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Chapter 1

Taking In the Joy of Cricket

Millions of people around the globe follow cricket. For many, cricket is the number one sport, offering a unique blend of physical strength, lightning reflexes, huge skill, and tactics galore. In fact there is a strong case for the game, which first spread through the British Empire in the 18th and 19th centuries, being the world's second most popular sport behind soccer.

When the best cricketers in the world do battle, you won't see anything like it for nail-biting tension and excitement!



REMEMBER

So what is cricket, in a nutshell? A cricket match involves two teams of 11 players and two on-pitch umpires, each aiming to score more *runs* (points) than the opposition when batting the ball. The teams take it in turns to bowl and field against the other team batting, and this is known as an *innings*. An innings is completed when ten of a team's batters have been dismissed by the fielding side. Once the batting team's innings is complete, the fielding team takes their turn to

bat. Therefore, the fielding team becomes the batting side and the batting side becomes the fielding team. The umpire's job is to interpret and apply the laws of the game to the match situation. Among other things, this means that the umpires get to decide whether a batter is out and whether a bowler has broken the game's laws. See Chapter 2 for a more detailed explanation of the game.

Understanding Cricket's Global Appeal

Cricket has spread around the globe on the back of the British Empire.

Despite the best efforts of cricket's global administrators — the International Cricket Council (ICC) — cricket is only now, after more than a century, managing to break out of this traditional heartland. Big investment in the U.S. promises much, but major parts of the world such as China and South America still barely register the sport.

But the British Empire — which at its height covered a third of the globe — isn't a bad heartland for a sport. India, Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, West Indies, Zimbabwe, and Bangladesh all play test cricket (the top echelon of the game; see Chapter 3 for more on test cricket).

Doing a quick bit of math, that covers about 1.5 billion people — around a fifth of the world's population. Although not as big as soccer, this coverage dwarfs some other world sports such as rugby, field hockey, and international tiddlywinks! And cricket isn't a minority sport in the countries that play it: far from it.

In India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, cricket is the number one sport; and in Britain, cricket is still one of the major national sports, along with soccer and rugby.

Buoyed by a recent World Cup triumph, cricket is going through a renaissance in England. Unlike premiership soccer, cricket has no seven-figure annual salaries or excessive swearing at the officials. And a good thing too, some would say. Hey, being a cricketer or a cricket fan may even be considered hip!



REMEMBER

National teams compete against each other in both test and one-day international matches. Tests involve each side having two innings and can last up to five days. One-day internationals, as the name suggests, are completed in a single day. Each side gets just one innings which is limited to a set number of overs, say 50 of 20. See Chapter 3 for more on the differences between test and one-day international matches.

Gauging the Difference: Amateur and Professional Cricket

Cricket, like most major sports, is divided between the amateur and the professional game. The amateurs play for fun; the professionals play for pay.



REMEMBER

The key differences between amateur and professional cricketers fall into four main areas:

- » **Fitness standards:** Professional cricketers are fitter than amateurs. They are put on special diets and fitness regimes and have an army of coaches to tell them what to do to get the most from their bodies. Even the most committed amateur is unlikely to be able to approach the sheer athleticism of a professional player.
- » **Skill levels:** Professional cricketers are way ahead when it comes to their skill levels. They get to practice most days and dedicate themselves to honing their talents.
- » **Commitment:** Amateurs have jobs and can, usually, only play at weekends. They may only get to train once a week during the cricket season, and perhaps not at all in the winter. For professionals, on the other hand, cricket is what they do for a living. They play matches on most days during the summer and may even travel abroad to play during the winter months.
- » **Match length:** Because the skill levels of professionals are so high, completing some games of cricket in a day can be difficult. Therefore, longer formats of the game have been devised; some games take up to five days to finish. See Chapter 3 for more on match formats. Amateurs only play one-day games, or very occasionally two-day games across weekends.

An estimated 300–400 professional cricketers earn their livings playing in Britain alone, whereas tens of thousands of amateur players play for fun each weekend during the summer months. In India, the new global powerhouse of cricket, there are hundreds of professionals but hundreds of thousands of amateur players. Even more play the occasional game of cricket — perhaps they have their cricket bat and clothing stuffed under the stairs, getting everything out when asked to take part in a friendly match at work or the local community cricket club.

The cricket season runs from April to September in Britain. But because cricket is a global sport and other parts of the world have their summers at different times of the year, even when no cricket is being played in Britain — because the

weather's cold and wet — cricket is being played somewhere else in the world. For example, in Australia the cricket season runs from late October to March; and in the U.S., it runs from June to October.

