

## HISTORY & SPORT: THE STORY OF CRICKET

Cricket grew out of the many stick-and-ball games played in England 500 years ago, under a variety of different rules. The word 'bat' is an old English word that simply means stick or club. By the seventeenth century, cricket had evolved enough to be recognisable as a distinct game and it was popular enough for its fans to be fined for playing it on Sunday instead of going to church.



**The oldest cricket bat in existence.**

Till the middle of the eighteenth century, bats were roughly the same shape as hockey sticks, curving outwards at the bottom. There was a simple reason for this: the ball was bowled underarm.

Our history of cricket will look first at the evolution of cricket as a game in England, and discuss the wider culture of physical training and athleticism of the time. It will then move to India, discuss the history of the adoption of cricket in this country, and trace the modern transformation of the game. In each of these sections we will see how the history of the game was connected to the social history of the time.

### HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CRICKET AS A GAME IN ENGLAND

The social and economic history of England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, cricket's early years, shaped the game and gave cricket its unique nature.

One of the peculiarities of Test cricket is that a match can go on for five days and still end in a draw. No other modern team sport takes even half as much time to complete. A football match is generally over in an hour-and-a-half of playing time.

Another curious characteristic of cricket is that the length of the pitch is specified – 22 yards – but the size or shape of the ground is not. Most other team sports, such as hockey and football lay down the dimensions of the playing area but, cricket does not. Grounds can be oval like the Adelaide Oval or nearly circular, like Chepauk in Chennai. A six at the Melbourne Cricket Ground needs to clear much more ground than a lofted shot for the same reward at Feroz Shah Kotla in Delhi.

The first written 'Laws of Cricket' were drawn up in 1744. They stated, 'the principals shall choose from amongst the gentlemen present two umpires who shall absolutely decide all disputes. The stumps must be 22 inches high and the bail across them six inches. The ball must be between 5 and 6 ounces, and the two sets of stumps 22 yards apart'. There were no limits on the shape or size of the bat. It appears that 40 notches or runs was viewed as a very big score, probably due to the bowlers bowling quickly at shins unprotected by pads. The world's first cricket club was formed in Hambledon in the 1760s and the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) was founded in 1787. In 1788, the MCC published its first revision of the laws and became the guardian of cricket's regulations.



**The laws of cricket drawn up and revised by the MCC were regularly published in this form. Note that norms of betting were also formalised.**

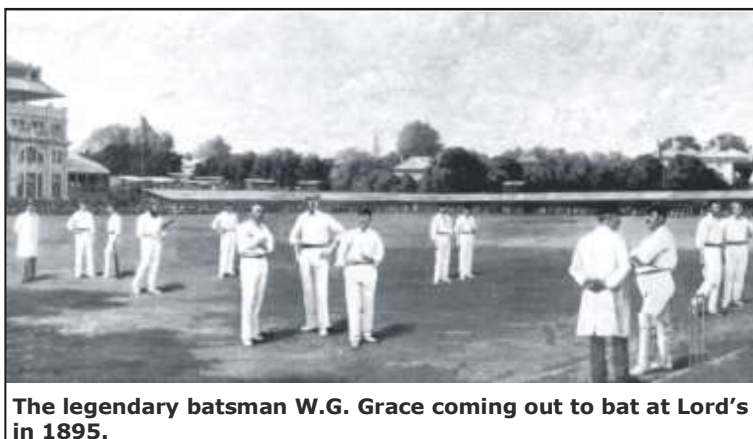
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The MCC's revision of the laws brought in a series of changes in the game that occurred in the second half of the eighteenth century. During the 1760s and 1770s it became common to pitch the ball through the air, rather than roll it along the ground. This change gave bowlers the options of length, deception through the air, plus increased pace. It also opened new possibilities for spin and swing. In response, batsmen had to master timing and shot selection. One immediate result was the replacement of the curved bat with the straight one.

The weight of the ball was limited to between  $5\frac{1}{2}$  to  $5\frac{3}{4}$  ounces, and the width of the bat to four inches. The latter ruling followed an innings by a batsman who appeared with a bat as wide as the wicket! In 1774, the first leg-before law was published. Also around this time, a third stump became common. By 1780, three days had become the length of a major match, and this year also saw the creation of the first six-seam cricket ball.

