

## Sports in Islam

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### Abstract:

Nobody can avoid sports or playing; for 'playing' is a natural phenomena. Regardless of age and state; everybody is engaged in some kind of sport somehow; everybody plays sport or is interested in some kind of sport. In Islam it is not only permissible but religious obligation (Sunnah) - a Prophetic tradition to play some sports. These include walking, running, wrestling, swimming, horse riding etc. In essence participation in 'sport' in Islam are twofold; one to be fit and healthy to carry out fundamental religious obligations like dawah (call towards Islam), offering five times prayer daily, keeping fasts and performing Hajj and; second to protect oneself and sacred limits of Islam against enemy, evils, aggression and oppression commonly termed as 'jihad'. Further Islam encourages sports which involves mutual love, respect and cooperation and prohibits sport which involves grudge, hatred and animosity. In this paper an effort has been made to throw light on 'participation in sport' in the light of Islamic rules or guidelines. This paper is primarily based on secondary data. The main aim of the paper is to explore Islamic teachings about the ruling of sport so that it will be not just entertaining activity but a blessed and fruitful one. Besides, it's purpose is to develop taste for the 'participation in sport' and to broaden our understanding regarding.

Key words: Islam, sports, participation, healthy, religious obligation.

### INTRODUCTION

In Islam it is not only permissible but religious obligation – a Prophetic tradition to play some sport. Sport activities in which Prophet (PBUH) himself took part are walking, running, wrestling, swimming, archery, spear throwing, horse riding and camel racing. Playing sport is not against the spirit of Islam unless it violates rules of Shariah (Islamic code of life). These general guidelines which must be taken care of by both the sexes while playing are;

1. To cover all the obligatory parts of the body.
2. To avoid customs / uniforms that contravenes the Islamic regulations.

3. To avoid gender mixing strictly after the age of ten.
4. To pay due attention to daily prayers and other religious obligations.
5. To avoid killing, gambling, defacing and extra indulgence in sport and;
6. To avoid 'sport' or customs which are in particular identified with any other religious community<sup>1,2</sup>

However, specifically, with reference to women, they are allowed to participate in sport provided it is carried out in privacy and where in there is no male interfere. Likewise Kay has mentioned "to participate in sports women need to be out

of the sight of men.”<sup>3</sup> But allows husband and wife to play sport with each other, just like Prophet Mohammad PBUH said to Ayesha (her wife ) “come on let us have a race”<sup>4</sup> Thus in nut shell, Islam and sport are complimentary and not contradictory; if sport provides ‘shield and strength’ to the body of Islam ; Islam provides it spirit and moral content. With reference to participation in sport, the prophet Muhammad PBUH said, “any action without the remembrance of god is either a diversion or heedlessness with exemption to four acts ; walking from target to target (archery), horse training , playing with family and swimming”<sup>5</sup>

## ISLAM AND SPORT

The word Islam comes from an Arabic word “salama” meaning peace, safety or security, while as Muslim is the one who follows the way of Islam. Islam does not oppose having a strong and healthy body via practicing sports. Muslims are commanded to be of sound bodies and sound minds in addition to having sound morals. A strong believer is considered better and more lovable to Allah than a weak believer. Likewise Sayyiduna Zayd ibn Arqam (RA) narrates that the holy Prophet (PBUH) used to say (in prayer): “I seek your protection from powerlessness (ajz), laziness (kasl), cowardice (jubn), miserliness (bukhl), and weakness (harem).”<sup>6</sup>

About the position of play in Islam, the holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is reported to have said, “Entertain [yourselves] and play, for indeed I dislike harshness to be seen in your religion.”<sup>7</sup> Participation in sport is the activity of healthy and fit ones. If a person is healthy, he/she can excel in sport and dominate in performance. But in the case of

otherwise, outstanding performance is nothing more than a dream. Islam advocates in favor of good health and sound physique. Healthy and fit Muslim is considered to be better than the weaker one. Regarding health and fitness, the Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said: “A strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer”.<sup>8</sup> About the significance of refreshment and revitalization of the minds and soul, the holy Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said, “Refresh your hearts from time to time.”<sup>9</sup>

At the time of the advent of Islam, limited events of sport were common among the masses. Since then, a considerable number of new events of sport have come into existence which has been popular in different parts of the world. From the perspective of Islam, legality or otherwise of these newly invented sport events can be evaluated and determined by the scale of Islamic teachings. Meaning that participation in all those sport events that are in conformity of the spirit of Islam and wherein the participant does not violate the Islamic guidelines with reference to participation in sport like gambling, gender mixing, violating the Islamic cloth code and disregarding the “Fard” (obligatory religious practices like five times daily prayer, fasting in the month of Islamic month Ramadan etc), is allowed in Islam. Further Islam strictly prohibits sport which involves hooliganism, gloating or jeering. Islam views sports as a means of enhancing mutual love and cooperation among people, not a means of hurting feelings. That’s why the winning party should never be carried away with joy to the extent of insulting the opponents, nor must the defeated party be eaten up with envy at his counterpart’s advantage. He must keep in mind that nothing is permanent and his today’s loss will pave way for his tomorrow success, if he keeps patience and tries to improve himself. This reminds us of the occasion when a

nomad's camel outpaced the Prophet's she-camel which was known to be ever-first in racing, Muslims felt sad. Commenting on the issue, the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him said: "Almighty Allah has decreed that nothing shall have a permanent glory (meaning that every situation has its ups and downs and no condition is permanent)." <sup>10</sup> In Islam both the winners and losers are taken into consideration; those who rank in the competition are given prizes and the losers are asked to make efforts. <sup>11</sup>

