Badminton History

From Garden Game to Fastest Racket Sport | Level C1 | EnglishBridges.com

Before You Read

Discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Have you ever played badminton or another racket sport? Was it a relaxed game or a serious contest?
2. What do you know about where badminton comes from, or about famous badminton players?
3. How might the way people play or watch badminton differ from one country or age group to another?

Reading: Badminton History

Badminton can be a **leisurely pastime** in a garden or a fierce professional sport. Few sports **span** such a wide range. People have kept feathered objects **aloft** for a very long time. In China, a kicking game called jianzi is thought to have been played for around two thousand years. In Japan, hanetsuki is a New Year game played with wooden paddles. In Europe, children played battledore and shuttlecock, a game of cooperation rather than competition.

The competitive version **took shape** in British India in the mid-1800s, when army officers added a net and started counting points. For a while the game was called "Poona," after the **garrison** town now known as Pune. One of the first sets of rules is said to have been drawn up there in 1873. The name comes from Badminton House, an estate in England. It is widely believed that officers back from India played the game there, but the details are **murky**.

The British organized the sport, and the All England Championships became one of its most **prestigious** titles. Yet the **center of gravity** soon moved east. Malaya won the first Thomas Cup in 1949. When badminton became an Olympic medal sport in 1992, Indonesia won its first Olympic gold medals. At Paris 2024, Asian players took four of the five titles. Denmark's Viktor Axelsen won the men's singles, so Europe has not **relinquished** its place.

In 2023, a player from India set a world record with a hit of 565 kilometers per hour. It was set in a test, not in a match. Yet the feathers create so much **drag** that a smash loses about half its speed every three to four meters. That is the **paradox** of badminton: the fastest shot slows down quickly, so a good defender can still return it.

All of this depends on a **fragile** object with 16 feathers and a cork base. It is often claimed that the feathers must come from a goose's left wing, but this detail is open to question. At least one engineering text names the right wing. Feathers are expensive, so in 2026 the sport's governing body began testing **synthetic** shuttles at smaller events. Whether top players will **embrace** them is still an open question.

Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

Complete each sentence with a word or phrase from the box. Use each one once.

center of gravity	**paradox**	**pastime**	**leisurely**	**aloft**	**spanned**	**took shape**	**garrison**	**fragile**
drag	**murky**	**prestigious**	**synthetic**	**relinquished**				

1. Their friendship _____ more than fifty years and two continents.
2. After the exam, we went for a _____ lunch that lasted three hours.
3. Watching old films is a popular _____ among my grandparents' friends.
4. The balloon stayed _____ for hours before it finally came down in a field.
5. The new school _____ slowly as the walls and roof went up.
6. A small _____ of soldiers protected the island during the war.
7. The rules about who owns the land are _____, so nobody is sure.
8. He studied at one of the most _____ cooking schools in France.
9. For many years, the _____ of the world car industry was in Detroit.
10. The general _____ command of the army after he became ill.
11. A parachute works by creating a lot of _____ as it falls.
12. It is a _____ that saving time with phones can leave us feeling busier.
13. The peace between the two countries is still _____ and could break at any time.
14. Most running shirts are made of _____ fabric, not cotton.

Word Partners: Collocations and Word Families

Part A. Collocations

Match the two halves to make common phrases. Write the letter on the line.

1. at a leisurely	_____	**a.** waters
2. span	_____	**b.** pace
3. a garrison	_____	**c.** award
4. murky	_____	**d.** town
5. a prestigious	_____	**e.** economy
6. relinquish	_____	**f.** change
7. a fragile	_____	**g.** three decades
8. embrace	_____	**h.** a claim

Now choose three of the phrases and write your own sentences.

Part B. Word families

Complete each sentence with the correct form of the word in brackets.

1. Winning the All England title brings great _____. (*prestigious*)
2. The shuttle's _____ means it must be replaced often. (*fragile*)
3. It seems _____, but the fastest shot in sport is also one of the slowest to arrive. (*paradox*)
4. Scientists can _____ many materials that once came only from animals. (*synthetic*)
5. For many families in the 1870s, badminton was a _____ activity, played on summer lawns. (*leisurely*)
6. After the rain stopped, the river slowly lost its _____ and became clear again. (*murky*)

Comprehension Questions

Answer in full sentences.

