

Sport in New Zealand

Rugby is the most popular sport in New Zealand by far. The TV News sports section is usually 50% rugby, 50% other sports. There are two types of rugby; rugby union and rugby league. Rugby union is the most popular type in New Zealand.

Many boys play rugby from elementary school, through high school and up into club rugby for their local teams. Recently, women's rugby has become more popular too.

Rugby is a winter sport, and people all over the country wake up early on a Saturday morning to smash into each other in the freezing cold. Most high schools have a rugby team and boys try to make their school's "1st XV" (First fifteen), called so because there are fifteen players on a rugby team.

Most school or club teams will practise once or twice a week, with a game on the weekend. The social aspect of rugby is very important, with club team members having beers after the game with the opposition team.

Very good club players are selected to play for their area team to participate in the national competition, the NPC (National Provincial Championship). The best players from these teams can become professional rugby players, playing in the Super Rugby competition. They get paid around \$100,000NZD (7,000,000yen). There are five Super Rugby teams in New Zealand; the worst team is the Auckland Blues, then we have the Waikato Chiefs, the Wellington Hurricanes, the Otago Highlanders, and the greatest Super Rugby team of all-time, the Canterbury Crusaders. The best players from each of these teams can be selected to play for the national team, the All Blacks. Becoming an All Black is the dream of every boy in New Zealand. Teacher Jordan could have made the All Blacks with his blistering speed and chip-and-chase kicking skills, but was unfortunately about 40kgs too small.

The All Blacks, have the highest winning rate of any major sports team in the world and the women's team, the Black Ferns, have won the Women's World Cup 5 times.

Formal club, professional and international rugby games are played and watched by many people, but 99% of the rugby games in New Zealand are informal games played during lunch time at school. At Jordan's high school, Christchurch Boys' High, many students would come back from lunch time with their white shirts covered in mud from playing rugby.

Rugby became an Olympic sport at the 2016 Rio Olympics, with a special kind of rugby, Rugby Sevens, named so because there are seven players on each team. Sevens is a lot faster and more interesting than fifteen-man rugby, with much shorter games. Expectation for the New Zealand team was high. Our first game was against Japan, and... we lost! New Zealanders were sad to lose the game, but happy for Japan, and most of all, glad that we didn't lose to Australia.

Rugby league



Another sport that is popular in New Zealand is rugby league. Rugby league has 13 players on each team and, unlike rugby union, play stops and resets with every tackle. The attacking team can be tackled 6 times before they have to give the ball to the other side, so generally there are 5 tackles and the attacking team kicks the ball before the 6th tackle. The one-on-one hits in rugby league are generally harder and more aggressive than rugby union.

New Zealand rugby league teams are terrible. We have one team in the Australian NRL (National Rugby League) competition, the Auckland Warriors, who are a consistent disappointment. A surprising disappointment was the national rugby league team in the 2017 Rugby League World Cup, who lost to traditionally very weak teams like Tonga and Fiji, and so didn't even make the final stages: pathetic.

Cricket



Cricket is the most popular summer sport in New Zealand. Cricket is a bat and ball sport with 11 players on each team. There are many rules for cricket and it is a difficult sport for Japanese people to understand, but it is very fun to play. There are three types of cricket: Twenty-20 cricket, which is the newest form of cricket, with games lasting a few hours; One Day International cricket, with games lasting a whole day; and Test Match Cricket, where games go for 5-days! As you can imagine, cricket can be a very slow and boring sport to watch. Back yard cricket, however, can be very fun to play. Many New Zealand houses have big gardens or yards, so “back yard” cricket means an informal game of cricket played in your or your friend’s garden.

Because everyone’s gardens are different shapes and sizes, everyone’s back yard cricket has their own special rules, for example: “if you hit the ball over the fence into the neighbour’s garden you get 6-runs, but you are out.” Back yard cricket is often played on long summer evenings after a BBQ.

British Hills has its own version of back yard cricket in our popular British Sports lesson. Your teacher will show you how to play cricket in the gym. If you are lucky, you might get Jordan as your teacher, who despite being one of the all-time worst batsmen, can bowl very effective medium-pace deliveries.

Netball



Netball is the most popular women’s sport in New Zealand. Netball is similar to basketball, except the nets do not have a backboard and players are not allowed to run with the ball. This means when an attacking player catches a pass, they must stop, stand still, and pass the ball to another player. There are five players on each team and games are very fast-paced. Netball is a winter sport and many high schools and elementary schools have a netball team.

There is a national netball tournament, called the ANZ Championship, played between five teams from New Zealand and five teams from Australia. The best players from the New Zealand teams are selected to play for the New Zealand national team, the Silver Ferns. The Silver Ferns are the second-best team in the world, but usually lose to Australia. Recently, men’s and women’s mixed social netball teams are becoming more popular, and of all the major sports in New Zealand, netball, along with touch rugby, is the easiest and most fun to play.

Touch rugby



One type of rugby more people can enjoy playing is touch rugby. As the name suggests, in touch rugby, you touch the opposition player instead of tackling them. This means a player’s size and strength is not so important, so all age groups, and men and women can play together.

Younger children also play touch rugby up until the age of eight or nine years old, with tackling being introduced later. There are official tournaments for touch rugby in New Zealand, but the majority of games are played by social teams after work on weekdays.

Like rugby league, in touch rugby, play stops and resets after an attacking player is touched. Most touch rugby has no kicking, and is very fast-paced, so you need very good fitness to play.

Mark these sentences as T (True) or F (False).

- ☐ • Rugby union is as popular as rugby league.
- ☐ • Boys play rugby at school.
- ☐ • Rugby matches are played on Saturday afternoons.
- ☐ • Club teams train every day.
- ☐ • NPC participants are amateur players.
- ☐ • Players in the Wellington Hurricanes are professional players.
- ☐ • Rugby Sevens games last longer than fifteen-man games.
- ☐ • New Zealand and Australian teams are bitter enemies.
- ☐ • The rules for rugby league are the same as for rugby union.
- ☐ • New Zealand rugby league teams do well in competitions.
- ☐ • Cricket is difficult to understand.
- ☐ • Cricket is fun to watch.
- ☐ • It is often played at home.
- ☐ • Netball is similar to basketball.
- ☐ • The ANZ Championship is an international sports event.
- ☐ • There are men's and women's mixed social netball teams.
- ☐ • You don't have to be heavily built to play touch rugby.
- ☐ • You have to be fit to play touch rugby.

Answer these questions.

1. How much do professional rugby players earn?
2. Who are the Canterbury Crusaders?
3. How many World Cups have the Black Ferns won?
4. When did rugby become an Olympic sport?
5. In what way is rugby league different from rugby union?
6. How long does a Test Match Cricket game last?
7. When is back yard cricket often played?
8. What are the differences between netball and basketball?
9. Who are the Silver Ferns?
10. What's the difference between rugby and touch rugby?