It is evident from the available sport record that the prominent events of sport in which, the holy Prophet (PBUH) himself or his companions participated in, were walking, running, wrestling, swimming, archery, spear-throwing horse-racing and camel-racing. These sporting events were carrying significance from the perspectives of health and fitness with reference to taking part in "Jihad" (the holy battle fought for the cause of Islam). These sport events were meant for improving the vital battle oriented skills of the masses.

### Walking

Walking is one of the main gaits of locomotion among legged animals. Walking is typically slower than running and other gaits. Walking is defined by an 'inverted pendulum' gait in which the body vaults over the stiff limb or limbs with each step. Many people enjoy walking as a recreation in the mainly urban modern world, and it is one of the best forms of exercise. <sup>12,13</sup> For some, walking is a way to enjoy nature and the outdoors; and for others the physical, sporting and endurance aspect is more important.

About the significance of walking the holy Prophet (PBUH) highlighted upon the benefits of walking by saying, "Compete in archery, have a fit body and walk barefoot."

<sup>14</sup> It was narrated that Abu Moosa (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "The people who will receive the greatest reward for prayer are those who walk the furthest distance to come and pray, then those who walk the next furthest." <sup>15</sup> It was narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Whoever purifies himself in his house then walks to one of the houses of Allaah in order to perform one of the duties enjoined by Allaah, for every two steps he takes, one will erase a sin and the other will raise him one degree in status." <sup>16</sup> Walking thus to the house of Allah each day five times or more will not only bring innumerable benefits as cited above but will also erase ones sin's.

### Running

Running is a method of terrestrial locomotion allowing humans and other animals to move rapidly on foot. Running is a type of gait characterized by an aerial phase in which all feet are above the ground (though there are exceptions). <sup>17</sup> This is in contrast to walking, where one foot is always in contact with the ground, the legs are kept mostly straight and the center of gravity vaults over the stance leg or legs in an inverted pendulum fashion. <sup>18</sup> A characteristic feature of a running body from the viewpoint of spring-mass mechanics is that changes in kinetic and potential energy within a stride occur simultaneously, with energy storage accomplished by springy tendons and passive muscle elasticity. <sup>19</sup> The term running can refer to any of a variety of speeds ranging from jogging to sprinting.

As reported by Ayesha, once the holy Prophet (PBUH) entered into the running competition with her (Ayesha), which she won but later on when I put on some weight,

we ran again, and this time He won, the Prophet (PBUH), who won the race, said, "This is the revenge of the first race; now we are level."<sup>20</sup> With the objective of promoting health and fitness of the children, the holy Prophet (PBUH) used to conduct running competitions among them, narrated by Abdullah bin Harit.<sup>21</sup>

### **Wrestling**

Wrestling is combat sports involving grappling type techniques such as clinch fighting, throws and takedowns, joint locks, pins and other grappling holds. The sport can either be theatrical for entertainment, or genuinely competitive. A wrestling bout is a physical competition, between two (occasionally more) competitors or sparring partners, who attempt to gain and maintain a superior position.

The Prophet wrestled with a number of men, one of whom was Rukanah ibn `Abd Yazid ibn Hashim ibn `Abdul-Muttalib, who lived in Makkah and was a skillful wrestler. Accepting wrestling challenge from the renowned wrestler Rukana bin Abdulyazid, the holy Prophet (PBUH) beat him three times in wrestling.<sup>22</sup> The Prophet also wrestled with Abu Al-Aswad Al-Jumahi, who was so strong that he would stand on a cow hide, and ten men would pull the hide to take it from under his feet, but in the end, the hide would be torn and he had not moved an inch. To see and determine the fitness level of the young children, the holy Prophet (PBUH) conducted wrestling competitions among them with reference to their participation in Jihad.<sup>23</sup>

### **Swimming**

Swimming is an individual or team sport that uses arms and legs to move the body through water. The sport takes place in pools or open water (e.g., in a sea or lake). Competitive swimming is one of the most

popular Olympic sports.<sup>24</sup> Swimming is the sport that is very much emphasized in the Islamic literature. Ata bin Abi Rabah (RA) narrates that the Prophet (PBUH) used to conduct swimming competitions among the youngsters.<sup>25</sup> About the significance of swimming, Umar (RA) is reported to have said "Teach your children how to swim." On another occasion Umar (RA) is reported to have said "Teach your children swimming and archery, and tell them to jump on the horse's back." It is reported that in the young age, our holy Prophet (PBUH) used to swim in the pool situated in the garden of his maternal uncle.<sup>26</sup>

