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Soccer - the world's most exciting sport

URL: <http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/0601/060105-soccer-e.html>

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5 January, 2006

THE ARTICLE

Soccer - the world's most exciting sport

English soccer is more exciting than any of the top American team sports. This is according to the research of a team of American scientists. Eli Ben-Naim of the Los Alamos National Laboratory and his colleagues analyzed the results of over 300,000 games of soccer, baseball, hockey, basketball and American football played since 1888. They decided that the likelihood of an “upset” in a game was a good measure of its competitiveness and excitement. An upset is a game in which the underdog, or weaker team, beats the stronger team. They found English soccer matches produced more upsets.

The survey is not all bad news for enthusiasts of American sports. It seems that soccer has become less exciting and more predictable over the past fifty years. This suggests that strong teams are becoming stronger and the chance of an upset is lessening. On average, the underdog wins 45 percent of the time in soccer, but this figure is sliding. In contrast, the frequency of upsets in baseball is increasing. Baseball has overtaken soccer in the past ten years to become the more exciting sport. However, the survey did not analyze the worldwide fever produced by soccer’s World Cup Finals.

Source: <http://www.nature.com/news/2006/060102/full/060102-1.html>

WARM-UPS

1. SPORT: In pairs / groups, brainstorm a list of the most exciting sports in the world. Which ones are the best? What makes them the best? What improvements would you make to them? Are they played by most of the world's countries? If not, why not?

2. UPSETS: Do you like sports that produce upsets? Does the possibility of upsets make the sport more exciting? With your partner(s), look at the list below. Have you ever got angry because the winner wasn't the one you liked?

- Sport
- Elections
- Nobel Peace Prize
- Olympic venue
- Music awards
- The Oscars (Academy Awards)
- "Time" magazine's Person of the Year
- Beauty contest

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

English soccer / excitement / scientists / baseball / hockey / basketball / competitiveness / enthusiasts / underdogs / upsets / bad news / fevers

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. SPORTING OPINIONS: Do you agree with these opinions on sport?

- a. I always support the underdog.
- b. Sport is being ruined by money.
- c. Sports stars get paid too much.
- d. Sport is not at all important.
- e. Sport helps countries have better relations.
- f. It's not the winning that is important, it's the taking part.

5. TWO-MINUTE SPORT DEBATES: Face your partner. Take part in the following for-fun debates. Partner A strongly believes in the first argument.

- a. Soccer is more exciting. vs. Baseball is. It has higher scores.
- b. Sumo is much cooler than wrestling. vs. Sumo is just fat guys falling over.
- c. Skiing is better to watch than skating. vs. Skating is a lot more interesting.
- d. F1 is a hundred times more thrilling than horse racing. vs. Horse racing is best.
- e. Men's sport is better than women's. vs. Many women's sports are better.
- f. Golf is the world's dullest sport. vs. A 5-day game of cricket is the most boring.
- g. The Olympics is the best sports event. vs. Soccer's World Cup is.
- h. Drugs should be used to make sport better. vs. Drugs have no place in sport.

6. SOCCER: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with soccer. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. American scientists say English soccer is more exciting than US sport. T / F
- b. The scientists looked at over 300,000 games across five sports. T / F
- c. Scientists decided excitement is based on the chances of upsets. T / F
- d. English soccer matches produced far fewer upsets than other sports. T / F
- e. The survey is bad news for enthusiasts of American sports. T / F
- f. On average, the underdog wins 45 percent of the time in soccer. T / F
- g. Basketball has overtaken soccer in being the most exciting sport. T / F
- h. The survey analyzed the fever that comes from soccer's World Cups. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|----------------|-------------|
| a. scientists | global |
| b. analyzed | chance |
| c. colleagues | last |
| d. likelihood | shock |
| e. upset | fans |
| f. enthusiasts | examined |
| g. past | regularity |
| h. lessening | researchers |
| i. frequency | reducing |
| j. worldwide | co-workers |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| a. more exciting than any of the | beats the stronger team |
| b. according to the research of a team | more upsets |
| c. a good measure of its competitiveness | enthusiasts of American sports |
| d. the underdog, or weaker team, | of the time in soccer |
| e. English soccer matches produced | soccer in the past ten years |
| f. The survey is not all bad news for | top American team sports |
| g. soccer has become less exciting | is lessening |
| h. the chance of an upset | of American scientists |
| i. the underdog wins 45 percent | and more predictable |
| j. Baseball has overtaken | and excitement |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

Soccer - the world's most exciting sport

English soccer is more exciting than _____ of the top American team sports. This is according to the research of a _____ of American scientists. Eli Ben-Naim of the Los Alamos National Laboratory and his _____ analyzed the _____ of over 300,000 games of soccer, baseball, hockey, basketball and American football played since 1888. They decided that the likelihood of an "_____ " in a game was a good _____ of its competitiveness and excitement. An upset is a game in which the _____, or weaker team, beats the stronger team. They found English soccer matches _____ more upsets.

upset
colleagues
produced
any
underdog
results
team
measure

The survey is not all _____ news for _____ of American sports. It seems that soccer has become less exciting and more _____ over the past fifty years. This suggests that strong teams are becoming stronger and the chance of an upset is _____. On average, the underdog wins 45 percent of the _____ in soccer, but this figure is _____. In contrast, the frequency of upsets in baseball is increasing. Baseball has _____ soccer in the past ten years to become the more exciting sport. However, the survey did not analyze the worldwide _____ produced by soccer's World Cup Finals.

time
fever
enthusiasts
lessening
bad
overtaken
predictable
sliding

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Soccer - the world's most exciting sport

English soccer is more exciting _____ the top American team sports.

