

SAMPLE EDITION

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THE
Nightwatchman
THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY



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Cricket's past has been enriched by great writing and Wisden is making sure its future will be too. *The Nightwatchman* is a quarterly collection of essays and long-form articles and is available in print and e-book formats.

Co-edited by Anjali Doshi and Tanya Aldred, with Matt Thacker as managing editor, *The Nightwatchman* features an array of authors from around the world, writing beautifully and at length about the game and its myriad offshoots. Contributors are given free rein over subject matter and length, escaping the pressures of next-day deadlines and the despair of cramming heart and soul into a few paragraphs.

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Issue 10, out now, features the following:

Matt Thacker introduces the tenth issue of *The Nightwatchman*

Rob Smyth on the cameo that won the 2005 Ashes

Patrick Collins remembers terrestrial television's last hurrah

Dan Waddell In memoriam Emma

Ten years on Photographs from the greatest Test series ever

Sean Ingle digs out Test Match from the attic

Huw Richards remembers Mike Marqusee – friend, Marxist and cricket nut

Dilip D'Souza mourns the Ranji Trophy's drift to irrelevance

Richard Beard counts from one to eleven

Julian Norridge wishes the County Championship a happy 125th birthday

Felix White finds distance brings a clarity of sorts

Telford Vice celebrates the World Cup's happy vibe

Top shots The Wisden-MCC cricket photographs of the year

Liam Herringshaw on his dad's career behind the camera

David Tossell examines England's selection lottery of the 1980s

Damian Broomhead finds solace in a cricket ball

Joe Wilson talks about Leicestershire's future with Wasim Khan

Martin Claytor on Worcestershire's 1965 trip round the world

Liam Cromar raises his foaming tankard

On the following pages you'll find an article by Geoff Lemon, exploring cricket's 'for-men-by-men' attitude





FOR MEN, BY MEN

Geoff Lemon examines cricket's attitudes towards women in the game – and finds plenty of room for improvement

It has to be the most embarrassing cricket footage I've ever seen. Worse than those compilations of Inzamam run-outs. Worse than Steve Harmison bowling to second slip or Darryl Tuffey's 14-ball over. You can watch it again and again, squirming more each time yet strangely compelled to click replay, the only time Channel Nine's lunchtime filler has approached the genius of *The Office*.

It's the Boxing Day Ashes Test in 2013. Michael Slater – the accidental David Brent – is presenting with Michael Vaughan. Their guests are Australian players Meg Lanning and Ellyse Perry. Women's cricket is getting six minutes of airtime amid five men's Tests. In those six minutes Vaughan's contribution consists of four questions about the men's series and 35 seconds narrating footage of himself on a British dance show. Slater manages to praise the women for being attractive, admit he doesn't know who won their last series, make cat-fight noises to portray them

sledging, ask how they physically cope with playing cricket, and claim credit for Perry's career after "I let her get me out" in an exhibition game.

It's a tour de force. But the champagne-fountain centrepiece of this glittering shit-show comes with a segue-free transition. Lanning is vice-captain of a national side at 21 while Perry represents Australia in two international sports. So, logically, the producers cut to footage of both women doing modelling shoots. The host has been prepped: he gives what passes in Slatish for an introduction, then as the camera lingers uncomfortably on images of Perry in a bikini, so does he. "Ellyse is just... it's just taking full flight with these shots. What's going on there, you are... you are looking fantastic! Do you enjoy doing that?"

Safe to assume she doesn't while a dude twice her age is sitting next to her, frothing at the corners of his mouth like the creepiest of uncles.

"It's much better wearing a set of cricket whites on the field," says Perry pointedly. Freshly-sharpened-pencil pointedly. "Don't be embarrassed," replies Slater with a time-honoured deflection, as though embarrassment is an innate personal phenomenon and not the result of unwelcome attention.

Cricket Australia still have the segment on their website. No worries boys, this is how to talk to the ladies. Point out things like this and there is always someone who will call you humourless, but you need a sense of humour to truly appreciate the woeful. The first mention of women's cricket was probably enough to see half of you flip the page, but the article in front of you is a lot more relevant to men. In writing it I could only conclude that cricket has deeper problems with women than tone-deaf interviews, even interviews that array those problems in perfect microcosm. Women in the game don't need this pointed out, but those of us who outnumber them might stir our natural curiosity about things we haven't had to notice.

