

## Soccer Time!

Bo played soccer. It was his favorite sport. Sure, the other ones were fun, but there was something very fun about soccer. It was competitive, but so were other sports. It was fast, and some sports were fast, but this was like a race. Maybe that's what he liked best about it: the running. It was like a zigzagging race while kicking a ball and that made it fun.



Basic soccer equipment is not expensive, which makes it an easy game to play. It can also be played casually among friends anywhere that you have a nice stretch of grass. Pro players wear a jersey, shorts, socks, cleats, and shin guards. At home, you can get away without the shin guards and probably wear tennis shoes. Cleats, however, help you grip the grass so you can run and turn more quickly. This is important for protecting your ankles and legs as you spin, turn, kick, and change directions often.

Soccer usually has 11 players per team, including a goalkeeper. Players are usually broken up into four groups: goalkeepers, defense, midfielders, and forwards. There are different kinds of defense, midfielders, and forwards, each with a slightly different job, but each team only has one goalkeeper. He or she is important, because the goalkeeper is the only one that can handle the ball with their hands. All other players must only use their feet, along with any part of their legs, chests, or heads.

Soccer is a 90 minute game split into two 45 minute halves. This is different than games like baseball, with its nine innings; basketball and football, which each have four quarters; or hockey with its three periods. Unlike football, there isn't a lot of stopping in soccer. While the game is playing, the clock keeps running. When it stops, it is only for a few seconds to set up for a kick or to give the other team the ball. Because of that, it is a fun sport to watch, too, because you don't have a lot of down time or breaks.

Bo liked playing as a midfielder. It was a fun position, probably with the most running involved. He not only had to help the defense fight off the other team's offense, he also had to help move the ball down the field to help his own team score. This meant that sometimes he would even take shots on the opponent's goal or set up a play for another one of his teammates. He loved getting assists on scores, because if he played just right, he knew he could help his team score and win.

Soccer is not like basketball or even football in terms of scoring. Each goal is only worth one point. It's most like ice hockey, if you have to compare it to any of the other major pro sports. Because the field is long, usually 100 meters (a meter is a little longer than a yard), and because there are so many players on the field, many soccer games end with scores of 0-1, 2-1, 2-0, or something like that. Games with more than three or four goals scored are kind of rare, unless the match is very uneven. Soccer is more about the near misses and exciting chances to score. With strong defense, one move and one kick can mean the difference between winning and losing. Close games are very thrilling to watch or play in!

Referees watch for tripping, offsides penalties, and other rules infractions, but mostly they like to keep the game moving along smoothly. Most minor infractions usually just end with the blow of a whistle and one team or the other gets to take the ball from where the event occurred. Major penalties are rare, so penalty shots are pretty interesting to watch. Sometimes they are 1-on-1 kicks against the goalie, or they might have whole teams lined up like a wall trying to kick or head the ball into the net!



Bo wished everyone loved soccer as much as he did. America has pro teams and even participates regularly in the international championship, FIFA's World Cup. However, it is in places like South America and Europe that you really see soccer's popularity. Soccer is easily the biggest sport to watch in most countries of the world. Even Africa and Asia have very strong soccer traditions.

Are you going to try to watch or play soccer?

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Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

1. What sport does Bo play?

- A. Soccer
- B. Baseball
- C. Basketball
- D. Football

2. How many minutes is a soccer game?

- A. 60
- B. 45
- C. 90
- D. 120

3. What sport is the scoring in soccer most like?

- A. Ice Hockey
- B. Baseball
- C. Basketball
- D. Football

4. TRUE OR FALSE: Soccer is the most popular sport to watch in most countries.

- A. True
- B. False

5. TRUE OR FALSE: Soccer is a very high scoring game.

- A. True
- B. False

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