



## **COMPETITIVE SPORTS AND LOCKDOWN EASING: AN APPROACH FOR ASSESSING WHAT WE CAN DO**

As restrictions from the lockdown begin to ease, one of the first questions for many people is: when will they be able to play their favourite sports again?

For many, this is a social issue as much as an activity one: for a lot of people, lockdown has meant exercising alone. So as the lockdown starts easing, many are looking forward to be able to play sports again with other people – family, friends, rivals!

At the same time, lockdown has meant that the facilities required to do one's favourite sport – sports halls, gyms, squash courts – have been closed. And people are understandably keen to get back to what they enjoy doing.

However, participation in many competitive sports is governed by the key criteria of social distancing – ie the extent to which exercise can be done without interacting too closely with others.

The recent government guidance<sup>1</sup> said that people can exercise outside as many times each day as they wish, and specified angling and tennis as examples of sports which can recommence.

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/884760/Our\\_plan\\_to\\_rebuild\\_The\\_UK\\_Government\\_s\\_COVID-19\\_recovery\\_strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/884760/Our_plan_to_rebuild_The_UK_Government_s_COVID-19_recovery_strategy.pdf)

However, they also stated:

*"You can only exercise with up to one person from outside your household–this means you should not play team sports, except with members of your own household".*

Another criteria which seems to have emerged is whether the sport is carried out indoors or outdoors.

The Government guidance emphasised that exercise can take place OUTSIDE – and even then only in some venues: *"You will still not be able to use areas like playgrounds, outdoor gyms or ticketed outdoor leisure venues, where there is a higher risk of close contact and touching surfaces".*

Furthermore, it looks like sports taking place indoors may be some way off: *"It is likely that reopening indoor public spaces and leisure facilities (such as gyms and cinemas)... may only be fully possible significantly later depending on the reduction in numbers of infection".*

So if sports are to be considered against the backdrop of these two criteria – social interaction and whether they are indoors or outdoors – where does that leave our favourite ones?<sup>2</sup>

This paper looks at one suggested approach.

## Types of Sport

Sports can be classified in many ways. The National Curriculum for Physical Education divides them into categories, including:

### 1. Games

- **Invasion games** - football, hockey, netball, basketball and rugby. These involve a team having to invade an opponent's territory by crossing over the half way line in order to score a goal or point.
- **Net/Wall games** - activities such as tennis, badminton, squash, table tennis, volleyball and racket ball. These involve playing the ball or shuttlecock back to the opponent in such a way that the opponent cannot return it and thus a point is scored.

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<sup>2</sup> Participation in sports is generally categorised into four parts:

1. Changing/preparation to take part
2. Conditioning (individual fitness)
3. Training (with other participants/team members)
4. Competition play.

This paper only looks at the conditions for Competition Play. It does not examine the extent to which social distancing may be required for the other three aspects.

- **Striking games** - games such as cricket, rounders, baseball and softball. These involve one team acting as the fielding side and one team acting as the batting - striking side. The fielding side has to get the batting - striking side out before they score too many runs.

## 2. Athletics

The classic athletics events are jumping, running and throwing, which take place in a set stadium or arena.

## 3. Racing sports

Rowing, swimming, cycle racing, are all examples of racing events, where the winner is the first competitor over a distance or in the shortest time.

## 4. Gymnastics

Gymnastic activities include activities such as floor work, vaulting, parallel bars and other apparatus work. They are concerned with the quality of movement and movement replication, the closest performance to a textbook performance. Because of the similar way in which they are scored, this category can also include trampolining and high board diving.

## 5. Target Sports

These are sports where the aim is to hit a specific target. Such sports range from shooting and archery to golf, darts and snooker.

## 6. Combat Sports

These are mostly individual sports where the objective is to overpower or score points over an opponent. They range in type from basic hand to hand combat (boxing, wrestling), to martial arts (karate, judo) to those using a weapon (eg fencing).