### **Archery**

Archery is the sport, practice or skill of using a bow to propel arrows. The word comes from the Latin 'arcus' denoting arc shaped weapon bow and arrow. Historically, archery has been used for hunting and combat. In modern times, it is mainly a competitive sport and recreational activity. The skill of Archery was regarded as one of the basic and effective tools for participation in Jihad. The holy Prophet (PBUH) said to his companions, "All of you should know the art of Archery."<sup>27</sup> The holy Prophet (PBUH) used to admire those companions who were expert in the skill of Archery. During the Battle of Uhed, Sa'd bin Abi Waqqas showed his excellence in throwing the arrows in target, the holy Prophet (PBUH) appreciated him with the remarks, "May my mother and father be sacrificed for you."<sup>28</sup> On another occasion the holy Prophet (PBUH) said, "Archery is not simply an entertainment but it is the best thing that you do for entertainment."<sup>29</sup> About the importance of the skill of Archery, the Prophet (PBUH) said, "Whoever learnt the art of shooting then left it, is not from us."<sup>30</sup>

### **Camel-Riding and Horse-Riding**

With reference to the significance of Camel racing, horse racing and archery as the skills of war for Jehaad, the holy Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said that, "There are presents for three things: Camel racing, horse racing and archery." He admired the position holders of aforementioned three events.<sup>31</sup> The holy Prophet (PBUH) is also reported to have said, "Every game a person plays is futile except for archery, training one's horse and playing with one's wife."<sup>32</sup> According to the narration of Ibn Umar, the holy Prophet (PBUH) used to train his horse and then He take part in competitions with it.<sup>33</sup> Similarly it was narrated from Abu Hurairah (RA) that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: "There should be no awards (for victory in a competition) except for arrows, camels or horses."<sup>34</sup> Likewise Urwa-al-Bariqi (RA), narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) said, "Horses are always the source of good, namely, rewards (in the Hereafter) and booty, till the Day of Resurrection."<sup>35</sup>

### **Spear Throwing**

A spear is a pole weapon consisting of a shaft, usually of wood, with a pointed head. The head may be simply the sharpened end of the shaft itself, as is the case with fire hardened spears, or it may be made of a more durable material fastened to the shaft, such as flint, obsidian, iron, steel or bronze. The most common design for hunting or combat spears since ancient times has incorporated a metal spearhead shaped like a triangle, lozenge, or leaf.

Once the holy Prophet (PBUH) saw competition of spear throwing He said to them, "Throw it (i.e. their spears), O children of Isma'eel, for your father was a spear-thrower."<sup>36</sup> Abu Huraira narrates that once, in the presence of the holy Prophet

(PBUH), a few Ethiopians were practicing spear throwing in mosque. Umar (RA) stopped them from doing so. But the holy Prophet (PBUH) directed Umar (RA) with the remarks "O Umar let them play."<sup>37</sup> Explaining the justification of playing in a mosque, Imam Bukhari (RA) says that since spear-throwing is a skill of Jihad, and Jihad is the act of worship, therefore the holy Prophet (PBUH) allowed them to carry on spear throwing in the mosque.

Keeping in view the Islamic approach with reference to participation in sport it becomes evident that promotion and maintenance of the health, sound physique, vitality and fitness and the state of preparedness to meet any emergency in the life are all vital in Islam. In addition to having reward from Allah by following the Sunnah, (doing the act of the holy Prophet (PBUH), the aforementioned sport events, which have been participated in or played in the presence of the holy Prophet (PBUH) and His companions, serve the objective of promoting health, having entertainment, getting physical fitness. Islam never refrains Muslims from getting and promoting their health and fitness.

### **Findings**

The study of the literature reveals that there exist a close relationship between Islam and participation in sport or health activities. As evident from the literature review quoted in the paper that Islam and sport are complimentary and not contradictory; if sport provides 'shield and strength' to the body of Islam ; Islam provides it spirit and moral content. The Islamic approach to sport is quite balanced one, on the one hand Islam encourages a sport which involves mutual love, respect and cooperation and on the other it prohibits sport which involves grudge, hatred and animosity. Further it emphasizes both on sound body and strong

sprit. The purpose behind to participate in sport is to be fit and healthy to carry out religious obligations very well besides carrying out jehaad.

## Conclusion

Islam and sport are quite complimentary. Playing sport in Islam is not only permissible but religious obligation provided they are carried out according to the general guidelines of Islam called 'shariath'. Further Islam approves only such sport which involves mutual love, respect and cooperation and prohibits sport which involves hatred, grudge and animosity. Sport activities in which Prophet (PBUH) himself took part are walking, running, wrestling, swimming, archery, spear throwing, horse riding and camel racing.

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