

Sneakers

Sneakers, or shoes designed mainly for sports and other outdoor activities, are worn in almost every country in the world. Arguably they have become a symbol of globalisation itself.

Yet there are some variations, not least in what they are called. In the US, they have always been 'sneakers', at least ever since the *Boston Journal* explained it to its readers as being 'the name boys give to tennis shoes' back in 1887. (1)..... However, in Britain, the word 'trainers' is much more common. Other names include 'daps' and 'plimsolls', which itself dates back to the 1870s. They are also known as 'rubber shoes' in the Philippines, 'tennis' in South Africa, 'running shoes' in Australia and 'canvas shoes' in Nigeria.

During the late 19th century, sneakers were worn by holidaymakers, as well as by sports players on the tennis court. The main advantage of wearing these shoes was that they enabled the wearer to move around quickly. (2)..... Later designs for sports players made this even more effective by also adding metal spikes which would dig into the ground.

British company JW Foster and Sons produced the first shoes made specifically for running in 1895, and the spikes allowed for greater acceleration and speed. (3)..... There, runners Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddell won their 100 metre and 400 metre running races while wearing these shoes. Doubtless Forster and Sons were delighted. The fortunes of Abrahams and Liddell were memorably portrayed in the Oscar-winning 1981 film *Chariots of Fire*.

During the 1920s and 1930s, sports became associated with building moral character and raising national pride. Demand for sneakers rose as a result, so manufacturers could afford to make the designs more varied. (4)..... All around the world, different shoes were also being produced for different sports. In France, a brand called Spring Court marketed the first canvas tennis shoe, complete with eight little holes for ventilation on the side of their rubber soles.

During the 1950s, people in America and Europe began to have more free time, more leisure opportunities, and often more money to spend. There were great changes in the attitudes and habits of the new generation. (5)..... Previously, they had simply worn the same things as adults, but in smaller sizes. Dress codes relaxed, and fashion items from sneakers to jeans became more and more popular.

Many were interested in what people such as US pop singer Elvis Presley and sporting heroes were wearing, and then wanted the same for themselves. Now it is common for sports stars to endorse (be seen to recommend) and advertise a particular brand of sneaker: recent examples include tennis ace Roger Federer and basketball star Lebron James. But did you know that this is a long-standing tradition, and that perhaps the bestselling sports shoe ever, the Converse All-Star was endorsed by basketball player Chuck Taylor as long ago as 1923?

Sneakers continued to become more and more popular. (6)..... This made sneakers the cheaper option, which in turn made young people even more likely to buy them instead of an alternative which seemed old-fashioned and was more expensive.

- A** This was one of the main problems with wearing sneakers.
- B** This was achieved by the use of an engraved piece of rubber on the underside of the shoe, which improved grip.
- C** For example, men's sneakers now became distinct from women's.
- D** In fact, sales grew so much that they negatively affected sales of traditional leather footwear.
- E** For perhaps the first time, children and teenagers everywhere were choosing for themselves what to wear.
- F** They became very popular with athletes, including at the 1924 Olympics.
- G** The term is also the standard name in Canada.