## 7. Outdoor pursuits

Outdoor pursuits include activities such as climbing, mountaineering, orienteering, and mountain biking. Many of these activities could also fall into the category of racing sports where their competitive forms are concerned with the fastest and first over the line. Examples of this are mountain bike racing, race sailing, canoe slalom and orienteering.

### Criteria 1:

### Levels of Interactivity

All of these sports, when played competitively, can be split into two types:

- **Interactive**, where the actions of the competitor physically affect the actions of the opponent during play;

- **Performative**, where the competitor has no direct physical interaction with the opponent during play.

These are described further below.

### **Interactive Sports**

An interactive sport is one where the competitor and opponent are always physically reacting to what each does.

The most common example of this would be team invasion games, such as football, hockey or rugby. Play is centered on the ball – who has it and what they are doing with it. So what each side does is a direct reaction to what the other side does, requiring the participants to be constantly aware of, and reacting to, the other side.

This also applies to individual sports. Examples of individual interactive sports would be tennis, badminton and squash.

However, not all interactive sports are the same. Different interactive sports allow for different levels of social distancing.

For example, for team sports, rugby does not allow for any social distancing. Not only are you constantly reacting to the other side, but you and the opposition are in the same space at the same time. In addition, it is “full contact” so you are also frequently in full physical contact with the opposition.

In contrast, volleyball is an interactive sport, but does allow for some social distancing – teams are reacting to the other side, but they are on separate sides of the court, so each team has their own space, and the only social contact is with your own team.

For individual sports, combat sports are probably the most interactive for the same reasons – you and the opposition are sharing the same space, and are in full or part body contact throughout.

However, tennis does allow for social distancing. Like volleyball, you are reacting to the opposition but you and the opposition are on separate sides of the court, with your own territory and no physical contact with the other side during play.

### **Performative Sports**

In contrast, in performative sports, the opposition does not physically interact with their opponents during play.

Examples of these sports would be gymnastics or diving. In these, participants take turns to perform. They carry out a set routine, which they have decided upon beforehand, and during that performance there is no physical interaction with their opponents in any way.

Crucially, these sports do allow for social distancing, as participants are doing the same thing but at a different time. Competitor and opposition perform in a separate space and time.

Other performative sports are those where the competitor and opponent are performing the same thing in a different space but at the same time.

Lane races (100m /200m running races, swimming races, rowing races) would be an example of this, where all are performing the same task at the same time. However, they are in separate defined spaces so there is no physical interaction between them during the activity. This therefore allows a certain amount of social distancing.

The diagram overleaf illustrates where the most common examples of competitive sport would fall on the Interactive/Performative spectrum:

# COMPETITIVE SPORTS: SCALE OF INTERACTION DURING PLAY

**MOST INTERACTIVE**

**MOST PERFORMATIVE**

- C's actions impact on O's actions
- C and O in same place
- At same time
- Full body contact

- C's actions impact on O's actions
- C and O in same place
- At same time
- Limited body contact

- C's actions impact on O's actions
- C and O in same place
- At same time
- V limited body contact

- C's actions impact on O's actions
- C and O in different place
- At same time
- No body contact

- C's actions impact on O's actions
- C and O in same place
- At different time
- No body contact

- C's actions do not impact on O's actions
- C and O in different place
- At same time
- No contact

- C's actions do not impact on O's actions
- C and O in same place
- At different time
- No contact

**EXAMPLES**

**TEAM SPORTS**

- INVASION GAMES
- Rugby Union
  - Rugby League
  - Ice Hockey
  - Water Polo

- INVASION GAMES
- Football
  - Hurling
  - Lacrosse
  - Basketball

- INVASION GAMES
- Netball
  - Field Hockey
- NET/WALL GAMES
- Squash (Doubles)
- STRIKING GAMES
- Rounders
  - Baseball

- NET/WALL GAMES
- Volleyball
  - Tennis (Doubles)
  - Badminton (Doubles)
  - Real Tennis (Doubles)
  - Table Tennis (Doubles)

- TARGET SPORTS
- Lawn Bowls (Team)

