

# Sports in the Middle Ages

After the fall of Western Roman Empire, people in Europe faced harsh tumultuous political wars and religious struggles. During the early middle ages, Europeans faced the rising of feudal system and situations for common people were very difficult. However, situations kept improving as the system was more and more stabilized. The members of nobility were expected to fight and offer security for their families and their serfs. On the other hand, serfs were subservient and they used to pay harsh taxes and rents for their lords, knights, barons and king.

The basic means of earning was either to fight as a soldier or to work as a peasant or serf. As a result, there was plenty of time for peasants and nobles to enjoy and entertain themselves. According to available historical records, people of medieval ages enjoyed many holidays. Besides Sundays, they used to enjoy around eight weeks of holidays in a year during which, they were considered free from any work.

In addition, medieval people also scheduled specific time for sports. However, almost all sports of the medieval ages were designed with a motive of increasing the fighting capacities of the people as soldiers. There was a significant influence of the feudal system over the middle ages sports.

Lords of manors were expected to provide trained soldiers for kings that could be used at the time of need against the invaders, barbarians, and other enemies. It was necessary for every Knight to attain exceptional fighting skills and all techniques of wars. As a result, lords of manors used to improvise and encourage such sports which were designed to offer fighting and weapon practices for sportsmen. These activities used to encourage common men to take better care of their physical capabilities.

## **Sporting contests of middle ages**

The feudal system of middle ages offered proper chances for everyone to gain reputation and higher social rank. A Knight who could prove his fighting abilities during a war or during the sporting tournaments was often awarded with a great wealth. A peasant, who could perform better during these sports events, was used to get more land from the lords of manors. As a result, these sporting events and contests gained huge popularity among the masses and people enthusiastically took part in them.

## **Tournaments and Jousts**

Tournaments and Jousts were considered as big sporting events which included dangerous sports and games. Many contestants of these tournaments were used to be killed while playing those dangerous games. It was necessary for the participant of such tournaments and jousts to attain Quintain and Pell Training.



## **Archery: a major middle ages sports**

Archery was considered as an important medieval sport during the middle ages and it was not only a sport, rather it became an essential skill to be acquired by everyone by law. In 1252, The Medieval Archery Law was passed according to which, every Englishman of the age in between 15 and 60 years was required to equip himself with a bow and arrows. People were specifically trained to perform archery in specifically designated areas which were used to be known as Butts. Englishmen invented the Long Bow which was an important weapon that helped English to defeat French in the Battle of Crecy in 1346. According to historical estimates, around 2000 French knights and soldiers were killed by long bow arrows while English lost just 50 soldiers.



### Other Important Sports of Medieval Period

Apart from archery, other middle ages sports included , Golf, Gameball, Hammer-throwing, Shinty, Horseshoes, Jousting at tournaments, Skittles, Stoolball and Wrestling. All these were outdoor sporting games.

Colf was specifically played by the members of nobility. It was similar to present-day golf game and it is considered as the ancestor game of Golf. Similarly, shinty, which was also known as hurling was similar to the present-day game of hockey, while stoolball was similar to cricket. Skittles was a game which was very similar to ten-pin balling. All these games were designed to increase the physical strength, stamina and fighting skills of soldiers and common people.

In addition, there are evidences that people of medieval period also enjoyed playing sports like a form of ice-skating in which the contestants used to strap the shinebones of cows or other cattle to their feet and used them to skate on frozen ponds or lakes. They also used to play fighting with cudgels; which was a kind of club. In addition, people of medieval period also used to play a primitive form of badminton in which they used a ball and paddles.



### Games for Serfs and Peasants during the Middle Ages

In addition, peasants also had some specific games such as folk-football, a wild game in which members of a village used to contest with members of other village. The serfs and peasants were often invited to watch the games of aristocracy during the tournaments; however, they were not allowed to take part in these tournaments. Peasant women were also encouraged to take part in certain games. They could participate freely in footraces and ball games of medieval period. However, the ladies of nobility used to take part in hunting while they were allowed to keep falcons. On the other hand, women of the Middle Class often used to be spectators alone.



### Indoor Games of medieval period

While the medieval society provided enough chances for Middle Ages sports, they were not as well-organized and entertaining as the sports of classical Roman Empire were. Apart from these sports which were designed to increase fighting skills of knights, soldiers and peasants, the medieval society of Europe also enjoyed certain entertaining games including card games, dice games, board games, and children's games. Some of the indoor games which were very popular during the Middle Ages were, chess, backgammon, nine men's Morris, alquerque; which was a strategy game and is considered as the ancestor of checkers, fox and geese; another strategy game, the philosopher's game; another strategy game that included numbers, shovelboard, knucklebones, and hazard; an ancestor game of craps.