



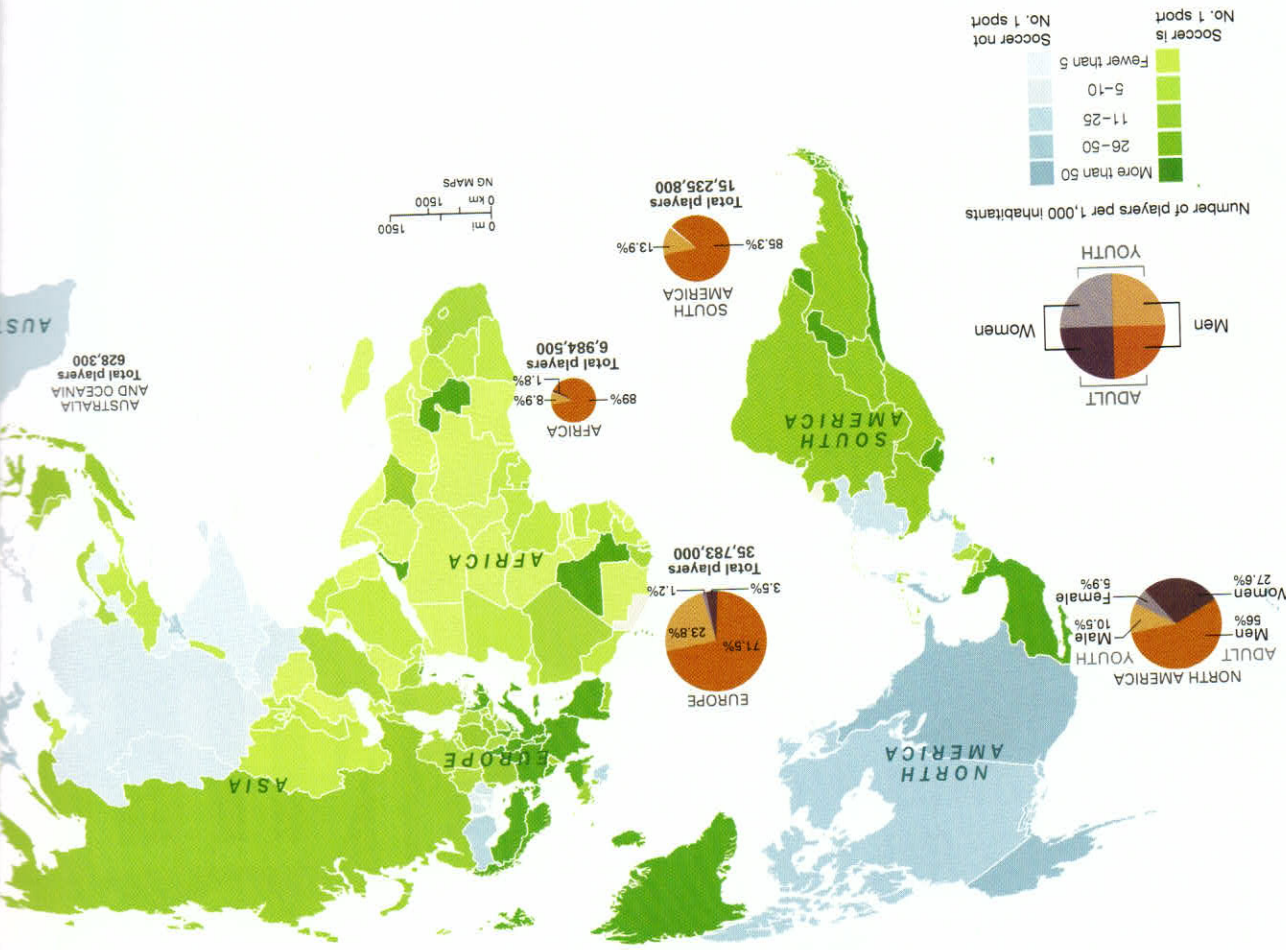
Hurdlers racing in  
Guangzhou, China

# SPORT AND FITNESS

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- A. True or False.** Look at the information above. Read the sentences below and circle **T** (True) or **F** (False).
- Soccer is the most popular sport in most countries of the world. **T** **F**
  - The continent with the largest number of soccer players is Asia. **T** **F**
  - More women play soccer in South America than in North America. **T** **F**
  - In most countries in western Europe, there are more than 50 players per 1,000 inhabitants. **T** **F**
- B. Predict.** Why is soccer such a popular sport? Make a list of your ideas. Then read the passage. Underline all the reasons that are mentioned. How many of your ideas are discussed?