- ATHLETICS
- Running Relay Races (4x1, 4x4)
- RACING SPORTS
- Swimming Relay Races (4x1, 4x4)
  - Lane Rowing (Pairs, 4s, 8s, Double, Quad sculls)

- TARGET SPORTS
- Field Archery (Team)
  - Shooting Sports (Team)

**INDIVIDUAL SPORTS**

- COMBAT SPORTS
- Boxing
  - Wrestling
  - Karate
  - Taekwondo
  - Judo

- COMBAT SPORTS
- Fencing

- NET/WALL GAMES
- Squash

- NET/WALL GAMES
- Tennis
  - Badminton
  - Real Tennis
  - Table Tennis

- TARGET SPORTS
- Lawn Bowls
  - Snooker

- ATHLETICS
- Lane Running (100m, 200m)
  - Hurdles
- RACING SPORTS
- Lane Swimming
  - Lane Rowing (single sculls)

- ATHLETICS
- Middle and long distance
  - Steeplechase

- ATHLETICS
- Athletics (Jumping)
  - Athletics (Throwing)
- TARGET SPORTS
- Field Archery
  - Shooting Sports
  - Darts
  - Golf
- GYMANSTICS
- Gymnastics
  - Diving
- OTHER
- Weightlifting
  - Angling

## **Sport and social distancing**

This allows us to assess which sports can be played with social distancing.

This falls into three categories: whether such play can take place:

- 1. In the sport's conventional form, with no modifications to play necessary**
- 2. In a modified way, with certain aspects to ensure social distancing**
- 3. Not at all.**

For example, performative sports such as diving could take place, as competitors take it in turns to perform, so can be kept socially distanced at all times.

Some interactive sports (such as singles tennis) could also be played, as you and the opposition are on opposite sides of the net, so can be kept apart at all times during play.

Some interactive sports (striking games such as cricket) could be played with some modifications, as the nature of the game means most participants are naturally standing apart from each other during play. However, modifications (such as keeping the wicket keeper at a distance from the batsmen) would be required.

However, sports at the most interactive end of the scale (invasion games such as rugby, combat sports such as wrestling) cannot take place at all in their conventional form. This is because the game is based on physical contact. So playing without physical contact is either very difficult, or if physical contact was taken away, the game itself would be so changed it would not resemble its original form.

This is illustrated further overleaf, for team and individual sports:

# COMPETITIVE TEAM SPORTS:

## EXTENT TO WHICH PLAY IS POSSIBLE WITH SOCIAL DISTANCING

**MOST INTERACTIVE**

**MOST PERFORMATIVE**



INVASION GAMES

- Rugby Union
- Rugby League
- Ice Hockey
- Water Polo

No

INVASION GAMES

- Football
- Hurling
- Lacrosse
- Basketball

No

INVASION GAMES

- Netball
- Field Hockey

No

NET/WALL GAMES

- Volleyball
- Tennis (Doubles)
- Badminton (Doubles)
- Real Tennis (Doubles)
- Table Tennis (Doubles)

No

TARGET SPORTS

- Lawn Bowls (Team)

Yes (with modifications)

ATHLETICS

- Running Relay Races (4x1, 4x4)

No

TARGET SPORTS

- Field Archery (Team)
- Shooting Sports (Team)

Yes

NET/WALL GAMES

- Squash (Doubles)

No

STRIKING GAMES

- Rounders
- Baseball

Yes (with modifications)

RACING SPORTS

- Swimming Relay Races (4 x1, 4x4)
- Lane Rowing (Pairs, 4s, 8s, Double, Quad sculls)

