

# Is That So?

By Eugene Burns  
Ranger-Naturalist

Americans are today on the greatest sports binge in history! Take a gander at these figures—astounding figures to be duplicated in no other land.

Let's begin with boat trailers. In 1939 about 1,000 were produced. Ten years later, less than eight times that many, but by 1952 the number has reached



40,000 and last year it was over 100,000. Informed guesses say that there are about 5,250,000 recreational craft on all waters of the U. S., about half a million of which are sailboats and about 4 million are outboard powered craft under 16 feet in length.

Next, take swimming. It heads up the list of sports on public playgrounds. From a total of around 3 million swimmers in 1938, there are more than 10 million today.

If any of you are anglers, you know what happens on opening day! More than 17½ million fishing licenses were sold in 1953, of which about three million were to women. This is double as many as were sold in 1943. These figures do not include youngsters and salt water anglers. Roughly, there are about 30 million fishermen in North America.

In hunting, there are approximately 14 million holders of licenses—to this add three million nonlicensed hunters, mostly young boys. This does not include bow and arrow hunters—this, which was once a necessity, has become a sport enlisting hundreds of thousands with special deer seasons in many states for bow and arrow hunters only.

Bicycling, too, is booming—perhaps from its tremendous popularity in Europe. The Bicycle Institute of America estimates there are 22 million cyclists in America today.

What about the stay-at-home sports? Croquet, shuffleboard, table tennis, alley bowling, roller skating, horseshoe pitching, bowling on the green, golfing.

Take golfing. In the early 1930's there were almost 6,000 courses in America; today there are about 5,000—but nonetheless, many more people engage in golf. It is no longer a rich man's game. Figures of players are unavailable but the sales of golf balls during the past four years have averaged 28 per cent higher than during the years when there were more golf courses. It is estimated that there are more than 3 million golfers playing 10 rounds or more every year.

As for table tennis, it is estimated that there are 20 million players; bowling claims an equal number of participants—with over 2½ million members in the American Bowling Congress; and some 4 thousand roller-skating rinks have about 17 million men, women and children skaters.

This isn't the whole picture. According to a recent issue of Harper's magazine, some sports seem to be falling off. Notably, tennis, squash, and indoor badminton. The only racket game which is increasing is badminton—largely played by casual players.

In team sports, softball claims to have 20 million players, and of the school sports, basketball has grown fastest—where the sale of baseballs and footballs has remained fairly constant from 500,000 to more than 2 million in 1953.

Maybe it's because more people have more time what with long week ends, vacations with pay, more holidays, and shorter hours of work. Add to that, a longer life span which together with retirement and pension plans have placed many on the leisure market.

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