While many important changes occurred during the nineteenth century (the rule about wide balls was applied, the exact circumference of the ball was specified, protective equipment like pads and gloves became available, boundaries were introduced where previously all shots had to be run and, most importantly, overarm bowling became legal) cricket remained a pre-industrial sport that matured during the early phase of the Industrial Revolution, the late eighteenth century.

Cricket was originally played on country commons, unfenced land that was public property. The size of the commons varied from one village to another, so there were no designated boundaries or boundary hits.



- 1. Materials which were Earlier used:** Cricket's most important tools are all made of natural, pre-industrial materials. The bat is made of wood as are the stumps and the bails. The ball is made with leather, twine and cork. Even today both bat and ball are handmade, not industrially manufactured. The material of the bat changed slightly over time. Once it was cut out of a single piece of wood. Now it consists of two pieces, the blade which is made out of the wood of the willow tree and the handle which is made out of cane that became available as European colonialists and trading companies established themselves in Asia. Unlike golf and tennis, cricket has refused to remake its tools with industrial or man-made materials: plastic, fibre glass and metal have been firmly rejected. Australian cricketer Dennis Lillee tried to play an innings with an alluminium bat, only to have it outlawed by the umpires.
- 2. Important changes that occurred in the game of cricket during the 19th century:**

During the 19th century the important changes that occurred in the game of cricket can be briefly state as follows:

  - (i) The rule about wide ball was applied.
  - (ii) The exact circumference of the ball was specified.
  - (iii) Protective equipment like pads and glove became available.
  - (iv) Boundaries were introduced; earlier all runs were scored by running between the stumps. Overarms bowling became legal.

**3. Cricket and Victorian England:**

**(a) The rich were amateurs for two reasons:** One, they considered sport a kind of leisure. To play for the pleasure of playing and not for money was an aristocratic value. Two, there was not enough money in the game for the rich to be interested.

(i) The social superiority of amateurs was built into the customs of cricket. Amateurs were called Gentlemen while professionals had to be content with being described as Players.

(ii) They entered the ground from different entrances.

(iii) Amateurs tended to be batsmen, leaving the energetic, hardworking aspects of the game, like fast bowling, the professionals. That is partly why the rules of the game always give the benefit of the doubt to the batsman.

**(b) Cricket a batsman's game:** Cricket is a batsman's game because its rules were made to favour 'Gentlemen', who did most of the batting. The social superiority of the amateur was also the reason the captain of a cricket team was traditionally a batsman; not because batsmen were naturally better captains but because they were generally Gentlemen. Captains of teams, whether club teams or national sides, were always amateurs. It was not till the 1930s that the English Test team was led by a professional, the Yorkshire batsman, Len Hutton.

**(c) "Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton":** In actual fact the Napoleonic wars were won because of the economic contribution of the iron works of Scotland and Wales, the mills of Lancashire and the financial houses of the City of London. It was the English lead in trade and industry that made Britain the world's greatest power, but it suited the English ruling class to believe that it was the superior character of its young men, built in boarding schools, like Eton, playing gentlemanly games like cricket, that tipped the balance.

### **THE SPREAD OF CRICKET**

While some English team games like hockey and football became international games, played all over the world, cricket remained a colonial game, limited to countries that had once been part of the British empire. The pre-industrial oddness of cricket made it a hard game to export. It took root only in countries that the British conquered and ruled. In these colonies, cricket was established as a popular sport either by white settlers (as in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Australia, New Zealand, the West Indies and Kenya) or by local elites who wanted to copy the habits of their colonial masters, as in India.

While British imperial officials brought the game to the colonies, they made little effort to spread the game, especially in colonial territories where the subjects of empire were mainly non-white, such as India and the West Indies. Here, playing cricket became a sign of superior social and racial status, and the Afro-Caribbean population was discouraged from participating in organised club cricket, which remained dominated by white plantation owners and their servants.

The first non-white club in the West Indies was established towards the end of the nineteenth century, and even in this case its members were light-skinned mulattos.