No



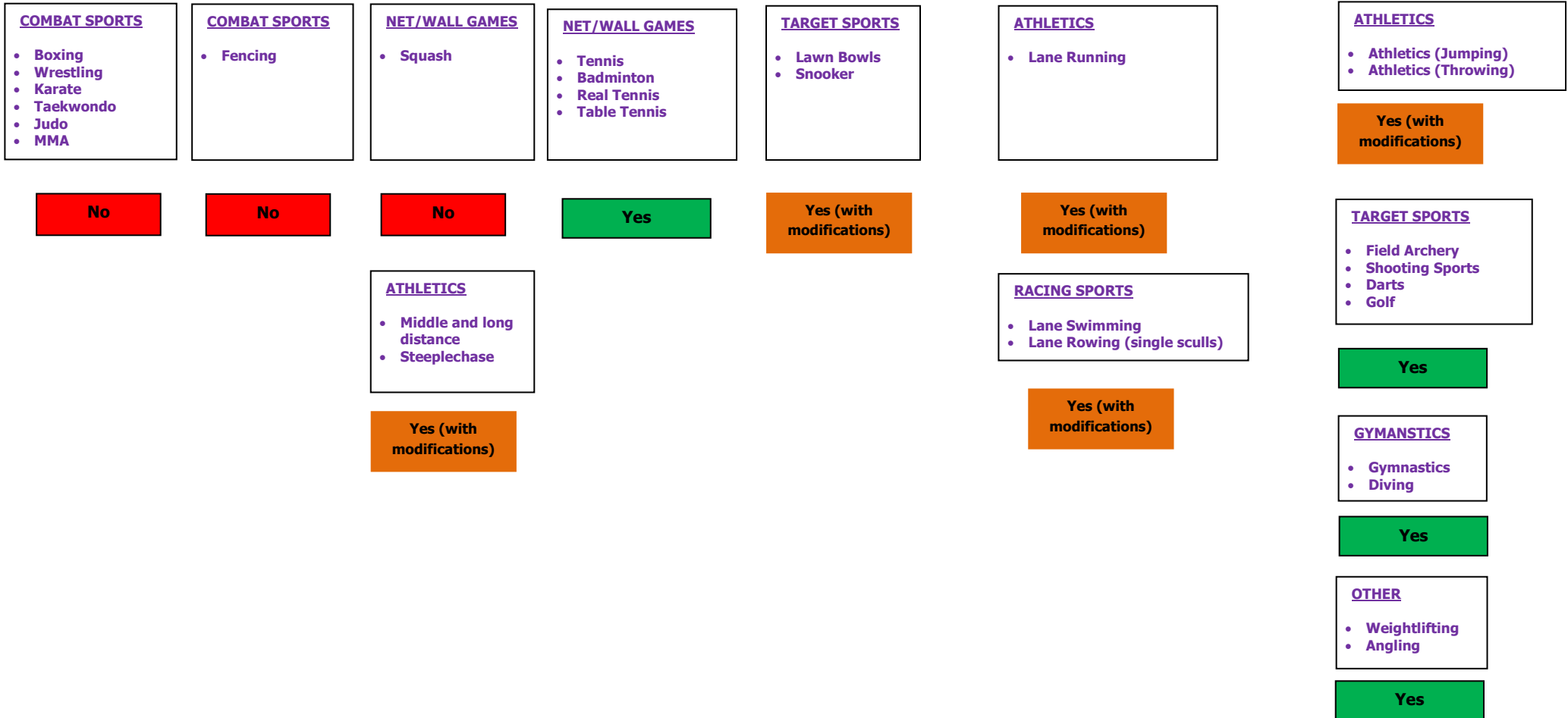
# COMPETITIVE **INDIVIDUAL** SPORTS:

## EXTENT TO WHICH PLAY IS POSSIBLE WITH SOCIAL DISTANCING

**MOST INTERACTIVE** ←

**MOST PERFORMATIVE** →

EXAMPLES



## **Criteria 2:**

### **Indoors or Outdoors?**

However, social distancing is just one criteria.

The second criteria for the Government seems to be whether the sports are played outdoors or indoors, with outdoor sports being prioritised at this time.

Some sports (such as athletics) can be played in both forms: however, most sports are primarily one or the other.

