**THE ESSENCE OF SPORTS**

**BASEketball**

BASEketball is a comedy about sports. Indeed, “BASEketball” is a fusion of *Baseball* and *Basketball* invented by two complete losers, who eventually become stars. Over the course of a couple years, the sport becomes increasingly popular. The funniest part of the movie is the beginning: a sort of documentary on why modern-day sports are dying.

There was a time in America when contests of athletic prowess were a metaphor for the nobility of man. Historic moments forged by the love of the game celebrated the human potential to achieve excellence. But as time passed and the country neared the millennium something went awry¹.

The ideal of sportsmanship began to take a back seat to excessive celebration, the athletes caring less about executing the play than planning the vulgar grandstanding that inevitably followed even the most pedestrian of accomplishments. The games themselves became subordinate to the quest for money.

Stadiums and arenas became nothing more than giant billboards to promote commercial products. Players sold their services to the highest bidder, much like the hired guns of the Old West.

Soon it was commonplace for entire teams to change cities in search of greater profits. The Minneapolis Lakers moved to Los Angeles where there are no lakes. The Oilers moved to Tennessee where there is no oil. The Jazz moved to Salt Lake City where they don’t allow music. The Oakland Raiders moved to LA and then back to Oakland – no one in Los Angeles seemed to notice.

The search for greener pastures went on unabated. Continued expansion diluted the talent pool, forcing owners to recruit heavily from prisons, mental institutions and Texas. Fist fighting and brawling permeated every sport, overshadowing any athletic competition. As the problems mounted the fans became less and less interested.

To reverse the trend major sports started inter-league play. When that novelty wore off they tried inter-sports play. But no matter how far the major sports went it wasn’t enough to bring the fans back.

*BASEketball*, film directed by David Zucker, 1998

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**GLOBAL COMPREHENSION**

1. What used to be the “ideal of sportsmanship” in America?
2. What went wrong at the end of the millennium?
3. What is ridiculous about teams changing cities?
4. Why did fans become less and less interested in major sports?
5. What did majors sports do to reverse the trend? Did they succeed?
6. What is true and what is fiction in this description of sports in the US today?

**DETAILED COMPREHENSION**

Match the following expressions:

1. take a back seat to  
   a. unimaginative, boring  
2. grandstanding  
   b. *le plus offrant*  
3. pedestrian  
   c. increase, get worse  
4. billboards  
   d. *panneau d’affichage*  
5. the highest bidder  
   e. act of doing something to win applause from the audience  
6. hire  
   f. *pétrole*  
7. oil  
   g. at full force  
8. unabated  
   h. quarrel, fight noisily  
9. talent pool  
   i. pervade (*se répandre, s’infiltrer*)  
10. brawl  
    j. *éclipser*  
11. permeate  
    k. *tendance*  
12. overshadow  
    l. disappear  
13. mount  
    m. *embaucher*  
14. trend  
    n. *réervoir de talents*  
15. wear off  
    o. become less important

¹ go awry = go wrong
**Chapter 1**

This is the story of two men. They were different, but in each man a fire burnt. Each wanted to show the world something.  
**Harold Abrahams** was Jewish. In those days, the 1920s, many people thought that Jews could not be real Englishmen.  
**Eric Liddell** lived in Scotland and went to Edinburgh University. He wanted to go to China to preach the Gospel like his father. Eric was, also a very fast runner, and he was a famous footballer. His sister, Jennie, did not want him to become a runner.

In the autumn of 1919, Harold went to Cambridge University, to Caïus College. He was twenty. He made a friend on the first day, when he got off the train at Cambridge. This was Aubrey Montague.  
"You must try the Trinity Dash," said Aubrey. "Trinity College has an open space inside, with buildings all around it, and grass in the middle. And there’s a clock. You must dash round the open space and reach the finish line before the clock strikes twelve. It strikes 24 times."

The morning or the Trinity Dash came. Hundreds of young men were there to see Harold. He was the only runner. Lord Andrew Lindsay, a rich young man from a very, old English family said: "I'll run with my friend here." "You'll run faster if I run too," he said to Harold.

**Chapter 2**

"You're famous," said Eric's friend, Sandy McGrath who was at Edinburgh University with him. "Do you like having a famous brother, Jennie?"

Jennie, who was a year or two younger than Eric did not smile. "Eric," said Sandy, "You're going to run in the last race today, the 200 meters, aren't you? It's going to begin soon."

"Perhaps," said Eric, "If Jennie will let me."

"I suppose I can't stop you," said Jennie. [...]

"It's strange," said Sandy, "he's doing it all wrong. His feet are too high, he moves his arms too much, his head's too far back – but he's winning, he's winning easily!"

