**Pliny the Younger (61/62-113 CE) :  Letters, III.1: The Life of a Refined Roman Gentleman**  
Source: William Stearns Davis, ed., Readings in Ancient History: Illustrative Extracts from the Sources, 2 Vols. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1912-13), Vol. II: Rome and the West, pp.239-244  
Scanned by: J. S. Arkenberg, Dept. of History, Cal. State Fullerton. Prof. Arkenberg has modernized the text

I do not think I have ever spent a more delightful time than during my recent visit to Spurinna's house; indeed I enjoyed myself so much that if it is my fortune to grow old, there is no one whom I should prefer to take as my model in old age, as there is nothing more methodical than that time of life. Personally I like to see men map out their lives with the regularity of the fixed courses of the stars, and especially old men. For while one is young a little disorder and rush---so to speak---is not unbecoming; but for old folks, whose days of exertion are past, and in whom personal ambition is disgraceful, a placid and well-ordered life is highly suitable. That is the principle upon which Spurinna acts most religiously; even trifles, or what would be trifles were they not of daily occurrence, he goes through in fixed order, and, as it were, orbit.

**Why does Pliny envy the lifestyle of Spurinna?**

In the morning he keeps his couch; at the second hour he calls for his shoes and walks three miles, exercising mind as well as body. If he has friends with him, the time is passed in conversation on the noblest of themes, otherwise a book is read aloud, and sometimes this is done even when his friends are present, but never in such a way as to bore them. Then he sits down, and there is more talk for preference; afterward he enters his carriage, taking with him either his wife---who is a pattern lady--or one of his friends, a distinction I recently enjoyed. How delightful, how charming that privacy is! What glimpses of old times one gets! What noble deeds and noble men he tells you of! What lessons you drink in! **Yet at the same time it is his wont to so blend his learning with modesty, that he never seems to be playing the schoolmaster.**

**What is meant by the bold-faced phrase? Is this a desirable quality?**

**Is this sort of lifestyle common for the elderly today? Explain.**

After riding seven miles he walks another mile, then resumes his seat, or betakes himself to his room and his pen; for he composes, both in Latin and Greek, the most scholarly lyrics. They have a wonderful grace, wonderful sweetness and wonderful humor, and the chastity of the writer enhances its charm. He is told that the bathing hour has come---which is the ninth hour in winter and the eighth in summer. Then he plays at ball for a long spell, throwing himself heartily into the game, for it is by means of this kind of active exercise that he battles with old age.

After his bath he lies down and waits a little while before taking food, listening in the meantime to the reading of some light and pleasant book. All this time his friends are at perfect liberty to imitate his example or do anything else they prefer. Then dinner is served, the table being as bright as it is modest, and the silver plain and old-fashioned: he has also some Corinthian vases in use, for which he has a taste but not a mania. The dinner is often relieved by actors of comedy, so that the pleasures of the table may have a seasoning of letters. Even in the summer the meal lasts well into the night, but no one finds it long, for it has kept up with such good humor and charm. The consequence is that, though he has passed his seventy-seventh year, his hearing and eyesight are as good as ever, his body is still active and alert, and the only symptom of his age is his wisdom. This is the sort of life that I have vowed and determined to forestall, and I shall enter upon it with zest, as soon as my age justifies me in beating a retreat.

**What kind of ball game do you see the Romans playing?**

**Questions to Consider:**

1. **What repeated activities are seen throughout Spurinna’s day? Why might they be considered ‘”gentlemanly”?**
2. **How might the life of a plebeian (lower-class) Roman differ from that of Spruinna?**