1. What two kinds of badminton does the writer describe in the first paragraph?
2. How were most early shuttlecock games different from modern badminton?
3. Why was the game once called "Poona"?
4. What is known, and what is unclear, about how badminton got its English name?
5. What evidence does the writer give that the sport's center of gravity moved east?
6. Why does the writer mention Viktor Axelsen?
7. Why can a defender return a smash that left the racket at very high speed?
8. Why does the writer treat the claim about a goose's left wing with caution?
9. Do you think synthetic shuttles will replace feathered ones at the top level? Give reasons.
10. **True, False, or Not Given:** *"The world record of 565 kilometers per hour was set in an Olympic final."* Explain your answer using the reading.
11. **Yes, No, or Not Given:** *"The writer thinks the story of how badminton got its name is fully understood."* Explain your answer using the reading.
12. **Author's purpose:** Why does the writer open with a family playing in a garden and a player in an arena? Is it (a) to show how wide the range of the sport is, (b) to argue that garden badminton is better than professional badminton, or (c) to explain the official rules of the game?

True or False

Circle T (true) or F (false). Be ready to correct the false sentences.

1. Hanetsuki is a Japanese game played with wooden paddles. **T / F**
2. Battledore and shuttlecock was mainly a contest between two scoring sides. **T / F**
3. Army officers in British India added a net and started counting points. **T / F**
4. Historians know exactly when and how the name "badminton" was adopted. **T / F**
5. Malaya won the first Thomas Cup. **T / F**
6. Badminton became a full Olympic medal sport in 1972. **T / F**
7. A Danish player won the men's singles at Paris 2024. **T / F**
8. The 565 kilometers per hour record was set during a professional match. **T / F**
9. A smash loses roughly half its speed every three to four meters. **T / F**
10. Synthetic shuttles are already used at all top international events. **T / F**

Language Focus: Passive Reporting Structures

Use a **passive reporting structure** to report what people say or believe without naming who says it.

Pattern 1: *It is* + said / believed / thought / claimed + *that* + clause. *It is said that the lake has no bottom.*

Pattern 2: subject + *is* + said / believed / thought / known + *to* + verb. *The lake is said to have no bottom.* For an earlier time, use *to have* + past participle.

From the reading:

"One of the first sets of rules **is said to have been drawn up** there in 1873."

"**It is widely believed that** officers back from India played the game there."

Tip: Adverbs such as *widely*, *often*, and *generally* go before the past participle: *It is widely believed that…*

Part A. Sentence starters

Finish each sentence so that it is true for you or your country.

It is + past participle + that

1. In my country, it is often said that _____
2. It is widely believed that people who _____
3. In my family, it is generally thought that _____

Subject + is + past participle + to

4. My hometown is known to _____
5. A popular food in my country is said to _____

Part B. Questions

*Answer each question in a full sentence. Try to answer using a passive reporting structure (*It is said that… *or* …is thought to…*). Then ask a partner.*

6. What is a traditional food in your country said to be good for?
7. Which sport is thought to be the most popular in your country?
8. What is commonly believed about people who stay up very late?
9. Is there a place in your country that is said to be lucky, unlucky, or haunted?
10. Which city or region in your country is known to have the best food?

Discussion Questions

Discuss with a partner or in a small group. Give reasons and examples.

1. What sports or games did you play as a child? Which ones did you play just for fun?
2. Would you rather play badminton in a park with friends or watch a professional match? Why?
3. Which sports are most popular in your country, and why do you think they became popular there?
4. What traditional games are played during holidays or festivals where you live?
5. Many sports were organized and given rules by the British. Why do you think this happened?
6. Why do you think some countries become very strong in one particular sport?
7. How important is national success in sport, such as an Olympic gold medal, to people in your country?
8. Would you watch a sport more often if you understood the science behind it? Why or why not?
9. Should records set in tests, not in matches, count as world records?
10. Many stories about the origins of sports are not fully proven. Does it matter if a popular story is not true?
11. Would you accept a synthetic version of something traditionally made from animals, such as feathers, leather, or wool? Why?
12. Should sports change their equipment when natural materials become expensive or hard to find?
13. How does the success of a sport at the Olympics change how many people play it?
14. Is it fair that some sports receive much more money and media attention than others? Why?

Online Practice

Scan the code or visit **englishbridges.com/lessons/badminton-history** for the full reading, vocabulary activities, the Speed Challenge, typing practice, and AI conversation prompts.