



GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

ENGLISH (Specification 1900)

Unit 1 Non-Fiction, Media and Information (Higher Tier)

2431/02/RBI

READING BOOKLET INSERT

Monday 16 May 2011
Morning

Duration: 1 hour 45 minutes



INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

- The material in this READING BOOKLET INSERT is for use with the questions in Section A of the question paper.

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The “Sporting Spirit”

In this article written over 60 years ago in 1945, George Orwell puts forward his thoughts about the ways in which sporting ideals are becoming corrupted.

I am always amazed when I hear people saying that sport creates goodwill between the nations, and that if only the common peoples of the world could meet one another at football or cricket, they would have no inclination to meet on the battlefield. Even if one didn't know from concrete examples that international sporting contests lead to orgies of hatred, one could deduce it from general principles.

Nearly all the sports practised nowadays are competitive. You play to win, and the game has little meaning unless you do your utmost to win. In village cricket, where you pick up sides and no feeling of local patriotism is involved, it is possible to play simply for the fun and exercise: but as soon as the question of prestige arises, as soon as you feel that you and some larger unit will be disgraced if you lose, the most savage combative instincts are aroused. Anyone who has played even in a school football match knows this. At the international level sport is frankly imitation warfare. But the significant thing is not the behaviour of the players but the attitude of the spectators: and, behind the spectators, of the nations who work themselves into furies over these absurd contests, and seriously believe – at any rate for short periods – that running, jumping and kicking a ball are tests of national status.

As soon as strong feelings of rivalry are aroused, the notion of playing the game according to the rules always vanishes. People want to see one side on top and the other side humiliated, and they forget that victory gained through cheating or through the intervention of the crowd is meaningless. Even when the spectators don't intervene physically they try to influence the game by cheering their own side and “rattling” opposing players with boos and insults. Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words it is war minus the shooting.

Instead of blah-blahing about the clean, healthy rivalry of the football field and the great part played by the Olympic Games in bringing the nations together, it is more useful to inquire how and why this modern cult of sport arose. Most of the games we now play are of ancient origin, but sport does not seem to have been taken very seriously between Roman times and the nineteenth century. Then, in England and the United States, games were built up into a heavily-financed activity, capable of attracting vast crowds and rousing savage passions, and the infection spread from country to country. It is the most violently combative sports, football and boxing, that have spread the widest. There cannot be much doubt that the whole thing is bound up with the rise of nationalism – that is, with the lunatic modern habit of identifying oneself with large power units and seeing everything in terms of competitive prestige. In addition, organised games are more likely to flourish in urban communities. In a big town one must indulge in group activities if one wants an outlet for one's physical strength or for one's sadistic impulses. Games are taken seriously in London and New York, and they were taken seriously in Rome and Byzantium: in the Middle Ages, however, they were played, and probably played with much physical brutality, but they were not mixed up with politics nor a cause of group hatreds.

Why I hate Wimbledon: This tournament has turned into the most aggravating, toe-curling, exasperating sporting event

Jan Moir presents a personal, and one-sided, view of a major sporting event.

Oh, I say! Anyone for tennis? Sadly, the answer seems to be yes. Every year during Wimbledon fortnight, millions of British fans thrill afresh to the pock-pock-pock of fluffy yellow balls bouncing off the hallowed grass courts.

Hideously, this is now accompanied by the grunt-grunt of female players who holler as if they were in the final stages of giving birth. Before she was defeated by Gisela Dulko, a Russian player, Maria Sharapova, laid an ostrich egg on Centre Court while simultaneously treating the crowd to her impersonation of a constipated donkey. Well, come on. That's exactly what it sounded like. And this development is not the only ghastly new blot on the Wimbledon horizon.

For this famous tournament has turned into the most aggravating, toe-curling, exasperating sporting event on the planet. I can't watch it any more. I can't even listen to it.

Every tiny thing about Wimbledon is irritating. From the garbled commentary of the golly-gosh presenters to the motley selection of smirking semi-criminals, loafers, free-loaders, soap stars and minor royals stuffed in the Royal Box, the whole thing has become a very British farce.

Look at Roger Federer, one of the greatest players the game has ever seen. Those on-court clothes. Are you serious? Are you kidding me? Rog may be a giant of the game with shoulders like a sentry box, but isn't there something rather ridiculous about his three-piece tennis suits and their matching gold-embossed cream blazers? It is not a good look for any grown man.

Elsewhere, every aspect of Wimbledon has become overblown, exaggerated, richly varnished with snob appeal and a grudging, suburban, small-mindedness. It is the last word in one-upmanship and petty pride.

A tennis player crashing into the umpire stand is treated as a national event of huge importance.

A ball girl knocks up a few practice strokes with a player? Oh I say! It makes headline news. Even the soft fruits have their own agenda. For these are not just strawberries. These are Wimbledon strawberries.

Just look at them draped in their annual double cream of rich conceit. Don't they glow with a ruby self-importance quite unfitting their modest, poly-tunnel background? Of course they do.

Like everything else connected with Wimbledon, they are a bit of a joke, another tarnished tradition. Every year, as the sun rises on South West London the price of Wimbledon strawberries hits a new gold standard. This year, each one cost more than a diamond. Or a new car. Stop me and eat one? You would have to be mad or stupid to do so.

But we are talking about Wimbledon fans, so of course they buy them by the ton. Then they go and sit on Henman Hill aka Murray Mount and watch a game on a giant screen that is taking place within earshot. None of it makes any sense. But what does in this world of mixed doubles and single-minded silliness?

What on earth has happened to this once-great tournament? For many happy decades, Wimbledon was an event of character – a showcase for the lovely game of tennis; a sporting event which epitomised everything that was glorious about elegant sportsmanship and the lazy, hazy glory of an English summer. Today, it's a shameless, corporate, commercial circus attended by vulgar, jingoistic, smug, strawberry-munching crowds who just don't know how to behave properly.

Perhaps that's because this is the only sporting event they ever attend. Absolutely appalling crowd manners that have appeared over the last few years include Mexican waves in the middle of a match and cheering when whoever is playing their favourite makes a mistake.

The goons routinely shriek and shout mid-rally, then laugh when players make mistakes. They wear tennis ball earrings, Union Jack waistcoats and paint their faces with national flags. What chumps. For who truly believes that any modern tennis player is there on behalf of a nation? Instead of utterly and completely for themselves?

There is no more self-absorbed sports figure than the modern tennis player, an automaton who flogs around the global circuit with his or her eye on the cash prizes, the next match and not much else. It's all about them, not their place of birth. Not one of them is representing a country. Their focus is on themselves.

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