

## Benefits of Sport through the Ages

Once in Crete did the young men and maidens take hold  
Of a bull by the horns and then somersault high  
O'er the back of the beast. 'Twas a sight to behold.  
As this sport's surely dangerous, do you know why  
These Minoan young folk did such dare-devil deeds?  
Was it just for the rush of adrenaline thrill  
To show off, you may ask, or for some other needs?  
Oh indeed 'twas not so, but 'twas done to fulfil  
What was due in the rites of the Cretan bull cult;  
For the gods and the goddesses must be assuaged  
So no earthquake or other disaster result  
From a deity upset, provoked or enraged.  
So the sport would ensure that prosperity reigned  
And that peace and true harmony would be sustained.

But the Greeks were more practical surely for they  
Practised running and javelin and discus and sports  
Such as boxing and wrestling we still do today.  
Yet the Greeks did these things because *they* are the sorts  
Of proficiencies needed when facing the foe,  
When the battle field called and you had to defend  
Both yourself and your comrades; for *then* there was no  
Standing army your city could summon and send  
Into war. 'Twas a citizen's duty to serve  
As a soldier if needed; and so it made sense  
To keep practising skills which might help to preserve  
Him in fighting the foe for his city's defence.  
Thus to city and citizens benefits came  
From such sports since repelling their foes was their aim.

But the Romans professional armies maintained  
So that ordinary citizens were not required  
To be ready to fight or for soldiery trained,  
But could choose any sport that they liked or desired;  
But 'twas being spectators that mostly appealed.  
All along the great Circuit they'd watch as they cheered  
When the chariots sped rashly, refusing to yield  
Any ground to each other and headlong careered;  
Or they'd shout and they'd holler with bloodthirsty glee  
In their amphitheatres where gladiators fought  
Or where animal hunts gave a merciless spree  
Of unspeakable carnage and bloody onslaught.  
And the benefit generous Emperors got  
Was a populace dulled and content with their lot.

Let us forward to times Medieval and see  
Just what sports we may find in Britannia's isle.  
For the king and the nobles a jousting tourney  
Was important as were all the skills and the guile  
Of one fighting on horseback. The hunt and the chase  
They indulged in as well; for the the boar and the deer  
They delighted to eat. Every man must embrace  
Daily practice with longbow - the law made that clear -  
And the archers of England and Wales proved their worth  
At the battles of Crecy, Poitiers, Agincourt.  
And the peasants and serfs who were bound to the earth  
On their Sundays and High days engaged in such sport  
As folk football and other ball games to keep fit  
So they'd get back to work in good health with true grit.

At the Tudors and Stuarts let's now take a peek.  
Both the king and the gentry, they still liked the hunt,  
But they also liked racing their horses to seek  
Which was fittest and fastest to come out in front;  
And they liked their real tennis and racquets and such.  
But the bating of bears and of bulls did appeal  
To all ranks of society. Liked nigh as much  
Was the fighting of cocks although that had the feel  
Of a lower class sport. Oh what benefit did  
Such horrendous sports bring? There are none I opine.  
Though the grander folks did to the poorer forbid  
Them to hunt deer or boar, they were able to dine  
On the rabbits or hares or the fish that they caught;  
And folk-football and bowls for them exercise brought.

At the twenty first century now we arrive  
Where the number of sports has so greatly increased;  
And some sports are now global, while others survive  
In enthusiasts' groups; and the grandest and least  
All enjoy many similar sports nowadays.  
Some may train by themselves or go jogging alone;  
Some prefer to join others on golfing fairways  
Or in squash courts, at bowls or where frisbees are thrown,  
Or in team games where many oppose on each side  
Such as football or cricket, lacrosse or baseball.  
Some take part for their health, or for national pride,  
Or for fame and great fortune or just to enthral.  
So the benefits vary: for some it is health,  
And for some relaxation, for others it's wealth.