* * *

A month after that interview its key participants returned to the scene. Australia and England had a Twenty20 double-header - first the women, then the men. I walked into the MCG that day and stopped dead. Having followed the women's game through scoresheets and television, this was my first glimpse of a live field of play. I'd previously scoffed at Big Bash boundaries: acres of unused space left to a passing array of henchmen, jugglers, acrobats and flamethrowers, so that any toe-ended slog hanging in the air like limp asparagus might

plop apologetically for six amid the circus where a not-so-deep midwicket would once have held a catch. But for this game the boundary was further circumscribed - of the mighty MCG turf it seemed barely half was used.

All I could wonder was how the women about to take that field could fail to feel demeaned. On 8-bit logic it made sense: if women can't hit as far, make the boundary smaller. But any game is about using your skill to gain mastery of its conditions, not easing the conditions to the point that you can master them. Repainting an entire dartboard as a bullseye will not improve your aim.

It's part of a pattern whereby the women's game is - in all respects - reduced. Women play Tests over four days, not five. Those Tests are one-offs, not series. Their Ashes contest rests on limited-overs games. Double-headers are granted like favours, but their summer decider could be a curtain-raiser to a meaningless men's T20. Whatever the practical arguments, these things can't help but give a perception of the women's game as quantifiably lesser, smaller, a pat on the head. Don't strain yourselves, there'll be extra breaks. And peppermint tea stalls. And hair curlers in the change rooms. And smelling salts if you feel faint. Sessions will be half an hour, and 30 runs is a century.

The ICC and its member boards took control of women's cricket in 2005, and are still looking at it like a jumble-sale impulse buy. Its Test history - from the first in 1934 through a five-match Ashes in 1984 and a five-day Sydney Test in 1992 - has faded into a barren

decade. England and India played the last mathematically definable series in 2006. In nine years since, cricket-playing nations have collectively managed eight matches. England captain Charlotte Edwards has played 19 years for 22 Tests. Men's captain Alastair Cook has over a hundred Tests in half the time. Female captains still name Test cricket as the sport's pinnacle, but for them it's a sporadic exhibition. All domestic women's cricket is now 20 or 50 overs. It's cheaper to stage, easier to sell and has some prayer of being telecast.

So why bother with the token remainder? Women are picked for Tests based on performance in a different game. They can't develop the familiarity or stamina to excel. Effectively the structure sets them up to underperform. It's not complex: if you want to call something an Ashes series, build it like one. If Tests are too hard, have a different series. If women's Tests are the pinnacle of the sport, have first-class comps to support them. Players are bound by nonsense, deciding major trophies with a form they never play. You don't ramp up a 200-metre sprint final to 800 just to see how they go. You can't use shreds of Test cricket for fig leaves - oh, we respect the game so much that we've made it biennial. The final call should belong to the cricketers: do they want to base their game around the long form or short? Right now we're stuck in a condescending middle ground with a nowhere strategy - a set of administrators sitting so hard on the fence they'll need a proctologist and a carpenter to get themselves free.

It's true that the last three years have seen improvements in Australia and England: players have modest professional contracts, games are more available via digital TV and streaming, the last two Ashes had an increased profile, and plans are afoot for a Women's Big Bash League. But India has actively run its team into the ground, and while West Indies and Sri Lanka have provided on-field highlights, other teams still live in the margins. The degree may vary, but wherever you look the women's game is still secondary - an obligation to be expended rather than an opportunity seized.

* * *

Inevitably, such conversations detour into the relative worth of female sporting endeavour. Articles on the subject prove irresistible to a subset of men personally aggrieved to find it under discussion. First, the biology lecture: men are on average stronger than women, you will be stunned to learn. They are more suited to athletic excellence, you shall hear intoned. Men will be depicted as sparring stags, women as dun-coloured bowerbirds waiting to be impressed. *O teach me, teach me, whose muscle mass is greater* - as the grimy clerestory window of your mind's eye is flung wide and the cascaded sunbeams of enlightenment flood in. Then we shift our Darwinism to the social: men's sport is richer because it is popular, and popular because it is better.