## Before You Read



# A WORLD OF SOCCER



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**1 Camaraderie** is a feeling of friendship or team spirit among people who share an experience together.

from many different nations, and these clubs now have fans all over the world. Or perhaps it's the promise of great wealth. A number of professional soccer players, including Cameroon's Samuel Eto'o and Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, come from poor families. Today, both of these players make millions of euros every year.

Soccer is popular for all of these reasons, but ultimately, the main reason for its **universal** appeal may be this: It's a simple game. It can be played anywhere with anything—a ball, a can, or even some bags tied together. And anyone can play it. "You don't need to be rich . . . to play soccer," says historian Peter Alegi. "You just need a flat space and a ball."

1 Throughout history, humans have played some kind of kicking game. What the world now calls football, or soccer in the U.S., began as far back as 2500 B.C.E. with the Chinese game of *tsu chu*. The sport we know today originated in Britain. By the 1840s, England's Football Association **established** a set of rules, and the modern game was born. Today, more than 120 million players all over the globe **participate** in the game, truly making soccer the world's sport. So, why is soccer so popular? Maybe it's the game's camaraderie:<sup>1</sup> the feeling that the team on the field is *your* team; their win is *your* **victory**, and their loss is *your* **defeat**. Or maybe it's the game's international quality. In countries like France, England, Spain, and Brazil, major teams have players

> A dirt soccer field in Agahozo Shalom Youth Village, Rwanda

# THE WORLD'S GAME



35 It is this **unique** simplicity that makes soccer the most popular sport in Africa. Here, even in rural areas far from the bright lights and big stadiums, children and adults play the game, often with handmade balls.

40 **A Passion<sup>2</sup> for Soccer**

45 The story of soccer in Africa is a long one. In the mid-1800s, European colonists<sup>3</sup> brought the game to Africa. Early matches were first played in the South African cities of Cape Town and Port Elizabeth in 1862, and in time, the sport spread across the continent. In the past century, as countries in Africa urbanized and became independent, they joined the

2 **Passion** is a powerful emotion or feeling.  
 3 **Colonists** are people from one country who take control of another country.  
 4 If you do something **in your bare feet**, you do it without shoes.

50 International Federation of Association Football (FIFA). Today, some of the game's best players come from African nations, including Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Nigeria, and all over the continent, thousands of soccer academies now recruit boys from poorer cities and to play the game. Many learn to play in their feet,<sup>4</sup> and they are tough, creative **competitors**. Their dream is to join a national team or to play the big clubs in Europe someday. For some, the dream comes true, but for most, it doesn't.

Children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo play soccer with a ball made of string and t



60 But joining a professional team and making a lot of money isn't the main reason that soccer is so popular all over Africa, says Abubakari Abdul-Ganiyu, a teacher who works with youth clubs in Tamale, Ghana. "Soccer is the passion of everyone here," he says. "It **unites** us." In fact, more than once, the game has helped to bring people together. In Ivory Coast, for example, immigrants<sup>5</sup> and Muslims faced discrimination<sup>6</sup> for years. Yet many of the country's best soccer players are from Muslim and immigrant families. As a result, the national team has become a symbol of unity and has helped to **promote** peace throughout the country.

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All over Africa, soccer is popular with parents and teachers for another reason: It keeps young people—especially boys—in school and out of trouble. "Most clubs in Tamale, Ghana, don't allow boys to play if they don't go to school," explains Abubakari. "We're trying our best to help young people and to make them **responsible** in society. Soccer helps us do this. For us, soccer is also a tool for hope."

✓ In Johannesburg, South Africa, a group of fans cheer on their team.

5 An **immigrant** is a person who comes to live in a country from another country.

6 If you **face discrimination**, you are not treated fairly by others in society.