Reviewing the great divide: Amateurs and professionals

Over time, the skill and fitness standards of professional cricketers have raced away from those of amateurs.

A long time ago, when test match cricket had just started to be played, many top players were amateurs. Often they were members of the upper classes who didn't have to work and had enough spare time on their hands to play cricket. However, back then a lot of sham amateurism went on with top players claiming to be amateurs but receiving great big “expenses” payments.

Even in the relatively recent past, seeing a few beer bellies among professionals wasn't unusual — going back to the 1980s, former England captains Mike Gatting and Ian Botham both carried a bit of extra padding around their midriffs! Even the Australians had their fair share of rotund cricketers such as Tasmanian David Boon and fast bowler Merv Hughes. Nowadays, though, beer bellies are as rare as hen's teeth among professionals: They are athletes. As a result, performance levels in the professional ranks have raced away even further from amateurs, especially when it comes to fielding. Go to watch any club cricket match and you can bet that before long you'll see a fielder misfield the ball or miss it altogether. Such moments of enjoyable farce are few and far between in the professional ranks.

But not only physical fitness and playing standards mark the growing gulf between professional and amateur. Some of the rules now differ between top-notch-professional and amateur matches.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

In part the difference in rules is down to the inevitable march of new technology. In professional cricket matches broadcast on television and online, the umpires can call on the help of video replay technology. They do this by requesting that a third umpire, sitting on the sidelines, review the video evidence in order to give a decision — usually on whether a batter has been caught, run-out, stumped, or dismissed leg before wicket (LBW). See Chapter 2 for more on the third umpire and modes of dismissal. The third umpire then radios a decision back to the two umpires on the pitch and the decision is given. Under the Decision Review System (DRS), a batter who has been dismissed caught or LBW can call for the third umpire to look again at the video footage and ball-tracking technology to check that the on-field umpire's decision was correct. Of course in amateur games — where

rustling up a cricket ball and two sets of stumps can sometimes be hard enough — you won't find video replays or extra umpires.

Some experts suggest that by adopting such new technology the professional game is in danger of pulling away from the roots of the game. Ultimately, some argue, this could undermine the popularity of the professional game because amateur cricketers — who make up a sizeable proportion of fans at matches — may become unable to relate to the game as played by the professionals. In short, alienation could prove a big turn-off. However, with the use of video technology now three decades old, the evidence is that it has enhanced the experience of those watching the game on TV and online. In fact, it's fair to say that technology has had a more beneficial impact in cricket than in other sports, such as soccer where the advent of the video assistant referee has proved cumbersome. Other people see no harm in the introduction of new technology as long as it helps the umpires make the right call.

Getting involved in the amateur game

Cricket can be played anywhere. All you need is a few willing bodies, a bat, a ball, something to act as stumps (an upturned box will do), and a bit of open space, and Bob's your uncle, you're away!

Many people's first encounter with cricket is through an informal game in a garden, a park, or even in the street. This can be tons of fun, but sooner or later, if the cricket bug bites, you'll want to take things a touch more seriously.

This is when cricket clubs come into play!

Joining is easy. Just contact someone who is involved with the club, go along to a practice session or a match, and see if you like what you see. Are they a friendly bunch, and is the standard right for you?

Clubs are mostly for amateurs, but like professional teams, they love to organize themselves into leagues and play in cup competitions. Some competitions in which club sides compete have been going for donkey's years. Local social media groups usually have details of games in an area. Club sides play at weekends and sometimes after work during the week. Depending on how many players a club can rustle up, it may field several different sides catering to a range of player abilities, from the very good player to the pure enthusiast who may not be blessed with oodles of talent.

The best players in the club (or the captain's buddies) play for the first eleven. The next group play in the second eleven and so on downwards. One club I was a

member of boasted seven teams of eleven playing in different competitions, with men's and women's sections. Leagues tend to be organized so that players of similar abilities square off against each other, so the second eleven at one club play other second eleven teams from the local area.

In short, club cricket is amateur and supposed to be fun, but at the same time a competitive streak runs through its heart. Trophies are at stake!

Many clubs run men's and women's sections. This reflects the growing participation of women as players and spectators of cricket. Junior sides may often be mixed — girls play alongside boys — but as they get older it tends to be the case that teams become single gender. This is nothing to do with any difference in ability but to do with something as mundane as dressing room facilities, and to a degree, the culture of the country.

