CULTURE CORNER

Hurling – a uniquely Irish game

Although it may look like an ordinary game, hurling has a very special meaning to Irish people: it is a symbol of their national identity and character. It is also the country's favourite hobby.

Hurling is often compared to field hockey. However, this analogy would be only partially true. Apart from the fact that both games involve a stick and a ball, it is hard to notice any other similarity. Surprisingly enough, hurling has in fact a lot to do with such sports as football and rugby, especially when you see what the players are allowed to do with the ball.

Hurling is played with fifteen players on each side on a field larger than a football pitch. The aim of the game is to hit a small ball called a sliotar with a wooden stick called a hurley in such a way that it goes into the opponents' goal or above it. If the ball goes around the goalkeeper and lands between two goalposts, in the net, you score three points; hitting the ball over the goal (but it must be between the H-shaped goalpost) gives you one point. An average score would be about 22-18 over 70 minutes of the game's official time.

Players are allowed to hit the ball not only when it is on the ground, but also when it is high in the air. They can also catch the ball in their hand (in which case they can carry it for not more than three steps), kick it or even hit it with an open hand. A player who wants to carry the ball for more than three steps, has to balance the sliotar on the end of the hurley while running. When performed at full speed, this last trick can look really impressive.

The fast pace of the game combined with the rule allowing the players to strike the ball above head height mean there is a high risk of injury. This is why since 2010 all players have had to wear a protective helmet. Given the long history of the game, the regulation seems to have come quite late. The reason for this is the general opinion about the game among the Irish: hurling is a hard game but it must be played fairly and with respect for the other players. No exceptions are made to this rule, no matter if it is the hurling played by youth leagues or the women's version of hurling (called camogie): in both cases, the game is as hard as that in the regular men's leagues and similar safety policies must be followed. The only difference is the size of the field and the weight and size of the equipment.

What is really surprising about hurling is the fact that although the game enjoys great popularity, it has remained purely amateur. Most players have regular jobs and do not receive any money for their performance unless they become team managers. Also, most games are either free or the entry fee is minimal.

There is no doubt that hurling is a unique sport in many ways. It is also uniquely Irish, as it reflects typical Irish values: hard work, fair play and the importance of the community.

1 Hurling and field hockey
- ○ are very similar.
- ○ have something in common.
- ○ should never be compared.
- ○ involve totally different equipment.

2 You score more points if you
- ○ hit the *sliotar* over the goal.
- ○ hit the *hurley* over the goal.
- ○ hit the *sliotar* into the net.
- ○ hit the *hurley* into the net.

3 The players are NOT allowed to
- ○ hit the ball when it is on the ground.
- ○ balance the ball on the end of the stick.
- ○ carry the ball in their hands.
- ○ take too many steps with the ball in their hands.

4 Protective helmets
- ○ were for a long time seen as unnecessary.
- ○ have a long tradition in hurling.
- ○ came too late.
- ○ have never been worn in hurling.

5 Women's hurling
- ○ is harder than men's hurling.
- ○ is safer than men's hurling.
- ○ follows the same rules as men's hurling.
- ○ involves exactly the same equipment as men's hurling.

6 Hurling is a unique sport because
- ○ it enjoys great popularity.
- ○ the players haven't turned professional.
- ○ team managers don't receive any money.
- ○ all games are free.

LIVEWORKSHEETS