But Jennie walked quickly away. So Eric began to run more often and Sandy helped him. With every race Eric felt stronger. Then he ran for Scotland, and other runners began to talk about him. The papers called him "The Flying Scot".

In Cambridge, Harold Abrahams heard about him and went to Edinburgh to see the race between Scotland and France. The race began. A Frenchman was in front, and Eric was just behind him. And then, suddenly, the French runner put his arm in front of Eric who fell to the ground, but soon jumped up and began to run again, and crossed the finishing line two meters in front of the Frenchman.

**Chapter 3**

There was only a year before the next Olympic Games. They would all be in Paris. Each hoped to be in the Olympics. But, one day Aubrey said to Andy, "I'm tired. Let's go to London for a weekend."

So they all went to London, and on Saturday night hey went to the Savoy Theatre. One of the singers was a pretty young girl with a very sweet voice. After the theatre Harold took her to the restaurant. Her name was Sybil Gordon.

The young men’s next race was the 100 meters in the British Games in London. Harold and Eric both had their pictures in the papers. The sports pages said, *FLYING SCOT COMES SOUTH TO MEET THE CAMBRIDGE RUNNER. ABRAMHS SAYS "I'M READY"*. Thousands of people came to see the British Games. Sybil was there, but Harold shut out all thoughts of her. He thought only about himself (Number 30), and Liddell (Number 14).

However Liddell was faster – Abrahams came only second. For more than an hour after the race, Harold sat in the changing room with his head in his hands. "I turned my head and looked at Liddell," he thought. "Why did I do it?"

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2 preach the Gospel: annoncer l’Evangile.
"Harold," said a voice. It was Sybil. "Harold, I've waited for you. Are you all right?" Harold couldn't look at her.

"I can't run faster," said Harold. "I can't."

"Yes, you can, Mr. Abrahams," said a voice. "I can help you." It was the famous trainer Sam Mussabini.

Chapter 4

Back in Cambridge, Harold's training began. First, Sam showed him some pictures of Charlie Paddock, the world's fastest runner. "And here's Jackson Scholz, another American. And you know this one," Sam said with a smile.

"Eric Liddell."

And so, day after day, Harold trained with Sam. It was very hard work. "Think that you're running on hot stones, Mr. Abrahams. Your feet are burning. Up! Up! Up! Lightly! That's it."

Sometimes Sam went out in an open car, and Harold ran beside it.

Eric Liddell ran too, every day, and Sandy ran with him.

Jennie, of course was unhappy.

One afternoon, Eric was too late for a church meeting. "Training!" said Jennie, "Training, that's all you do, all you talk about. You don't think about us, and our work for God."

"Jennie," he said, "you don't understand. Try. Listen. God wants me to go to China. He made me and He wants me to run too. When I run His fire burns in me."

Jennie did not answer, but she smiled and kissed him.

Chapter 5

In June 1924, all the British runners went to Broadstairs, a seaside town south of London. Lord Birkenhead, President of the British Olympics, went with them. Every evening, in the half light, the thirty young men ran on the sands.

On the last night at Broadstairs, Lord Birkenhead talked to the runners. "You're the best in Britain, and now you're going to meet the best from all over the world. I know you'll do well. I've heard that the Americans are sending a very large number of runners, but we have Liddell and Abrahams, and they're going to show the Americans what Britain can do."

When the British runners left London by train for Dover, Sam Mussabini was there, and a lot of newsmen as well.

"Mr. Liddell," called one of them, "Mr. Liddell, are you going to win the 100 meters on Sunday?" Eric did not answer.

Chapter 6

The French President opened the Olympic Games on July 5th. The Games began. Andy's 3000-metre race came early and he was second.

The Prince of Wales came from England to see the games, and one evening there was a party for all the sportsmen. Lord Birkenhead talked to the Prince.

"They're talking about you, Eric," said Sandy. "And look – Lord Birkenhead's coming to speak to you."

"The Prince wants to meet you, Liddell. Come with me."

"We've talked about you, Mr. Liddell," said the prince with a smile. "And we don't think the French will change the day of the 100 meters race. Won't you run for your country? If I ask you?"

"I love my country, sir, but I can't run on a Sunday." Then suddenly the door opened, and Andy came in.

"Lord Lindsay?" said Lord Birkenhead, "What can we do for you?"

"I'm sorry to come in like this, sir, but I think perhaps I can help. I'm running in the 400 meters on Thursday. I've got my medal for the 3000 meters. Liddell could take my place in the 400 meters."