Club cricket can be a breeding ground for the professional game. County sides scout club teams to check out any promising youngsters making their way in the game. If they like what they see, they may invite the youngster to join them for practice or even offer them a contract to turn professional.

Joining a club isn't that expensive. You'll need to pay an annual subscription fee as well as a small fee for each match played. The fees are charged so that the club can hire pitches, when needed, and arrange for rather delicious cricket teas to be laid on for the players. Yum!

Exploring the Strange World of Cricket Speak

Eavesdropping on a couple of cricketers or cricket fans having a natter can be a surreal experience. They can seem to use their very own unique language more akin to Esperanto than English.



CRICKET
LORE

Some of the characteristics of cricket speak are

- » **Arcane words:** Cricket has been around for centuries and words that have fallen out of everyday usage long ago still have a foothold in cricket speak. For example, sometimes you hear the phrase *bowling a maiden over*; this may sound like something from a romantic novel but in fact refers to the bowler delivering an over without the batter scoring a run.
- » **Slang:** Perhaps no other sport is as wedded to the use of slang as cricket. Over time cricketers have developed their own words to describe on field

actions and phenomena. Some of this slang has been adopted around the globe, and some is so bizarre that it stays put in its own country of origin. Most of the slang is fairly logical when you think of it. For example, a brand new cricket ball is referred to as a *cherry* because the ball is at its most red in color when new and before the covering lacquer has worn away.

- » **Multiple usages:** Nothing confuses non-cricket followers more than the habit among players and fans of using the same word to describe very different things. For example, the word *wicket* is often used to describe the following: the strip of turf between the two sets of stumps, the stumps themselves, and the act of dismissing the batter. Have a look at this passage:

The bowler delivered the ball which bounced off the wicket. The batter missed the ball which struck the wicket. The batter had lost his wicket.

The good news is that in this book I avoid multiple usages of words like the plague!

Pitching Batter Against Bowler

Watch a cricket match for any length of time and you soon understand that the main on-field contest is between the batter and the bowler. This is because

- » The bowler's job is to get the batter out — or *dismiss* them. The bowler can do this in a number of ways, for example by bowling balls that hit the stumps or by tempting the batter into hitting the ball into the air to a fielder who then takes a catch.
- » The batter's job is to prevent the bowler from dismissing them and to score runs off the bowler's deliveries to add to the team's total.

The eyes of everyone — the batters, bowler, fielders, umpires, and spectators — are glued on the small cricket ball as it travels towards the batter.

Understanding That Cricket is a Dangerous Game



WARNING

Cricket can be dangerous. A cricket ball is 5 ½ ounces of cork wrapped in leather, and believe me, if you get hit by one you certainly know about it. In fact, each year lots of people around the globe are seriously injured, or in some rare cases killed, by cricket balls.

A player is most at risk of being hit when batting or fielding close to where the batter plays their shots. Why batters are at risk is fairly obvious. The bowler is trying to hit the stumps and the batter stands in the way trying to hit the ball to stop that from happening. Sometimes, though, the batter's torso, head, hands, or legs are inevitably struck by the ball.

Close fielders — including the wicket-keeper — are at risk of injury because they don't have long to react to the ball if the batter hits it towards them. If the batter hits the ball hard, it can travel at great speed and cause nasty injury to hands, body and even — gulp! — the face.

However, don't get the impression that cricket is like a heavyweight boxing bout with the players finishing the match all bloodied and bruised. Injuries, fortunately, are relatively rare. This is thanks, in no small part, to the amount of padding worn by batters (in particular) and close fielders. The ins and outs of cricket equipment, what you need, how much it costs, and where to find it, are covered extensively in Chapter 9.

Taking in the Dark Side: Cricket Frustrations

Even the most ardent of fans accept that cricket is a sport not suited to everyone. Some people just can't get their heads around the game.

The people who aren't fans think that the idea of fully grown adults putting on white clothing, hitting a ball around the place, chasing it for up to five days, and at the end of it all maybe still settling for a draw is, put simply, a bit mad.

Here are some things that drive cricket's detractors up the wall:

- » Players leave the field if it starts to rain and even if the light is bad.
- » Matches can last for days and still end in a draw.
- » Cricket matches can be slow affairs, a sudden flurry of activity when the bowler delivers the ball to the batter followed by a minute or so of inaction as the bowler prepares to bowl the next delivery.
- » Much of the language used in cricket is arcane or just plain bizarre (see "Exploring the Strange World of Cricket Speak" earlier in this chapter for more on this).

The truth is that you either love or loathe cricket, and the fact that you have picked up this book means that you are at least inclined to join those that love it.