All these claims share a few characteristics: they're partly true, readily apparent, and analytically shallow. There is a sense of manifest destiny: holding a position of power

means its tenant was fated to assume it. Some will argue that women's cricket doesn't deserve spending when the men's game earns the money; the more pompous will tell you that this is true equality. Harrumph.

But seeing the men's game as more deserving - the put-upon breadwinner in some domestic fable - is absurd when it has enjoyed an effective monopoly and a couple of centuries' headstart. With the rivalry of one village versus the next, cricket was public entertainment in an age when sport was left to men. And frankly when it became popular there wasn't a hell of a lot else to do - Maypole dancing and the Black Death only filled so much of your time. Once leisure options diversified in the twentieth century, cricket had the appeal of tradition. Instead of being supplanted by radio or television it became part of them. Women's cricket is starting from the back of a vastly more crowded field.

To dismiss female cricketers empirically, strength is the preferred criteria: they can't bowl as fast or hit as hard. Its significance though is debatable. Most men are stronger than most women, just as some women are stronger than most men. Men are the fastest servers in tennis, but the top women still serve plenty fast, and are just as entertaining. Greater strength is not greater skill, and cricket has many facets. There's no masculine advantage to keeping wicket or bowling spin. The marker of batting elegance and excellence is timing: "barely seemed to hit that" is the praise for the best flicks and drives. So why look down on women who have no choice but pure technique? Why look down on bowlers who use seam and

swing in the absence of pace? England seamer Kate Cross has excelled against men's teams in Yorkshire League cricket this season, with 3 for 19 on debut and 8 for 47 three weeks later. The focus is always on the men that women can't beat, not the ones they can.

But team sports are not about first place: meaningful competition needs top players in their hundreds, even thousands. Even if the very best are male, there's no inherent reason that women can't make that group. It's a numbers game. Of course, male internationals are currently more skilled: compare a history of 2,163 Tests to 137, or 3,650 ODIs to 944. Try a dozen competitive nations compared to four or five. Most importantly the women's game draws from a far smaller talent pool. Elite athletes are outliers in natural aptitude and sufficient development. Around the world, women who could have been great cricketers never considered playing. That's why it matters when boards are publicly indifferent. Increase opportunities, make the game seem worthwhile, and you'll start to find more of those outliers coming through.

It's not like women can't hit sixes the old-fashioned way: in that same Ashes series I remember Lanning creaming a slog-sweep over the fence at Bellerive. Deandra Dottin has made the West Indies famous with her long striking, including a T20 century off 38 balls. Increase player numbers, find more power hitters. Women may never bowl at 90 mph, but if enough of them try then you might find some who can. Men bowling 95 mph are rare: sides can go decades without one, but it doesn't mean they aren't around. Thirteen-year-

old baseballer Mo'ne Davis messed with some heads last year, pitching fastballs at 70 mph to outpace most boys in her age bracket. "I just go out and throw strikes," she smiled. You can see her as an anomaly, but if as many girls were encouraged into sport as boys, you would find a lot more anomalies. Or they would start to seem less anomalous. The people now arguing that Davis can never play Major League would once have insisted a girl could never pitch a shut-out at the Little League World Series. Everything's impossible until it happens.

In any case, it's not like women must aspire to play like men. As with so many sports, women play a subtly different game, the same field and equipment met with varied rhythms and strategies. That's why it grates to see the tiny boundary. There's no excitement to a smaller mimicry, nor dignity to the achievement. Bradman didn't bother with sixes and it didn't stop people watching him. Maybe women would hit more threes, a game built on placement. With sixes becoming rarer they'd be more exciting, and those who could hit them would grow in importance. Tactics would develop in response, all part of the intrigue of an evolving game. Set the ropes back and more women will learn to clear them. What is sport if not a spur for endeavour?

