

It's a simple universal truth – we love sports, whether we're talking about us as individuals or as a nation. And in just about every game that we follow, those that are played on the field of competition can't start without the most basic of equipment: the ball. So, in this edition of the *GeoSampler* we're going to have one (a ball, that is) – or more appropriately, pay homage to it. We'll feature the sports with the fastest moving balls (hint: what tops the list isn't even a ball). So read on, fellow sports fan. And, as always, keep your eye on the ball.

FAST AND FURIOUS

Whether it's a streaking wide receiver in football, a sprinter in a 100 meter dash or a base runner stretching a double into a triple in baseball, there's just something about witnessing speed that is awe inspiring. But while it is often said that you can't teach speed, you can, however, measure it. And though the speed of the athletes can be impressive, they don't come close to matching the velocity of the one necessary piece of equipment for most sports—the ball. So, with that said, here are the top ten fastest balls in sports, based on highest recorded speeds.

No.10 Table Tennis

We've all played it in someone's basement or perhaps at a rec room somewhere. And we may have thought ourselves as pretty good at it. But there are those who have taken the art of hitting a ping-pong ball to mind-blowing levels. Even though the ball is one of the lightest in sports, and certainly the lightest on this list, Lark Brant from New Zealand, holds the record for the fastest recorded smash of 69.9 mph (112.5 km/h) at the World's Fastest Smash Competition. Makes you wonder what going up against him in beer pong would be like.

No.9 Cricket While we tend to follow baseball, its international version (and the precursor to our game) can still put up some pretty impressive stats of its own. For instance, a typical cricket match can last three to five days with at least six hours of cricket played each day. And you thought baseball games were long. With regard to our list, the fastest bowl—what we know as a pitch—ever recorded came at

the hands of Shoaib Akhtar of Pakistan who reached 100.23 mph (161.3 km/h) in 2003.

No.8 Baseball Next up, our national pastime (well, what used to be considered our national pastime)—baseball. There is much to love in the game, not the least of which is the thrill of seeing a true fastball pitcher bring the high heat. And no pitcher more embodied that event than Hall of Famer, Nolan Ryan. The man with the most strikeouts in the history of the game also holds the record for the fastest pitch ever recorded. The Ryan Express once topped the radar gun at 108.1 mph (174 km/h) in 1974. Think about getting plunked at that speed. On second thought, don't.

No.7 Hockey If having big bruisees flying around on ice while wearing sharp blades for shoes wasn't intimidating enough, the puck these guys chase after and fire at the goal can reach jaw-dropping speeds. In fact, in 2012, Zdeno Chara of the Boston Bruins set an NHL record for the fastest shot at 108.8 mph (175.1 km/h) at that year's NHL All-Star Skills Competition. However, that same year at the KHL All-Star Skills Competition in Russia, defenseman Alexander Ryazantsev set a new World Record with a shot at 114.1 mph (183.7 km/h). Luckily, no goalies were harmed in the setting of those records.

No.6 Soccer You wouldn't think it when watching the sport. After all, the game is known more for "bending it" and phantom flops than power shots, but these guys can really haul off and send the ball



*"I'm glad I don't play anymore. I could never learn all of those handshakes."
—Phil Rizzuto*



Play Ball

I never threw an illegal pitch. The trouble is, once in a while I toss one that ain't never been seen by this generation.

— Satchel Paige

There have been only two authentic geniuses in the world, Willie Mays and Willie Shakespeare.

— Tallulah Bankhead

If a woman has to choose between catching a fly ball and saving an infant's life, she will choose to save the infant's life without even considering if there is a man on base.

— Dave Barry

I watch a lot of baseball on the radio. — Gerald Ford

Bob Gibson is the luckiest pitcher I ever saw. He always pitches when the other team doesn't score any runs. — Tim McCarver

The other teams could make trouble for us if they win. — Yogi Berra

hurling through space at an amazing clip. And in 2006, the fastest recorded shot came from the foot of Ronny Herbersen at 131 mph (210.8 km/h). Not much else you can say about that, other than, “Gooooooooooooal!”

No. 5 Tennis There is some dispute with this record. The official governing body of the highest level of tennis played in the world, the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP), only recognizes records at ATP World Tour and Davis Cup level events. The fastest ball ever recorded at one of those tournaments came from a serve at the 2011 Davis Cup by Ivo Karlovic of Croatia, topping off at 155.96 mph (251 km/h). The fastest serve ever recorded happened during a 2012 Challenger event, compliments of Samuel Groth of Australia at 163.67 mph (263.4 km/h). Simply put, you’re not returning either one.

No. 4 Squash Not really considered a blue-collar sport, the game, with its hollow rubber ball can reach speeds that can make even the manliest of men cringe. How fast are we talking about? Well, in 2014, Cameron Pilley of Australia was able to beat his own record by one mile per hour when he topped out at an astounding 176 mph (281.6 km/h). And how did he celebrate? By having his brother offer himself up as a target for one of his serves. That’s either incredible family love or insane sibling stupidity.



No. 3 Jai Alai The ball in jai alai is known as the pelota. And in 1979, an electronically measured pelota hurled by Jose Ramon Arieto was recorded at 187.65 mph (302 km/h). To break that down, that’s going over 275 feet per second. That’s almost the length of a football field (91.67 yards) in just one tick of the clock. Now that’s a

hurry-up offense. No wonder it’s been dubbed the deadliest ball in all of sports.

No. 2 Golf Long gone are the day’s when golf was considered a lazy man’s game—even though lazy men can still play it. Today’s players are much stronger and more in shape. And that is most evident in the speed with which these duffers can send the ball flying. On the professional tour, Bubba Watson and Dustin Johnson have each had swings of 128 mph (206 km/h) and long-drive specialist Jamie Sadlowksi hit one at 146.02 mph (235 km/h). We know, those numbers would put them below tennis on the list. But, according to the Guinness Book of World Records, Maurice Allen of the United States holds the title for the fastest drive ever recorded at 211.02 mph (339.6 km/h). True, he did it at an indoor driving simulator in 2012, but, hey, it still counts.

No. 1 Badminton Say the word badminton, and you think of lawn parties and something to do during summer family gatherings. You don’t think of “holy (bleep)!” But that’s just what would pop into your head when it comes to how fast the game’s birdie, also known as the shuttlecock (no snickering), can move. While the fastest speed ever recorded in competition was a mere 206.3 mph (332 km/h) from Fu Haifeng of China during the 2005 Sudirman Cup, that’s nothing compared to its top speed ever hit. In 2013, while testing new racket technology, Tan Boon Hoeng of Malaysia set a new world record at a whopping – are you ready? – 306.34 mph (493 km/h). Perspective? That’s almost 65 mph faster than the highest Indy car speed ever recorded, which was 241.428 mph (388.54 km/h). Like we said, “holy (bleep)!”

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