Many cricket watchers suggest that there has never been a more exciting time to be a cricket fan. The advent of T20 cricket — where a result has to be achieved in a few hours — and aggressive batting showcased in the hugely successful Indian Premier League has helped quicken the pace of run-scoring in cricket matches.

Scorebooks, Scoreboards, and Scorecards

Cricket matches can be long affairs — up to five days — and someone has to keep track of what's going on, delivery after delivery. This is called *scoring* and the people who keep score are called the *scorers*. The scorers' job is to note down what happens during each delivery — whether, for example, the batter has scored a run or the bowler managed to dismiss a batter.

These scorers note down all this information in a scorebook. To the untrained eye the marks made in the scorebook can look like a giant game of noughts and crosses is being played out. However, each tiny mark made in the scorebook records an event in the match. See Chapter 2 for the ins and outs of marks used in scorebooks, and Chapter 4 for the low-down on interpreting a scorecard.

Equipping Yourself as a Fan

Not every fan of cricket wants to play the game. From a playing perspective, cricket can be very time-consuming and equipment isn't cheap. What's more, some people just don't feel that their skills are up to playing the game. Instead, they would rather just be a fan. And boy, does cricket offer a lot to its fans.

Nearly every day of the year a test or major 50-over or T20 match takes place somewhere. The men's and women's Indian Premier League (IPL) now takes place twice a year in huge stadiums with millions watching from home. Likewise, the Big Bash, Australia's equivalent of the IPL, runs women's and then men's competitions either side of Christmas, gathering huge global audiences. During the summer months, 18 county sides in England compete in a plethora of competitions from the County Championship to the quick-fire excitement of new 100-ball competition. Check out Chapter 3 for more on the different formats of the game, and Chapter 5 on savoring international cricket.

Showing off your cricket knowledge

Cricket fans in particular love a list. Get a group of cricket fans together and quicker than you can say “Mine’s a pint!” they’re gabbing away about the great players and matches from the past. At the end of this book, the Part of Tens is full of lists and the inside track on the greater figures of cricket; check it out so that you can show off your cricket know-how.

Coaching and cricket tactics

Cricket coaching has come a long way in the past couple of generations. Players used to rely largely on natural ability and would practice their skills sporadically. Teams didn’t have coaches. Instead, players relied on each other to impart technical tips on playing the game. But in the modern era, players have all sorts of professional backroom staff to call on. The top professional teams such as those representing counties and nations now have fitness trainers, dieticians, sports psychologists, and specialist coaches who are experts in one facet of the game such as fielding, batting, or bowling. Chapter 14 gives you the inside track on training and practicing for cricket.

Cricket coaching may be a relatively modern phenomenon but tactics have always played a big role in the game. The team captain has to decide the tactics, and the challenges facing the captain differ according to whether the team is batting or in the field. See Chapter 13 for more on the arts and crafts of captaincy.

Getting to Grips with the Laws of the Game

Cricket as a sport takes itself a bit seriously. Instead of simply just having rules, cricket has *laws*. Cricket administrators see themselves as protectors of the laws of the game. Cricket has more laws than you can shake a stick at. Full explanations in print of the laws of cricket can run to way over 10,000 words. Compare this to soccer which only has a few rules and mostly involves two teams kicking a bag of wind between posts. However, don’t get the impression that because cricket has lots of different laws that somehow the game is impossible to pick up. The basics of the game are relatively easy to comprehend.



CRICKET
LORE

The first printed version of the laws of cricket can be traced way back to 1744. They were drawn up . . . guess where? A bar! The Star and Garter in Pall Mall, London, to be precise. A copy of these laws were later taken to the U.S. by no less a figure than Benjamin Franklin (he really did get everywhere!). But cricket laws haven't stood still; they have evolved and been changed on many occasions.



REMEMBER

Cricket, despite its sometimes stuffy image, is always evolving. The game's governing body, the International Cricket Council (ICC), meets regularly to review the laws of cricket. The ICC often makes changes and is willing to experiment. Some law changes work and they remain; others don't and they are, usually, ditched in double-quick time.

Knowing the Importance of the Umpire

Umpires are present to apply the laws of the game to the match situation. They decide, for example, whether a batter has been dismissed by the bowling side, whether the bowler is bowling legally, and when play stops to take lunch and tea breaks. Their role is a crucial one: Without an umpire, a proper game of cricket can't be played.

See Chapter 2 for more on the role of the umpire and some of the signals they use to alert the scorers, players, and crowd to what is going on in the match.