We therefore applied this criteria to the previous scale to show whether, in addition to the levels of interactivity, they are indoor or outdoor sports. This is shown overleaf:

# OUTDOORS

## TEAM SPORTS

### INVASION GAMES

- Rugby Union
- Rugby League

### INVASION GAMES

- Football
- Hurling
- Lacrosse
- Basketball

### INVASION GAMES

- Netball
- Field Hockey

### STRIKING GAMES

- Rounders
- Baseball

### NET/WALL GAMES

- Tennis (Doubles)

### ATHLETICS

- Running Relay Races (4x1, 4x4)

### RACING SPORTS

- Lane Rowing (Pairs, 4s, 8s, Double, Quad sculls)

### ATHLETICS

- Middle and long distance
- Steeplechase

### TARGET SPORTS

- Lawn Bowls (Team)

### TARGET SPORTS

- Field Archery (Team)
- Shooting Sports (Team)

### ATHLETICS

- Athletics (Jumping)
- Athletics (Throwing)

### TARGET SPORTS

- Field Archery
- Shooting Sports
- Golf

### OTHER

- Anqing

## INDIVIDUAL SPORTS

### NET/WALL GAMES

- Tennis

### TARGET SPORTS

- Lawn Bowls

### ATHLETICS

- Lane Running (100m, 200m)

### RACING SPORTS

- Lane Rowing (single sculls)

## MOST INTERACTIVE

## MOST PERFORMATIVE

## TEAM SPORTS

### INVASION GAMES

- Ice Hockey
- Water Polo

### INVASION GAMES

- Basketball

### NET/WALL GAMES

- Squash (Doubles)

### NET/WALL GAMES

- Volleyball
- Badminton (Doubles)
- Real Tennis (Doubles)
- Table Tennis (Doubles)

### ATHLETICS

- Running Relay Races (4 x1, 4 x4)

### RACING SPORTS

- Swimming Relay Races (4 x1, 4 x4)

### COMBAT SPORTS

- Boxing
- Wrestling
- Karate
- Taekwondo
- Judo
- MMA

### COMBAT SPORTS

- Fencing

### NET/WALL GAMES

- Squash

## INDIVIDUAL SPORTS

### NET/WALL GAMES

- Badminton
- Real Tennis
- Table Tennis

### TARGET SPORTS

- Snooker

### ATHLETICS

- Lane Running (100m, 200m)

### RACING SPORTS

- Lane Swimming

### ATHLETICS

- Athletics (Jumping)
- Athletics (Throwing)

### TARGET SPORTS

- Darts

### GYMANSTICS

- Gymnastics
- Diving

### OTHER

- Weightlifting

# INDOORS

Looking at the same sports through the second criteria as well gives a broader overview of where the potential risks lie, based on both criteria.

Assuming that interactivity is a bigger risk than being indoors, the following would apply:

- The highest risk group would be that in the bottom left hand corner: highly interactive sports which take place indoors. At team level, these would be sports such as ice hockey and waterpolo. At individual level, these would be combat sports, such as judo, wrestling, etc.
- The next highest risk group would be in the top left hand corner: highly interactive sports which take place outside. At team level, these would be invasion game sports such as rugby league and rugby union, and to a lesser extent, football and basketball. There are very few examples of individual sports here.
- The second lowest risk group would be the bottom right hand corner: performative sports which take place indoors. Because these are mostly performative, with participants in a different place at the same time, or in the same place at a different time, there is almost no interaction: however, they do take place indoors, which is more risky than being outside.
- The least risky group is therefore in the top right hand corner: performative sports which take place outside. These would meet both the government's criteria. The inclusion of angling and golf are examples of these sports. One would hope that other sports in this category, such as archery and shooting, and outdoor athletic events such as jumping and throwing, could follow.

## Conclusions and caveats

The above analysis provides just one way of looking at participation in competitive sports. It is also based on the government's current stance on sports participation (as at 14 May 2020). However, one of the features of the Covid-19 virus and its impact is that knowledge about it is still limited. We are still learning more about it – how it spreads, what can impact it, what can combat it.

As these change and more information becomes available, there may be more appropriate ways to address the issue of participation in competitive sport. We will be watching closely at all times and want to hear your thoughts as well!

So do get in touch if you want to discuss this or learn more – just email us at

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