* * *

In late 2014, Roar Radio ran a commentary stream of Australia's UAE tour against Pakistan. During the second Test our rotation brought Cat Jones, cricket coach and columnist, on air with former ABC sport presenter

Katie Bailey. The pairing was as random as any, but messages started coming in: this was the first time, said listeners, they'd heard two women calling men's cricket. If there were a precedent none of us could recall one. But rather than the triumph of a pioneering moment, it felt mildly embarrassing that the combination should be notable.

Just like switching on ABC radio deep into the World Cup and listening to Alison Mitchell - the first woman I'd heard calling ball-by-ball on a major broadcast. Mitchell was excellent. The world, entirely un-ended, spun on its way. The year was 2015. Mitchell is rare not because women can't do the job, but because they're overwhelmingly discouraged from thinking they ever could. For decades commentary has been an all-male affair. Tanya Aldred's 2013 *Telegraph* profile on Mitchell makes for wonderful entertainment, its comment section brimming with expostulation (fully sic):

"LEAVE TMS ALONE. Its one of the final bastions of broadcasting i can actually stand, the LAST thing it needs is to be infected by political correctness."

"A woman in the commentary box would change the wonderful dynamic of repartée."

"After you have successfully campaigned for male presenters of 'Womans' Hour then you can start campaigning for female presenters of Blokes' Hour."

"Other sports have tried the 'female' presenter who stand there spouting irrelevant nonsense for no good reason."

"Too much talk about the cricket and it was not easy relaxed listening."

Several tested the rhetorical flourish that supporting women's advances in hostile industries is itself sexist – “ah ha!” you can see them shouting, brandishing a quill at the keyboard. Most online comments do come from the least reasonable readers, but these still reflect pervasive attitudes – that women in sport have nothing to offer, that their presence can only be a token gesture, that there's no value in the full range of voices. Weighed with its boots on, this is a bitter conclusion: that half our citizens have no place discussing the teams that represent them.

The outrage is really over a threatened sense of familiarity. On professional grounds Mitchell is quality: no one gains by promoting the unsuited. Which doesn't mean other female broadcasters won't disappoint, dullness not being chromosome-dependent. The issue is that women entering male fields are held to represent their gender: a woman being rubbish means that women can't commentate, a bloke being rubbish means he can't.

Still, there's progress. No one expected the IPL – home of cheerleaders and decorative boundary riders – to hire Lisa Sthalekar, Mel Jones, Isa Guha and Anjum Chopra for regulation commentary. It's gone better than Nine's use of Lanning for domestic 50-over games last year, where instead of being one of the standard three callers she was tacked on each stint as a fourth. As Cat Jones observed in the *Guardian*, the regulars “seemed unsure about whether they were interviewing Lanning or commentating with her.”

Not to mention that to get Nine's attention Lanning had to be appointed

Australia's youngest-ever captain, win a T20 World Cup and prove herself the most exciting player in her sport – and even that may not have been enough had she not met Australian TV's *Home & Away* standard of being sufficiently blonde and photogenic. Appearance is an extra box that female presenters must tick – the IPL announcement was illustrated with its female commentators in cocktail dresses – while Ian Botham can roll in looking like someone shot the arse off a hungover rhinoceros and still plonk his jowls on the telly. The industry's women are islands in a sea of unremarkable middle-aged men.

My first press corps tour at the 2013 Ashes was another study in geography. I met Aldred at Trent Bridge, did *Guardian* podcasts with Emma John and Lizzy Ammon, saw Antoinette Muller for a day at Old Trafford, caught up with ABC reporter Mary Gearin, and nodded to Nine's Roz Kelly and *The Age*'s Chloe Saltau. That was it – seven women, not at one Test but across the lot, in press boxes that each held a hundred people or more. Since then I've worked with nine other women in cricket media. That I can name them individually says everything about the status quo.

