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WINTER 2017

THE
Nightwatchman

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

WISDEN



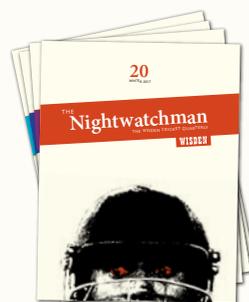
THE Nightwatchman

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

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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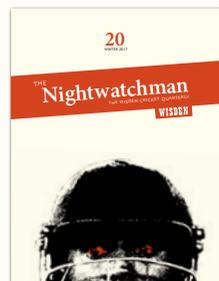
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NOT MY STORY

Kamran Abbasi is an Ashes outsider

I've never properly felt the buzz of the Ashes. I understand it, of course. History. Rivalry. Socio-political undertones. Colonial legacy. But I've never really got it in the sense of the Ashes being the greatest show in cricket. I've never felt the emotion – that something deep inside that pushes a contest beyond a sport in a fan's mind. I've never been nervous about my adopted country's fate in any sport, except perhaps penalties in the 1990 World Cup semi-final against Germany. It must be the immigrant in me.

In the days of Maggie Thatcher and the Tebbit Test, when being an immigrant was as stigmatised as it is again now, I never questioned my indifference to the Ashes. It wasn't something that defined a five-year-old from Lahore who spoke little English and whose first home in England was a bedsit in South Woodford followed by an overpopulated terrace in south Yorkshire.

One of my earliest memories is sitting on the pavement outside another house in Rotherham's worst estate

(we'd moved up the housing ladder to a council semi). It was the day before a National Front march in the town and I told our very white neighbours, the kind who would now be a target for UKIP campaign managers but were then old-school working class, that we'd be forced to leave England. In that moment, I truly believed it. Pakis, the word used for all Asian immigrants, would be sent home. It was a horrible day and the thought of the march, of the hate, of the skinheads, and of the support these foul people were gathering, filled me with a desperate apprehension about the future.

We'd come to England in hope, looking up to the British sense of justice and fair play, only to discover a bitter reality of hate and rejection. I knew nothing I'd done to deserve it. Just as I didn't deserve the racial abuse at school, both from so-called friends and people I didn't even know, or the violence my family experienced, which left me glad that one of my uncles chose to fight back.

Nor the death threats and bomb threats that meant a police officer occasionally sat outside our house. Then there's the prejudice that you can't prove but everybody knows, which means somebody less able than you is selected for jobs and sports teams. Yes, there's plenty that my community can improve and put right. Integration, tolerance, and acceptance work both ways. But tell me why an immigrant to England who lived through the unwelcoming racism of the 1970s and 1980s should immediately care about supporting England in sport?

When you're considered the enemy within, one small pleasure is from your host country's misfortune. This isn't being ungrateful. It's just being human. So when England failed to qualify for the 1978 World Cup it was easy to put heart and soul into Ally's Tartan Army. When West Indies, a team that represented all of us immigrants, made England and its South African imports "grovel", we smiled and relished the sweet justice.

That's why, in the beginning, in the grey '70s, when I did come across the Ashes, Australia were my team. This wasn't just payback for the racism I experienced. Australia were ex-colonial kindred spirits, yes, but they also produced some special players. Dennis Lillee and Jeff Thomson were the world's most feared opening bowlers. Then there was Rodney Marsh, a wicket-keeper of irrepressible spirit, and my favourite, Greg Chappell, as stylish a batsman as the game has known. England's players were less classy, less appealing.

Not that the Ashes mattered much in any case – somebody else's battle. It was Pakistan's visits that we lived for. Thousands of miles away our country was breaking free of its colonial legacy, and Pakistan's success on the cricket field was the most obvious symbol of progress. Despite our personal situation, it was a more optimistic age for Pakistan and the world. As an immigrant, an unwelcome resident, it's hard to find pride in your existence. What do you stand for? What brings you respect? What earns you status? The Pakistan cricket team had the power to bring us all that, or so we believed, which is why every result against England mattered, each win was glorious and each loss a kick in the guts. It was no different for immigrants from the West Indies or India. Our mood swung with every high and low on the cricket pitch.

And there was another rivalry. Pakistan and India played each other regularly enough. Sunny and Zed. Bishan and Mushy. Later it would be Imran and Kapil, Javed and still Sunny. In terms of population, it is the greatest contest in the world of cricket. Numbers, we also know, don't tell the full story of what has passed between these two. A country divided in 1947, friends and families separated. A refugee crisis of unprecedented scale, with murder and pillage on both sides of a new border. An ongoing conflict over Kashmir, followed by an open wound over Bangladesh. Wars and countless skirmishes. Yet, deep down, we shared a common history, a common culture, a common blood. How could the Ashes, for all its convict stories and class struggle, compare with the legacy of Partition?



For a Pakistan fan, those were good times. Pakistan dominated India right up to the 2003 World Cup. When the countries struggled to play in south Asia, they were able to continue their contests in off-shore venues, namely Sharjah. We now know that those games were a soft target for bookies and match-fixers, but the great rivalry was becoming a sporting spectacle just as the political power of both countries began to rise in cricket. In truth, they needed each other, or perhaps more accurately, India still needed Pakistan, and at the time it seemed as if the partnership in cricket would somehow transcend the skirmishes that politicians and military men were fond of.

