

IAIN MACINTOSH

**EVERYTHING
YOU EVER WANTED
TO KNOW ABOUT**
Cricket

(BUT WERE TOO AFRAID TO ASK)



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Acknowledgements

This book is dedicated to anyone who has ever felt the clammy grip of fear closing around their heart when a very important file refuses to open. If you've ever lost thousands and thousands of words or a painstakingly constructed spreadsheet or an intricately designed PDF, then my heart goes out to you. Back up your files, kids. Back 'em all up as often as you can.

The patience, love and understanding of my incredible wife Rachael was key to my survival of that awful moment. Without her, I'd have cracked like an egg.

Thanks also to the staff of Zone Content, experts in design and technology and based in Camden, whose IT men tried in vain to retrieve 17,000 words of lbw explanations and historical descriptions of the formative years of the game. They weren't successful, but they fought as if it were their own book that had vanished and they didn't complain when I dried my tears on their mousemats.

I never told my publisher, Charlotte Atyeo, about all of this for two reasons. Firstly, because I didn't want to worry her, and secondly because I hadn't been paid yet. Thankfully, it's all behind us now, eh? Eh? Ok ... I'll get me coat... Thanks to Lucy Beevor too, for putting this all together.

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Author's Note

As this book is written purely in an effort to make cricket seem simple, you will have to forgive me for referring to every hypothetical person as a 'he'. This is by no means a reflection on my views of gender politics especially as, at the time of writing, the female England cricket side were far more dominant than their male counterparts.

I know that it would be more politically correct to find a way round the problem with words, but I didn't want to end up with a book that read, 'And then the bowler will begin his or her run-up and deliver the ball to the batsman/woman who will try to hit as hard as he or she can.' I think we can all agree that that would have got really tiresome really quickly.

Cricket is a wonderful sport and it doesn't matter whether there's a crossbar on your bicycle or not, it's open to everyone.

Anyway, what are you doing hanging around here debating semantics? There's a wonderful game to discover!



1

Why you should like cricket

I'm afraid that it is a well-established fact that any introduction to a cricket guide should include a set lexicon of words and phrases. I am therefore obliged, before we even get started on the rules, to chunter on for a number of paragraphs about glorious English summer afternoons at the village green, the gentle thwack of leather on willow, warm beer and vicars on bicycles, small boys with scoreca... Nope ... it's no good, I can't do it.

It is a curious phenomenon that cricket, a sport which embraces technology with far more readiness than any other outside of motor racing, is so intrinsically linked with this odd snapshot of what appears to be a BBC costume drama. This isn't to dismiss the cliché entirely, of course. There is, after all, a lot to be said for the warm beer. But it just seems such a shame to focus entirely on a lazy stereotype. We're selling the sport short. Cricket offers so much more.

It has prospered in nations where both football and rugby have failed to hold a beachhead. It is as compelling to the veteran as it is to the newcomer. It has brought people of different, even of conflicting, backgrounds together. There are

dressing rooms where Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Christians all share locker space. It can be the most charming and honourable of sports, but it can also be brutal, competitive and downright nasty.

There are no quiet village greens in the Indian Premier League, where the fireworks and dancing girls reign supreme, and you're certainly not limited to warm beer at a Test match. Cricket is more inclusive, more exciting and more accessible than ever before. You really couldn't have picked a better time to find this book.

It is a game of such beautiful simplicity and yet it is blessed with layers so complex that it can be anything to anyone. Twenty20 offers the spectator an adrenaline-fuelled, hi-octane explosion of big hits, while the more cerebral Test match is like watching two generals carefully trying to outwit one another, their hopes dependent on the courage and concentration of their men, on the wear and tear of one strip of grass and, of course, on the weather. And yet whatever form of the game you watch, it all comes down to one thing: the ability of a man to hit a ball with a bit of wood.

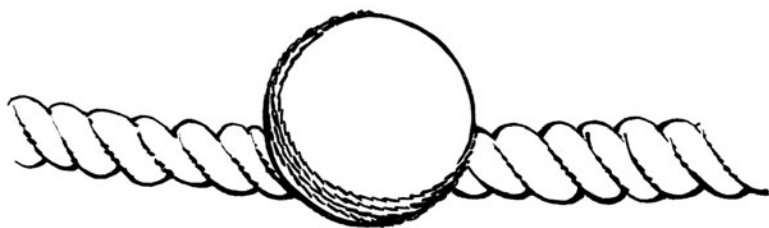
But few sports are as difficult to understand as cricket. It is complicated, but only at the outset. Most naysayers, quite understandably, find it all too confusing. They complain that there are too many numbers, too many weird rules and that it is all too slow. They wonder how anyone can sit through five days and not see a result at the end. I assume, given that you are tentatively flicking through this introduction in a book shop somewhere, that you have always been one of these people. But something has changed, hasn't it? Something has made you look harder and search deeper for the appeal of the game. I applaud you and I hope that you will not be disappointed.



I couldn't, in the confines of these pages, ever hope to do anything more than scrape the surface of this magnificent game. There are better writers and bigger books, but perhaps none that will take you by the hand and guide you through the mess in quite the same way as this one will. There will be no jargon, and no insular codewords or slang will pass by unexplained. This is cricket for the uninitiated, for the brave nomads from other sports wondering what all the fuss is about. This is cricket broken down and put back together, piece by piece. Here you'll discover an easy explanation of that infernal leg-before-wicket issue. You'll know your maidens from your silly mid-off and you'll find out exactly why catches win matches.