Despite the exclusiveness of the white cricket elite in the West Indies, the game became hugely popular in the Caribbean.

At the time of their independence many of the political leaders of Caribbean countries like Forbes Burnham and Eric Williams saw in the game a chance for self-respect and international standing.

When the West Indies won its first Test series against England in 1950s, it was celebrated as a national achievement, as a way of demonstrating that West Indians were the equal of white Englishmen.

The first time a black player led the West Indies Test team was in 1960 when Frank Worrell was named captain.

Through the early history of Indian first class cricket, teams were not organized geographical principles and it was not till 1979 that a national team was given the right to represent India in a Test match.



**A rough-and-ready cricket game being played by Indians in a village in the Himalayas (1894).**

1. **Cricket, Race and Religion:** Cricket in colonial India was organised on the principle of race and religion. The first record we have of cricket being played in India is from 1721, an account of recreational cricket played by English sailors in Cambay. The first Indian club, the **Calcutta Cricket Club**, was established in 1792. Through the eighteenth century, cricket in India was almost wholly a sport played by British military men and civil servants in all-white clubs and gymkhanas.

The origins of Indian cricket, that is, cricket played by Indians are to be found in Bombay and the first Indian community to start playing the game was the small community of Zoroastrians, the Parsis. Brought into close contact with the British because of their interest in trade and the first Indian community to westernize, the Parsis founded the first Indian cricket club, the Oriental Cricket Club in Bombay in 1848. Parsi clubs were funded and sponsored by Parsi businessmen like the Tatas and the Wadias. The white cricket elite in India offered no help to the enthusiastic Parsis. In fact, there was a quarrel between the Bombay Gymkhana, a whites-only club, and Parsi cricketers over the use of a public park. The Parsis complained that the park was left unfit for cricket because the polo ponies of the Bombay Gymkhana dug up the surface. When it became clear that the colonial authorities were prejudiced in favour of their white compatriots, the Parsis built their own gymkhana to play cricket. The rivalry between the Parsis and the racist Bombay Gymkhana had a happy ending for these pioneers of Indian cricket. A Parsi team beat the Bombay Gymkhana at cricket in 1889, just four years after the foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, an organisation that was lucky to have amongst its early leaders the great Parsi statesman and intellectual Dadabhai Naoroji.

The establishment of the Parsi Gymkhana became a precedent for other Indians who in turn established clubs based on the idea of religious community. By the 1890s, Hindus and Muslims were busy gathering funds and support for a Hindu Gymkhana and an Islam Gymkhana.

The British did not consider colonial India as a nation. They saw it as a collection of castes and races and religious communities and gave themselves the credit for unifying the sub-continent. In the late nineteenth century, many Indian institutions and movements were organised around the idea of religious community because the colonial state encouraged these divisions and was quick to recognise communal institutions.

This history of gymkhana cricket led to first-class cricket being organised on communal and racial lines. The tournament was initially called Quadrangular, because it was played by four teams: the Europeans, the Parsis, the Hindus and the Muslims. It later became the Pentangular when a fifth team was added, namely, the Rest which comprised all the communities left over such as the Indian Christians.

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By the late 1930s and early 1940s journalists, cricketers and political leaders had begun to criticize the racial and communal foundations of the Pentangular tournament. They condemned the Pentangular as a communally divisive competition that was out of place in a time when nationalists were trying to unite India's diverse population. A rival first-class tournament on regional lines, the National Cricket Championship (later named the Ranji Trophy), was established but not until Independence did it properly replace the Pentangular. Pentangular was a colonial tournament and it died with the Raj.

2. **Mahatma Gandhi's views on Cricket:** Mahatma Gandhi believed that sport was essential for creating a balance between the body and the mind. However, he often emphasised that games like cricket and hockey were imported into India by the British and were replacing traditional games. Such games as cricket, hockey, football and tennis were for the privileged, he believed. They showed a colonial mindset and were a less active education than the simple exercise of those who worked on the land.



The Parsi team, the first Indian cricket team to tour England in 1886.

