

A NEW FOURTEEN-LETTER TRANSPOSITION

DARRYL FRANCIS

Thursby, Cumbria, England

darrylfrancis@yahoo.co.uk

The Saturday 17 December 2005 World Wide Words (Issue 472), edited by Michael Quinion, exhibited the neologism SINISTROSPHERE: “This has started to appear online as a disparaging collective term for bloggers with left-wing political affiliations. Its opposite is the dextrosphere, a sweeter-sounding and must less sinister term. Both words are based on blogosphere, a collective term for the whole blogging environment.”

So what’s remarkable about this word? It’s a fourteen-letter transposition of SPHERISTERIONS. Here is the definition of spheristerion, drawn from <http://www.alphadictionary.com>:

Meaning: A place, room in a school, bath, courtyard, or stadium for playing ball. The Roman called it a spheristerium.

Notes: The Greeks and Romans played several games with balls for physical training. *Pila* (ball) was played in a room. The object was to throw the ball up and catch it without letting it touch the floor or ground. The Greek game *phaininda* corresponded to the Roman *hapastum*, a game played with an 8-inch ball of leather sewn around sponges [and/or] animal fur. The rules suggest it was similar to rugby and was played in a stadium on a field about the size of a football field.

In Play: This good word would add class to any ballpark near you. How about Yankee Spheristerion? We would, of course, have to write new songs, since “Take me out to the Spheristerion” will not make you tap your feet.

Word History: Today’s word is the locative noun from the Greek word *sphaire* (ball), origin of the English word *sphere*. It also underlies the name of another ball game played by the ancient Greeks, *sphairistike*, a game played by bouncing balls off courtyard walls. In 1874 Major Walter C. Wingfield patented in London the equipment and rules for a game under the name of Sphairistike. However, the name proved too difficult to pronounce and was soon replaced by Lawn Tennis, which quickly evolved into the game of tennis we know today.

There can’t be too many new fourteen-letter transpositions being found these days!