Chapter 7

Sunday came, and some of the first 100-metre races. Harold stood next to Charlie Paddock who moved his body forward. Harold did the Same, then quickly moved back. Too late. The starter's gun sounded and Paddock raced forward. The American won and Harold came second. There were no smiles for him from Sam Mussabini.
The Essence of Sports

"Like a child. A child, Mr. Abrahams. You moved when he moved. He hoped you would, that's why he did it. You're still in the last big race. Think about it. Forget the other runners. Think only of the race and you'll get that gold medal."

The runners in the changing room were very quiet. They went out together to the starting line. The Americans smiled at their friends, but Harold looked neither right nor left. Then at the sound of the starter's gun, the fire in him rose high and he raced forward. At 25 meters all the runners were together. At 50 meters, Harold led, and did so all the way to the finish.

Chapter 8

Eric waited with the other runners. He heard the starter's gun, and then led all the way. "And it's the fastest time ever," said Sam. "That was the best race in the Olympics."

And then they all went home. Harold and Sybil got married, and Eric soon left for China with his family. Their running days were over.

Eric stayed in China and died there just before the end of World War Two.

Harold became a famous sports writer and was often on radio and TV. He died in 1978.

Adapted a non abridged from W. J. Weatherby, Chariots of Fire, 1985, based on a screenplay by Colin Welland

FIRST READING

1. What was the Trinity Dash? Who won it?
2. What were Sandy's and Jennie's attitudes to Eric Liddell?
3. What happened at the Savoy Theater?
4. Why was Jennie unhappy about Eric’s dedication to running?
5. Why did Eric not answer the journalist who asked about “the 100 meters on Sunday”?
6. What was Eric’s dilemma and how did Andy Lindsay solve it?
7. Why did Harold lose the first 100-meters race and how did he behave in the final?
8. How did Eric get on with his race? Compare the two men’s destinies.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Fill in the table with some of the information that you found in the extracts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Main characters</th>
<th>Harold Abrahams</th>
<th>Eric Liddell</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>death (date)</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Sporting events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st race (type, place, score)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd race (type, place, coach, score)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd race (type, place, coach, other runners, score)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LESSER CHARACTERS

Three lesser characters played a prominent role in the two athletes’ lives:
1. Sybil Gordon;
2. Jennie Liddell;
3. Sam Mussabini.
Write a paragraph about each of them.

**THE ESSENCE OF SPORTS**

Write a paragraph about each of them.

**SUMMARY**

Complete the summary with the appropriate link words and vocabulary from the lists given below.

**NB:**

- Les mots sont donnés dam l’ordre du résumé mais ont été classés par catégories grammaticales.
- Pour compléter le résumé, identifiez d'abord la nature de chaque mot manquant en vous servant du contexte.
- Barrez les mots de la liste au fur et à mesure de leur utilisation.

**Mots de liaison:**

- **adverbes ou locations adverbiales:** as a matter of fact (en fait); on the one hand, ... (d’une part); on the other hand, ... (d’autre part); therefore (donc); however (cependant); in the long run (à la longue, à long terme); finally.
- **conjonctions:** in order to (afin de); although (bien que); before (avant de); whereas (tandis que); until (jusqu’à ce que); after (après que); so as (afin de).
- **prépositions:** in spite of (malgré); as for (quant à).

**Vocabulaire:**

- **verbes:** deal with (traiter de); succeed (réussir); overcome (surmonter); fulfil (accomplir).
- **noms:** Scot; winner (gagnant).
- **adjectif ou participe passé:** Jewish (juif); urged (poussé).

**Summary**

*Chariots of Fire* **deals with** the stories of two men, one of whom, Harold Abrahams, was a ………………. Englishman, and the other, Eric Liddell, a Presbyterian ………………. , they both had a fire burning in them and wanted to ………………. , as Harold meant to prove that he was a true Englishman, he was ………………. by a desire to run faster and faster ………………. be the ………………. although the competition was fierce. ………………. Eric's purpose was to run in God's name ………………. he went on a mission to China. ………………. the difficulties they had to ………………. , they trained as hard as they could. ………………. , Eric was better and won every race, ………………. Harold often came second ………………. , they each had their victory in die 1974 Olympics. ………………. , Harold became a sports writer ………………. he married his girlfriend. ………………. . Eric, he ………………. went to China so as to ………………. his mission.

**WRITING**

1. What were the two men’s ideals? (50 words)
2. What is your personal reaction to this story and what it illustrates: competition, perseverance, excellence, etc. (100 words)
3. Compare the movie *Chariots of Fire* with the extract from *BASEketball*. In your opinion, what has changed in sports in the last century and why? (100 words)