very interesting. You mentioned something at the beginning about... you mentioned rugby union and rugby league. John, could you explain to me what the difference is? I think I know but..

John: Well I didn't know...well in the pictures...we had a picture of some rugby union players so we had the all blacks, I think playing against South Africa and the rugby league picture was illustrated by a game between Leeds and Huddersfield, two local rugby league teams. So most of the students did actually get that. I think it was probably the fame of the all Blacks perhaps, then the jerseys that they managed to spot that one. But obviously most of them were unsure about the exact differences so , obviously rugby league, big thing in Halifax, I went on to explain historic differences in the two codes and how they diverged back to 1895 the northern rugby league teams, as they are now, broke away from the then rugby union over the issue of what they called broken time which basically meant that when their players were training and playing they wanted to be able to remunerate them, they wanted to pay them... and at the time and for many years after, the rugby union were staunchly amateur whereas rugby league became professional. So a language point there, we discussed the difference between amateur and professional. So if you're playing football on a Sunday afternoon in Halifax for the local team you'd be an amateur player. If you're playing for Liverpool or Manchester city and getting a wage you'd be a professional player. So that's what the main difference was.

Christine: So ... I suppose if there's no wages for rugby union that meant it was... they were wealthier people.

John: They did tend to be, yes. So we did go on to examine, you know, this historically as being something of a regional and a class difference. Rugby union often paid their players in other ways. This was always quite controversial. Often they'd be given jobs or there'd be some other remuneration... but quite often under the table, so to speak. Whereas rugby league it was played at an amateur level obviously locally but at the top club level it's been a professional game for... since 1895. So they found that, I think they found that quite interesting... we looked at some of the local rugby league teams Keighley Halifax, Bradford, Leeds. So that's something they've got some experience of living in West Yorkshire.

Christine: Very good...and so you , in your discussion of sport how did you get on talking about... how did you link into other sessions?

John: Well we linked back to some of us other sessions because when we did look at rugby, I mean obviously football is completely international isn't it? It's across Asia, South America, everywhere in the world plays football but when we looked at rugby union, rugby league and cricket ... we examined some of the teams that play that, that compete in those world cups, that compete internationally and they were all very quick to spot that these teams are all from the British Commonwealth or the former British Empire so the great cricket teams from Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka and also, obviously also, its played across Australia and New Zealand and South Africa. Very much the same wi' rugby, you know the only teams that really compete, apart from a few exceptions, they do tend to be Australia, South Africa etc. so these were sports .. that spread from the UK to the Empire and latterly the commonwealth.

Christine: Well that sounds very interesting.

John: Yeah, I think it was, yeah. And we ... as I say we've been through all those various sports... and we looked at ... well we discussed the idea of ... of secret history, which is something that the historians, a phrase that historians use for ... for histories that aren't as well known. For example... that haven't been covered perhaps by you know standard history.

Christine: What's some of the secret history of sport?

John: Well we looked at. ... a lady called Lily Parr and the famous teams that she competed in. She was a fantastic football player in the 19.. well just after the First World War and into the 1920s and it's a little-known.. a little-known history. Obviously people know all about the history of the great football teams and Scotland and England and they know all about the great cricket players ... but we .. examined ... women's football. Obviously it's ... women's football is thriving at the moment. They're doing very well on the international stage and women's club teams are getting great support but we looked at women's football in the story of the .. the World War I ladies teams. So again we looked back to things that we'd already covered: World War I, we'd looked at munitions factories, we'd looked about women coming into work and the effect that that had on the democratic system whereby women were able to push for the ... the vote after the war. But what is a little-known history is that when pretty much all the men, the healthy men, were away fighting in the trenches and wherever, the women basically set up, they would set up their own football teams and they competed in place of the men's football teams and they had a full football league, huge attendances. We discussed one match. Preston North end had a very famous ladies team. They had a fixture at Goodison which is the home of Everton with 53,000 people..

Christine: My goodness!

John: ... and 12,000 people locked out, who couldn't get through the turnstiles. So the... the ladies I think were quite impressed with that as well. They found that very interesting and we just... you know, we just looked at what a huge sporting spectacle that had been and how successful it had all been and then unfortunately in 1921 day the FA, the Football Association, deemed that it was a game 'unsuitable for ladies' . So they actually banned women's football and the

women were actually banned from playing competitive football on any grounds that were members of the FA. So they all found that very interesting ... so that were something we examined towards the end of the lesson and the reading that they took home on that.

Christine: Very, very interesting... Well I'm sad I missed it.

John: Well I'm glad we could do the podcast anyway.

Christine: Yes. So thank you.

John: You're welcome.

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Language Support

This is the part of the podcast where I pick out one or two language specific points from the episode. Today I want to focus a bit on regional variations in language. We've already highlighted in the past that with John coming from Yorkshire, Christine from Scotland and myself from London and the South, we have different accents. You will also find that in different regions there are different styles and forms of the language. Sometimes we say different **dialects**. In this episode John uses a couple of expressions that are very much Yorkshire dialect. For example, he talked of:

'some of **us** other sessions'.

In standard English we would say:

'some of **our** other sessions'

but some people using Yorkshire dialect would say **us** instead of **our**.

Later he referred to:

'that **were** something we examined in a previous session.'

Here he is using **were** whereas standard English would be **was**. Another example of Yorkshire dialect that would be used by some people in this region.

You may have noticed in the past phrases that Christine has used. I noticed, for example, that when she pauses, whereas I might say:

'well..er',

she says:

'och'.

That would be spelt OCH and it's very classically Scottish as an expression.

She also told me that she will say:

'amn't I?'

instead of:

'aren't I?'

Again an example of Scottish dialect.

And of course because I come from the south of England I pronounce some words differently than people in Yorkshire and the North. The classic is I would say:

'I am taking a bath (b-ah-th)

Whereas in Yorkshire and other parts of the north they'd be... they'd talk about:

'taking a bath'. (b-a-th)

I'm sure you will have come across other examples of regional accents and dialects. We will probably cover more of these in future episodes.

That's it for today. I hope you've enjoyed the episode.