Truth bomb: more men do like cricket. But that's partly because in so many ways over so many years women are implicitly or explicitly told they're not welcome. The game is seen as a male domain inherently, not just historically. I may bat like a seasick deckhand putting out a galley fire, but by virtue of birth I'm granted some assumed authority. This perpetuates the media imbalance, which manifests

in so many little ways that suggest women are less worthy of our regard: framing questions to female players in reference to their counterparts; covering Tests by webstream from a single dodgy camera; running every article with a revealing photo of Perry; barely bothering to report because we think no one will read it; the TV cameraman filming some poor woman in the crowd for so long you're sure you can hear him breathing. For me it'll always be a couple of supercilious English press-box lifers in 2013 enjoying their ascendancy. When would *anything* go right for the Australians, one rhetorically enquired.

“Well,” said the other, “one of the Southern Stars hit a century today.”

“Ha!” shot out the first. “Marvellous.”

* * *

Behind everything else lies the state of cricket administration. The International Women's Cricket Council was an amateur body that survived tour to tour. The ICC swallowed it without bothering to spit out the bones. There are 15 ICC directors and eight alternate directors, all male. Leadership is conducted across all areas by 11 overlapping committees. Outside the Women's Committee, Clare Connor is the only woman among 73 men.

Cricket Australia's website entrées its board with a photo of Delissa Kimmince nailing a sweep shot. Click her to reveal one woman among nine directors. CA's proportion of female players is a world-best 22 per cent. The ECB has two women on its board of

14, and participation at seven per cent. Indian cricket's nine office-bearers are men, and the next few hundred probably are too. The BCCI isn't just indifferent to women's cricket: it is hostile. Domestic and international games have plummeted in number, with opportunities like the Asian Games ignored to save the cost of a motel. National players fund their own training while officials haggle over match fees that you could pay out of a car ashtray. With the team's promise before the takeover and its parlous state now, the BCCI increasingly plays Jabba the Hutt, smearing itself in food while chuckling throatily at the desperate.

After decades of women organising their own matches on next-to-no funding, the three richest national boards are whimpering about the bill. You know, the boards that are signing broadcast deals worth billions, running lucrative T20 leagues and scooping the biggest serve of ICC revenue onto their own plates. Yet they claim non-profit status and tax exemptions on the grounds of growing the game, and the national service they provide in doing so.

So serve, dudes. Nationally. Internationally. Put your card on the bar and shed some dollars. It's cricket's money anyway. The advances are good, but ultimately you still make the women's game look like the budget rip-off replica. Treat the format with respect and coverage will follow suit. The more we report like games matter, the more people will accept they do. The more people follow the game, the greater its standing with the boards. On you go, a slow burn, adding fuel as more people start to play, more teams register, more kids think about

a Test cap, more lifelong diehards sign their pledge without even knowing it. All these things come together in a glorious feedback loop, the feats on the field and the perception off it. Prestige can't be built, but treat things right and it grows. The crowd will swell, the standard will rise, and one day a bunch of people will be watching the game without a second thought, wondering what we were fussing about, saying it was always destined to end up here.

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Discussing equality is tricky. People get defensive, as though they're personally being blamed. They dismiss problems as trivial or invented, and scoff about do-gooders as though doing good is a lamentable character defect. Suggest improvements and you'll be accused of an agenda, some murky plot to force interpersonal respect. Observing a measurable inequity is classed as a political act in a way that observing a pot of geraniums is not.

Few of cricket's issues are born from conscious malice, but they reflect systems that benefit men ahead of women. These are the attitudes reflected in that press-box sneer – that women don't count, what they do isn't worthy. The same attitudes manifest in uglier ways. Last November Sri Lanka Cricket launched an investigation into reports of officials using team selections to extort sex from players. In 2013, five Pakistani teenagers spoke out about the same practice at Multan Cricket Club: they were brushed off by an inquiry, banned by the PCB and sued by the chairman. One of them killed herself. Whatever the detail of these cases, we know that this kind of abuse happens in

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many places and never comes to light. Constant to all such cases are structures where men have power and women are not seen as credible.

Refusing to acknowledge these things can be apathy: complaints are tedious when you're not affected. Or we love the game and don't like conceding there's anything wrong. Or we're fearful of change – cricket and its broadcasters are a point of stability in so many lives. But it's OK. No one is telling us what to like, even if what we like has more to do with habit than whatever post-hoc logical linoleum we lay over that response. If we open the game, more people will come in, and that's only for the better. It's not about special-interest groups when addressing things that involve literally everyone. It's not about trying to point out bigger problems elsewhere when we can take the useful course of getting our own house in order.