This is according to the research of a team of American scientists. Eli Ben-Naim of the Los Alamos National Laboratory and his colleagues _____ the results of over 300,000 games of soccer, baseball, hockey, basketball and American football played since 1888. They decided that the _____ of an “upset” in a game was a good _____ of its competitiveness and excitement. An upset is a game in which the _____, or weaker team, beats the stronger team. They found English soccer matches _____ more upsets.

The survey is not all bad news for _____ of American sports. It seems that soccer has become less exciting and more _____ over the past fifty years. This suggests that strong teams are becoming stronger and the chance of an upset is _____. On average, the underdog wins 45 percent of the time in soccer, but this figure is _____. In contrast, the frequency of upsets in baseball is increasing. Baseball has _____ soccer in the past ten years to become the more exciting sport. However, the survey did not analyze the worldwide _____ produced by soccer’s World Cup Finals.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words **'team'** and **'sport'**.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "SPORT" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about team sports.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- top
- team
- 300,000
- likelihood
- underdog
- produced
- enthusiasts
- fifty years
- lessening
- sliding
- overtaken
- fever

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. Do you like soccer?
- c. Where is the world's best soccer league?
- d. Do you prefer the word "soccer" or "football"?
- e. Why do you think American football is called "football" when it's largely played with the hands?
- f. What do you think is the most exciting sport in the world?
- g. Do you prefer individual or team sports?
- h. What excites you most about sport?
- i. Do you get upset when your favorite team or star is upset?
- j. Do you always cheer for the underdog?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Do you agree with the survey's findings?
- d. Why do you think baseball and American football are not played in as many countries as soccer?
- e. Do you think the low scoring games in soccer makes it a boring sport?
- f. Who do you think is more famous worldwide, soccer's Pele or baseball's Babe Ruth?
- g. Who do you think is the most famous sports star ever?
- h. Are you more passionate about your favorite local team or your national team?
- i. The soccer World Cup is the planet's most watched televised event. Does this make soccer the best sport in the world?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

SPORT: In pairs / groups, agree on a score of 1 to 10 for the points in the top row. A score of "1" means no excitement, beauty, etc; a score of "10" is perfection.

SPORT	EXCITEMENT	BEAUTY	ATHLETICISM	UPSET POTENTIAL
Soccer				
Baseball				
Sumo				
Golf				
F1 motor racing				
Other _____				

Change partners and talk about the scores you agreed on with your old partner(s).

Talk about the reasons for any differences in your scores.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on English soccer. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. MY SPORT: Make a poster about your favorite sport. Explain why you like it and what makes it so exciting. Show your poster to your classmates in the next lesson.

4. LETTER: Write a letter to your favorite sports magazine or TV show. Explain what you think of Mr. Ben-Naim's survey. Show your letter to your classmates in the next lesson. Did everyone write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T b. T c. T d. F e. F f. T g. F h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|----------------|-------------|
| a. scientists | researchers |
| b. analyzed | examined |
| c. colleagues | co-workers |
| d. likelihood | chance |
| e. upset | shock |
| f. enthusiasts | fans |
| g. past | last |
| h. lessening | reducing |
| i. frequency | regularity |
| j. worldwide | global |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| a. more exciting than any of the | top American team sports |
| b. according to the research of a team | of American scientists |
| c. a good measure of its competitiveness | and excitement |
| d. the underdog, or weaker team, | beats the stronger team |
| e. English soccer matches produced | more upsets |
| f. The survey is not all bad news for | enthusiasts of American sports |
| g. soccer has become less exciting | and more predictable |
| h. the chance of an upset | is lessening |
| i. the underdog wins 45 percent | of the time in soccer |
| j. Baseball has overtaken | soccer in the past ten years |

GAP FILL:

Soccer - the world's most exciting sport

English soccer is more exciting than **any** of the top American team sports. This is according to the research of a **team** of American scientists. Eli Ben-Naim of the Los Alamos National Laboratory and his **colleagues** analyzed the **results** of over 300,000 games of soccer, baseball, hockey, basketball and American football played since 1888. They decided that the likelihood of an **“upset”** in a game was a good **measure** of its competitiveness and excitement. An upset is a game in which the **underdog**, or weaker team, beats the stronger team. They found English soccer matches **produced** more upsets.

The survey is not all **bad** news for **enthusiasts** of American sports. It seems that soccer has become less exciting and more **predictable** over the past fifty years. This suggests that strong teams are becoming stronger and the chance of an upset is **lessening**. On average, the underdog wins 45 percent of the **time** in soccer, but this figure is **sliding**. In contrast, the frequency of upsets in baseball is increasing. Baseball has **overtaken** soccer in the past ten years to become the more exciting sport. However, the survey did not analyze the worldwide **fever** produced by soccer’s World Cup Finals.