People have been playing cricket for over four hundred years and you're just over a hundred pages away from finding out why. So pad up, put on your helmet, adjust your box and grab your bat.

You're next in.





The history of cricket

Cricket is old. Really old. It's older than the great-grandparents of the oldest person you've ever met. It's older than both football and rugby put together. It pre-dates the Spanish Armada and William Shakespeare and, in one form or another, it almost certainly pre-dates the discovery of America. A spring chicken it is not.

As such, even the historians with more time on their hands than me have struggled to find its origins. One widely held theory is that it was developed in the fields of rural England by work-shy shepherds who used their staffs to hit rocks thrown at a target placed behind them. It's a good theory and it makes sense, not least because one olde name for a staff is 'cricce', though that does indicate that in a parallel universe this could be a book about a game called staff-it, or even stick-it. I think I'd have preferred stick-it.

The first written mention of cricket came in 1598 during a legal dispute over land in Guildford. A 59 year old, by the name of John Derrick if you're interested, is recorded as telling the court that he played cricket on the land as a child which means, assuming that he wasn't telling porkies, we can date the



sport as far back as about 1548, at least. It wasn't competitive, it wasn't organised, but there it was. Stick-it. Sorry, cricket.

In 1611, some 50 years before the Great Fire of London, two men were prosecuted for daring to play cricket on a Sunday instead of going to church. However, unlike the proto-football matches that were repeatedly banned by monarchs of the day, there isn't any evidence to suggest that the game suffered from the wrath of the authorities. Given that village football matches often ended in serious injury and destruction of property, you can see why cricket might even have been encouraged, provided that it was played in the park and not in the garden near the greenhouse.

After the restoration of the English monarchy and the overthrow of the killjoy Puritans in 1660, cricket began to grow in popularity. For a whole generation of gleeful aristocrats looking for something to do with their leisure time, cricket was a godsend. Not only was it good fun to play, but it was compelling to watch and, like most things, it became even more compelling when you staked half of Daddy's fortune on it. Gambling was one of the key, but not the only, motivating forces in these embryonic days of the sport. Social top bods like Charles Lennox, a grandson of Charles II, captained teams against those led by men like his good friend Sir William Gage. Much merriment ensued, lots of money was won and lost and cricket began to spread around the country.

In 1728, the first rules of cricket were set down on paper. These 'Articles of Agreement' kept the game on the straight and narrow-ish, even when huge stakes of money were being put up for every match. It also made it easier for the men in the far reaches of the Empire to propagate the good word. The British had outposts or colonies in the West Indies, India, South

Africa and down in Australia and New Zealand, so there were plenty of people to teach. It must have been a nervous time for the inhabitants of conquerable nations. Get turned over by the French and you get some decent recipes and the language of love. Get the English and it's cricket and queuing.

The Articles were officially codified in 1744, but it was 1774 when the first of many amendments were made. You see, cricket in those days wasn't quite the game you might watch now. For starters, all bowling was under-arm, bats were shaped like hockey sticks and wickets only had two stumps. In 1774, the leg-before-wicket (lbw) rule was introduced as well as a crucial clarification on the maximum width of a bat, which you just know was introduced because some bright spark walked out to the crease one day with a bat the size of a trestle table.

By this time, cricket was becoming an established part of British society. Still wildly popular with the upper classes, one of the primary clubs in existence was the White Conduit Club, so-called because they played their games on White Conduit Fields in Islington, London. The only problem they had was that the fields were very public and the gentlemen players were not amused to find the local populace constantly wandering onto the outfield to call them names. In desperation, they turned to one of their players, the bowler Thomas Lord. Lord, despite his name, wasn't an aristocrat, but he was an astute businessman and a very good bowler, hence his professional status within the club. He managed to find an area in north London called Dorset Fields (now Dorset Square) where they could play in peace and it became known as 'Lord's'. That original site wasn't actually the Lord's that we know now though. Another venue was used before they finally arrived in St John's Wood. However, it was at



Dorset Fields where the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) was formed in 1787.

The MCC were the guardians of cricket for over 200 years. They looked after the rules, organised the England team and attempted to maintain the spirit of cricket for future generations. Although they have often been criticised and dismissed as introverted and old-fashioned (they refused to admit women as members until 1998), they did successfully guide the sport through some fairly seismic changes.

The 19th century saw the gradual change from under-arm bowling, through round-arm bowling and finally to what we now know to be over-arm bowling. It also saw W. G. Grace, a kind of terrifyingly huge anti-Santa Claus, become the first great cricketing legend after making his debut in 1865. People would travel across the country, on the new-fangled train network, to see him in action. Grace was a phenomenal batsman but also, reportedly, something of a diva. After being bowled first ball in one match he refused to leave the pitch. 'Play on,' he is said to have told the umpire. 'These people have come to see me bat, not you umpire.'

By 1877, the first English touring side was in Australia and, by 1882, their clashes were so avidly followed that a defeat at the Oval in London was greeted with hysterical headlines about the death of English cricket, a story that can be found in more detail later on in this book. At this point, however, no one had actually specified how long a game could last, so some touring matches could go on a little too long. One game in South Africa in 1939 had been played for 12 days before someone on the England team remembered that they were due back in London, so the game had to be drawn to prevent them from missing their boat.