It's probably tennis that has best arranged the furniture. There's the odd spat about fashion-focused interviews or the three-sets-to-five split that so suits the schedulers, but by alternating men's and women's games in major tournaments, the two are shown the same respect. Fans follow suit. The game's iconic players don't divide on gender lines. Girls see making the tour as a viable ambition, so the standard remains excellent. No one loses in this arrangement, no one panders, and no one ruins the game forever. If you excised the women's half of the draw now, most enthusiasts would agree that tennis would be a poorer, duller and less colourful place. All of us would win if – someday – cricket could say the same.



EXTRACTS

ROB SMYTH

There were umpteen reasons for Vaughan to ease his way carefully into the series. He'd had a terrible time in the field. His knee was sore. There were only nine overs to tea. His fledgling record against both McGrath and Australia was awful. He averaged 27.94 in overseas Tests. Vaughan didn't give a toss about any of it. That was then and this was now.

In many respects Vaughan was winging it. He was 28, but had only been opening for England for seven months. Yet he had the unshakeable conviction of a man who had recently had an epiphany. His state of mind was perfect. So was his state of gut; Vaughan has always been an advocate of gut instinct, and his kept telling him that, on an individual level, he could conquer Australia. His mind was fresh and uncluttered: "Keep things simple – eye on the ball, hit and look to run."

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PATRICK COLLINS

The England v Australia series of 2005 was thrillingly memorable for the closeness of the contest and the quality of the cricket, but it was the television dimension that rendered it truly historic. When the ECB took the decision to sell their game to the highest bidder, they were effectively removing it from the mainstream of British sport. Their motives were easily understood. Incapable of generating sufficient funds to finance the sport at large, the counties seized an apparently lucrative short-term solution. The tens of millions on offer from Sky TV would appease their members, improve their grounds and attract a mercenary legion of overseas cricketers whose frequently dubious talents could be shamelessly over-promoted. Confronted by a veritable avalanche of banknotes, English cricket behaved with the decorum of lottery winners after a bottle or three of Dom Pérignon.

DAN WADDELL

Back in London the headaches grew worse. Doctors came and went, trying to rule out the worst. My only distraction from this mounting dread was the Ashes. The Old Trafford Test had started, which England dominated: Nemesis and the lads were finally debagging and deconstructing Hubris in front of our eyes. I'll remember one short passage of play for the rest of my life: Flintoff, swinging the ball both ways, probing, testing and finally conquering Hayden shortly before lunch on that gut-wrenching final day. Hayden, a man who had so often planted his big right leg down the pitch and intimidated a succession of English seamers; a man who chewed gum and directed tirades of witless invective to the batsmen from slip, point, or wherever he might be; the bully's bully, now reduced to a groping, humiliated wreck.

I watched the unrequited end in a pub in Ladbroke Grove, after an hour trying to "walk some wickets". The match had been like a spell. Now that it was broken, reality beckoned.

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SEAN INGLE

Has any young boy craved any present as much as I wanted Test Match during the autumn of 1984, when England were in India and I spent too many moments reading and re-reading the 20-word description in the Grattan catalogue, and then stalking the game out in toy shops in Luton's Arndale centre. The box promised "Super new improved bowling action!" and "Great new improved batting action!" The posed picture – of Botham, his brown mane yet to lighten into the full Aslan of 1985, and Gower, wearing a bemused smile that suggested this wasn't in his Test and County Cricket Board contract – vouched for its authenticity. This was the real deal.

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HUW RICHARDS

The writer he perhaps most resembles in type and quality is Gideon Haigh. In part that is a simple matter of talent. Each brings to the genre a range of qualities – analytical, observational and literary – calculated to strike the rest of us toiling within it as plain unfair. Neither is by origin or training a sports journalist. Where Haigh brings the hinterland and insights of a business writer, Mike's grounding was in politics, with the additional perspective of growing up outside cricket culture. Americans had written on cricket before, but with the odd exception of Henry Sayen, who dictated his 1956 work – *A Yankee Looks at Cricket* – to his mentor Gerald Brodribb, they had been Philadelphians and others writing as insiders. Mike had the inbuilt advantage of the intelligent outsider: he questioned things those of us who grew up with the game take for granted.