### THE MODERN TRANSFORMATION OF THE GAME

1. Modern cricket is dominated by Tests and one day internationals, played between national teams.
2. The players, Indian fans remember from the era of the Pentangular and the Quadrangular are those who were fortunate enough to play Test cricket.
3. C.K. Nayudu, an outstanding Indian batsman of his time, lives on in the popular imagination when some of his great contemporaries like Palwankar Vithal and Palwankar Ballo have been forgotten because his career lasted long enough for him to play Test cricket for India while others did not.
4. Nayudu has past his cricketing prime when he played for India in its first Test matches against England starting in 1932, his place in India's cricket history is assured because he was the country's first Test captain.
5. India entered the world of Test cricket in 1932s, a decade and a half before it became an independent nation. This was possible because Test cricket from its origins 1877 was organised as a contest between different parts of the British empire, not sovereign nations.
6. The first Test was played between England and Australia, when Australia was still a white settler colony, not even a self-governing dominion.

**Decolonisation and Sport:** Decolonisation, or the process through which different parts of European empires became independent nations, began with the independence of India in 1947 and continued for the next half a century. This process led to the decline of British influence in trade, commerce, military affairs, international politics and, inevitably, sporting matters.

Even after Indian independence kick-started the disappearance of the British empire, the regulation of international cricket remained the business of the Imperial Cricket Conference, ICC. The ICC, renamed the International Cricket Conference as late as 1965, was dominated by its foundation members, England and Australia, which retained the right of veto over its proceedings.



## **COMMERCE, MEDIA AND CRICKET TODAY**

Advances in technology had a dramatic effect on the game of cricket.

On-field, the concept of 'Third Umpire' was put in practice. A number of major decisions on field could be referred to him as he had the benefit of replays of every event from all possible angles. Stumps carried cameras; umpires could talk direct to the ground staff and others from their radios. Score-boards became more functional and informative.

Off-field, organization of matches became much more convenient with easy free flow of required information.

With the advent of television, cricket became a marketable game which could generate huge revenues.

- (i) Cricket boards became rich by selling television rights to television companies.
- (ii) Television channels made money by selling television sports to companies who were happy to pay large sums of money to air commercials for their products to cricket's captive television audience.
- (iii) Continuous television coverage made cricketers celebrities who, besides being paid better by their cricket boards, now made even larger sums of money by making commercials for a wide range of products, from tyres to colas, on television.
- (iv) Television coverage expanded the audience for the game by beaming cricket into small towns and villages.
- (v) It also broadened cricket's social base. Children who had never previously had the chance to watch international cricket because they lived outside the big cities, where top-level cricket was played, could now watch and learn by imitating their heroes.
- (vi) The technology of satellite television and the world wide reach of multinational television companies created a global market for cricket.

- 1. Contribution of Kerry Packer in development of cricket:** Kerry Packer was an Australian television tycoon. He saw the money-making potential of cricket as a televised sport. He introduced 'World Series Cricket'. He signed up fifty-one of the world's leading cricketers against the wishes of the national cricket boards and for about two years staged unofficial Tests and One-Day internationals. The innovations he introduced during this time to make cricket more attractive to television audiences endured and changed the nature of the game.

Coloured dress, protective helmets, field restrictions, cricket under lights, became a standard part of the post Packer game. Crucially, Packer drove home lesson that cricket was marketable, game, which could generate huge revenues.

**2. The centre of gravity in cricket has shifted away from the old:**

- (i) A more important sign that the centre of gravity of the cricket has shifted away from the old, Anglo Australian axis is that innovations in cricket technique in recent years have mainly come from the practice of sub-continental teams in countries like India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- (ii) Pakistan has pioneered in two great advances of bowling: the doosra and the 'reverse swing'.
- (iii) Initially, both innovations were greeted with great suspicion by countries like Britain and Australia which saw them as an underhanded, illegal bending of the laws of cricket.
- (iv) In time, it came to be accepted that the laws of cricket could not continue to be framed for British or Australian conditions of play, and they became part of the technique of all bowlers, everywhere in the world.
- (v) Today, the global marketplace has made Indian players the best-paid, most famous cricketers in the game, men for whom the world is a stage.