

# The History of Badminton

The sport of badminton evolved from the ancient game of battledore and shuttlecock, a game played by adults and children for at least 2000 years in ancient Greece, China, Japan and India. Peasants played it in Medieval England by the late 16th century, where it had become a popular children's game. By the 17th century, battledore had become a pastime of the leisured classes in many European countries. The game simply involved two players using bats to hit a shuttlecock back and forth as many times as they could without letting it hit the ground. This European influence may be one explanation to how battledore shuttlecock found its way to colonial America.

Two colonial pieces of art give further evidence of the existence of battledore shuttlecock in early America. One is a painting by William Williams entitled Portrait of Master Stephen Crossfield. Completed in the early 18th century, it shows a man holding a racquet and shuttlecock. The other piece is a late 18th century fabric hanging in Williamsburg, Va., showing childhood diversions. Two young boys are depicted hitting a shuttlecock back and forth.

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When and where the game of battledore shuttlecock changed to require court boundaries as it evolved into the sport of badminton is not known. We do know the sport takes its name from the Duke of Beaufort's estate at Badminton in Gloucestershire, England where a new version of battledore had emerged by the end of the 1850s. It is also known a form of the game was being played by the British in India in the 1860s and 1870s, and that the first rules were compiled there.

The game of badminton appeared in the U.S. as a slow-paced New York society game in the 1870s. A fast shuttle was used, which required little effort on the part of the players hitting it from end to end. An hour-glass shaped court made less area for the players to cover, and a higher net made it near impossible to smash. The formal suits and dresses worn by players also made it very difficult to run effectively.

The first badminton club in the United States, the Badminton Club of the City of New York, in 1878. The club served basically as a social gathering place for the elite with little emphasis on badminton. The games at the club in the early days were very similar to a carnival in nature, featuring multi-colored shuttlecocks, and colored pennants and badminton poles. While resting between games, players snacked tea, sandwiches and cakes.

As the 1900s approached, the game of badminton became far more athletic in nature. Following a scandal where a man took off his tuxedo coat while playing, the men of the club decided tennis clothing would be more appropriate. The rules of the English Badminton Association were adopted in 1905, and players soon found themselves on a rectangular-shaped court, 44' x 20' for doubles, 44' x 17' for singles.

In 1908, the Badminton Health Club in Boston was formed, and by 1925 included more than 300 members.

In the 1930s the game's popularity grew throughout New England, New York, the Midwest and West Coast. Some of the more notable Hollywood personalities who played the sport included Sonja Henie, James Cagney, Pat O'Brien, Harold Lloyd, Bette Davis, Boris Karloff and Ginger Rodgers.

On July 24, 1942, CBS broadcast badminton on national television, as the top 14 male and female players on the East Coast competed for the CBS Silver Bowl. Badminton also went to the silver screen in the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer movie *Badminton* (which was named "MGM Movie Short of the Year" for 1945).

In the 1950s, the game in the United States reached such heights that athlete Joe Alston was featured on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*, the first and only time a badminton athlete has accomplished such a feat.

There were more changes to the sport in the 1960s. The wood shot was once again deemed legal by the IBF.

The 1970s saw a decline in the number of clubs in the United States, but an expansion in high school and collegiate play, as well as the introduction of lighter metal rackets.

In 1987, the USOC officially recognized USBA as the National Governing Body for the sport of badminton. In 1989, badminton made its USOC event debut at the U.S. Olympic Festival in Oklahoma City, Okla.

At the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, badminton made its first appearance as an Olympic event, with U.S. athletes advancing as far as the second round of the tournament. The sport first appeared on the Pan American Games program in 1995 in Argentina.