

予習課題：次の英文を読んで、内容を理解しなさい。

In 1911, the American writer Ambrose Bierce defined Monday as "in Christian countries, the day after the baseball game." Times have changed and countries, too. In the U.S. of today, football is the most popular spectator sport. Baseball is now in second place among the sports people most like to watch. In Japan, it is the most popular. Both baseball and football are, of course, American developments of sports played in England. But baseball does not come from cricket, as many people think. Baseball comes from baseball. As early as 1700, an English churchman in Kent complained of baseball being played on Sundays. And illustrations of the time make it clear that this baseball was the baseball now called "the American game." Baseball is still very popular in the U.S. as an informal, neighborhood sport. More than one American remembers the time when he or she hit a baseball through a neighbor's window (nice neighbors return the ball...).

What makes football in the U.S. so different from its European cousins, rugby and soccer, is not just the size, speed, and strength of its players. Rather, it is the most "scientific" of all outdoor team sports. Specific rules state what each player in each position may and may not do, and when. There are hundreds of possible "plays" (or moves) for teams on offense and defense. Because of this, football has been called "an open-air chess game disguised as warfare." Those who don't understand the countless rules and the many possibilities for plays miss most of the game. They are like people who, watching a chess game for the first time, conclude that the purpose is to knock out as many pieces as possible. One reason for the growing popularity of American football is that games are more often shown on TV in more nations. Another is that the rules of the game are beginning to be better understood.

Baseball and football have the reputation of being "typically American" team sports. This is ironic because the two most popular participant sports in the world today are indeed American in origin—basketball and volleyball. The first basketball game was played in Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1891. It was invented at a YMCA there as a game that would fill the empty period between the football season (autumn) and the baseball season (spring and summer). Volleyball was also first played in Massachusetts, and also at a YMCA, this one in Holyoke, in 1895. During the First and Second World Wars, American soldiers took volleyball with them overseas and helped to make it popular. Today, of course, both basketball and volleyball are played everywhere by men and women of all ages. They are especially popular as school sports.

Professional and collegiate basketball games in the U.S. attract large numbers of fans (57.8 million spectators in 1991). Most of the important games are televised live. Basketball's growth in the last few years outside the U.S. has been startling. It was already in 1991 the world's fastest growing spectator sport. Then in 1992, the U.S. "Dream Team"—Michael Jordan and "Magic" Johnson and friends—appeared at the Olympics in Spain. While dazzling and charming viewers around the world, they also brought a new popularity to the sport. In the U.S., in 1992, fully 90 percent of all professional NBA (National Basketball Association) games were sold out. And today, NBA games are shown on TV in over 90 countries around the world.

(注) Ambrose Bierce : ビアス (1842-?1914)、米国のジャーナリスト・作家