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DILIP D'SOUZA

When Karun Nair got to 300, late on the third day, I looked around and counted as best I could. It wasn't hard. The great majority of cheering spectators was in the Sunil Gavaskar Stand alongside me, but a small, disproportionately vociferous, lot was to our left in the Divecha Stand – between us and the pavilion, where the cricketers emerged from and disappeared into. But don't be fooled by that phrase "great majority": in a stadium that can seat something like 35,000, those present here numbered about... 125.

If Nair had scored two runs for each man – the audience was mostly male – who watched him reach his triple ton, he would not have reached it. Luckily he didn't approach his task quite like that. But that count might just have summed up this match.

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RICHARD BEARD

5. I'm a specialist batsman, yes, but no one fully trusts me. They say they do but they don't. If the captain had faith in me I'd be at three or four. I fancy myself as an opener. Having said that, I suppose he trusts me more than he does the No.6.

The plan is for the top four to do most of the damage, then I'll have a crack. Doesn't matter, in the circumstances, if I get out: plenty more where I came from. There again, after a top-order early collapse I'm not trusted to stop the rot. Not on my own. There's another specialist batsman at No.6 waiting to help me.

So the skipper can fill my ears with skipper-oil but he knows I know what I am: a specialist who isn't as special as the others.

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JULIAN NORRIDGE

Sir David Birley, in his magisterial *A Social History of English Cricket*, offers the thought that had cricket emerged from the public schools and universities as a stylised new version of an old folk game, as soccer did, it might have been exposed to market forces in the 1870s rather than a century later. And it might then have become a genuine complement to soccer, as baseball is to American football, rather than remaining an elitist pursuit. But all the key people involved – MCC, the county committees, their members, the public school and university men and the high-grade professionals – all regarded the three-day game as sacrosanct. Anything else was simply not cricket. So "the game remained frozen in a neo-feudal posture".

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FELIX WHITE

It was, at first, gut-wrenchingly mortifying. I worried about myself. *Cricket is trivial*. It had never been in clearer focus. Maybe I had spent so much time escaping into it or defending it that in 20 years I hadn't yet actually acknowledged that, at the end of it all, it was only throwing. And catching. And hitting. It might sound odd, but that came as an absolute shock to me. I felt I had understood the distinction very clearly when, a month earlier, I rewound Geoffrey Boycott's appraisal of England's defeat to New Zealand as "a murderous assault" again and again on a train into our studio. It fascinated me for both its accuracy and the genuine lack of perspective it showed when talking about what was, after all, a game. Yet here I was, on my own, sat in Melbourne, in the only meaningful time off I'd had for years, begrudgingly accepting things as if I was a child being told that Father Christmas might not exist.

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TELFORD VICE

The sentence that caused all the trouble was this: "I'm a reporter - I'm here to cover the World Cup."

Screech (the tyres). Stop (the car). Swear (other drivers). Stare (the cabbie, at me).

"Sir! Really?"

"Umm, yes. Really."

"You were at the match? Last night!"

I replied that I had indeed been at the match - South Africa v West Indies at the SCG, a game in which AB de Villiers rewrote the Bible on all that was unholy about batting. Not that I said as much as that: even an atheist who has read neither of the testaments nor *The Da Vinci Code* knows better than to provoke a zealot to acts of faith. Especially when said zealot is driving a cab down a Sydney motorway in lunchtime traffic.

Stuck like a stone flung into the mud of a raging river, my life seemed in more danger than it had been since Herschelle Gibbs launched every delivery of a Daan van Bunge into and over the stands that ring the lovely - but Lilliputian - ground at Basseterre in St Kitts during the 2007 World Cup. Perched in a press box, whose walls were of nothing more protective than light fabric stretched over a rickety skeleton, I felt like a bird on a wire. Thing is, this time the drunk in the midnight choir was driving.

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LIAM HERRINGSHAW

Venturing into news photography could also prove rather hazardous. Dad winces when he recalls an incident at Headingley some 35 years ago.

"News photographers often mount remote cameras in elevated positions," he says, "and fire them by wire or radio. An elevated position is best, behind the bowler's arm. That's where all the remote cameras are sited. My infra-red device was located on the top of a balcony and was wired to the camera a few yards further back. I tripped over the wire and the device fell off the balcony, flipped outwards, and crashed onto a spectator, cutting open her scalp. She was shocked, but OK about it. I felt mortified and never used an elevated device again. It was ground-level only from then on..."

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DAVID TOSSELL

But if, like opening batsman Graeme Fowler, you rarely read the newspapers, there could be so little inkling of impending selection that you didn't believe it when it happened. "I hadn't a clue," he says of his call-up in 1982. "I was off the pitch at Old Trafford and the dressing-room attendant, who was a great old fellow and liked a laugh and a practical joke, said, 'Bob Willis is on the phone for you.' I said doubtfully, 'Oh yes,' and when I picked up the phone this voice said it was Bob. I still didn't know if it was but he said, 'You are playing next week.' I walked back into the dressing-room and said, 'I have been picked for England,' and the lads were jumping up and down. They must have guessed that I was closer than I did. There were people like Willis, Gower and Botham who knew they would play every game, but the rest of us had no idea from one match to the next. We didn't have an England manager or coach, just three or four selectors we never spoke to."

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DAMIAN BROOMHEAD

When, at the end of his life, Mark faced with incredible stoicism the awful depredations and pain of his illness, I couldn't help but be reminded of that bright-eyed little boy, swatting balls off his face in the Canberra sunshine with grace and ease and a kind of unflinching bravery, as the pitch was gradually shortened on him by forces outside his control.

Cricket suited Mark, and Mark suited cricket. Mark was smart, and he got the poetry, he got the subtlety. He loved the stories, the dramas, the characters and the anachronistic oddity and beauty of the game itself, the way it expressed itself in long days and brilliant moments. He loved talking about cricket. At Test matches in the pre-internet days, he'd even bring along a big book of cricket facts to help him argue obscure points with anyone sitting nearby who cared as much as he did.

• • •

JOE WILSON

Birkenshaw imposed loyalty just by giving me a look. Some players of that era doubtless felt the same way. In recent times loyalty has been tougher to come by: Leicestershire have had success producing players but have failed – miserably – to keep them. Over the winter four Leicestershire-born players left the county. The reasons will have varied, but ambition is a two-way street and Wasim Khan recognises the club’s deficiencies.

“When players leave because they genuinely believe they can better their careers and fulfil England aspirations you can just about stomach it. But if they leave because they’ve not been happy with the environment then that rings real alarm bells for any club. We are very sad to see those players leave and wish them well, but it’s a new era now and we want people who want to be here.”

Which brings us to Mark Cosgrove. It’s just as well his South Australian frame is formidable – he has a number of voids to fill for Leicestershire this season. Basically he needs to score most of the runs, most of the time whilst simultaneously inspiring youngsters promoted from the second XI to better themselves on a daily basis.

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MARTIN CLAYTOR

Reporting on the “World Tour”, the 1966 *Wisden* commented that: “History was made when Worcestershire became not only the first county to undertake an extensive overseas tour, but in their capacity as Champion County they played matches in countries which had never seen an English County XI – let alone the Championship pennant.”

A meeting with an international political outcast; cockpit-seat flights and a local witch doctor all added to the adventure.

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LIAM CROMAR

My childhood may have been spent following Mike Atherton’s men vainly attempting to prise Australian fingers off the Urn, yet come playing years, the Jug became my Holy Grail, my particular obsession.

It’s time to resurrect the Jug, to raise it to its rightful place at the centre of every club. With falling participation numbers in England, this tradition is undoubtedly the panacea that will cure every ailment of the English game, and usher in a glorious golden age of victory, comradeship, skittles and beer.

THE
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THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

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