Those days are long gone. India is the dominant force in cricket politics, far outgrowing any reliance on Pakistan. Its cricket team is dominant too. Pakistan is a cricket nation of guerilla warfare, a successful raid here and there, the 2017 Champions Trophy being a perfect example, while India is a superpower building an impregnable cricket empire. And that is the crux of the issue: there is no longer parity between the combatants.

Partition happened more than 70 years ago. What was once a deeply felt rivalry for the south Asian diaspora is now merely banter. Pakistan, the outsider, is still keen to give its well-off brother a thick ear. India, you suspect, sees Pakistan as little more than an irritation. Its head and heart have been turned by Australia and England.

The television figures may say otherwise but it isn't much of a rivalry when the teams only meet

in the sanitised environment of an ICC competition. It isn't much of a rivalry when one party is happy to go without. It isn't much of a rivalry when the teams are generally ill-matched.

This is a shame because it was in these contests that some of the world's greatest players announced themselves, staked their claim as heroes. India playing in Pakistan, Pakistan playing in India; this was the essence of rivalry, of contest, of sport transcending life. All this is gone. The India-Pakistan rivalry is a rump, a flailing kick of a dying dog. And the Ashes is now everything that we don't have. It is regular, home and away, plays to full houses and close enough as a contest.

Despite all this, I find it hard to get worked up about the Ashes. As an immigrant, I know I'm not alone. I now support England as a second team after Pakistan but I don't feel emotional about England in sport. My wife and children are English and they do feel something, the passion of a supporter. I'd need to feel that passion for the Ashes to matter to me. I did feel it once, in 1981, when Ian Botham's one-man show overturned impossible odds and I kissed forever goodbye to any soft allegiance to Australia.

Some people of my generation would still never support England. The wounds are too deep and they are too often re-opened. That's disappointing. I love this country, its language and its culture. I love how despite everything, despite the National Front and the BNP and the EDL, despite Enoch Powell and Norman Tebbit and Brexit,

this is a tolerant country willing to accommodate all religions and cultures. Just as we complain that all immigrants are tarred with the same brush when something goes wrong, why should we hold all English people responsible for the behaviour and actions of a minority? One of the more lovable traits of the English is their ability to be genuinely outraged at unfairness and prejudice in their society. That's something people of all backgrounds can learn from.

But that doesn't mean I buy the hype around the Ashes. As soon as one series ends, the sell for the next one begins. The Ashes becomes the point of reference for most conversations about form and selection. To the English at least, and I guess it is the same in Australia, the Ashes is on a pedestal. It is presented as the benchmark of quality and importance. All other contests are downgraded. You might be in the middle of summer engrossed in a monumental series between England and one of the best teams in the world but broadcasters' and journalists' minds are on the Ashes that winter. What do England

need to do to get ready for the Ashes? What does this performance mean for the Ashes? It's only 18 months away. Just round the corner.

But Australia and England have done what India and Pakistan have failed to: they have managed to preserve the status, the frequency, and the public interest in their series. India and Pakistan would be the greatest rivalry if we had half the regularity and the organisation of the Ashes. But it doesn't. We are what we are: squanderers of potential, backstory wastrels, unfulfilled rivals.

So for me, the contest that really matters, that fires my passion and keeps me on the edge of my seat, is the rivalry of immigrant reckoning, of settling a score that goes back a lifetime. You can keep your Ashes. You can forget your India-Pakistan blood-brother duel. The rivalry that means more to me than any other is that between Pakistan and England, for the simple reason that this is a collision between language, culture and religion that has defined my life.

• • •



EXTRACTS

There is one thing in sport that's better than great athletes at their very best – and that's when great athletes go beyond their very best. When they move out to the far reaches of possibility. I have spent a professional lifetime in pursuit of sport and I have seen such moments, but rarely, rarely... and of all my sporting miles and hours and years, I put these moments at the top of what sport has to offer.

SIMON BARNES

• • •

Richard has sent me some wonderful emails over the years. He specialises in putting together cricket teams of players of the past with particular characteristics: all called Herbert, maybe, or Test players with fathers who were vicars, or, if he's really in the mood, Test players whose fathers were vicars called Herbert. When he was working in the Home Office in the early 2000s, they moved to a vast and splendid new building in Marsham Street, Westminster. To be precise, it is three connected buildings. The Home Secretary of the time, David Blunkett, decided to run a competition to name the building. Richard suggested they should be called Hobbs, Hammond and Hutton. As he explains: "One of the most serious mistakes Mr Blunkett made in his time as Home Secretary was to reject my suggestion and instead to name the buildings Peel, Fry and Seacole after some 'social reformers'."

MARCUS BERKMANN

• • •

Consider, for example, the language of cricket. Bowling attacks are "taken apart", frequently so in the "death overs". Stumps are "splattered" or "scattered". Teams are "demolished", and after "staring down the barrel", occasionally they "collapse".

Even more prosaic activities are granted the terminology of physical force. A back-foot drive through point is known as a "punch". A ball that turns lavishly "rips". These days, an exceptionally good fielder is a "gun". What used to be known as a stroke is now more often a "shot", which may propel the ball like a "tracer bullet". What used to be known as an appeal is now more often a "shout". A catch is now a "grab".

JONATHAN LIEW

Then the railway networks carried cricket around the country, and the empire shipped it around the world. As Victorian Britain came to an end, cricket was in its Golden Age, with photography popularising individual players through postcards. Although the action in the middle was beyond the limited technology of the early camera lens, the artist could still capture the vista of white on green.

NICHOLAS HOGG

• • •

To answer the question why he was not selected – and why his international career then ended within a year while he was still in his prime and aged only 30 – you have to navigate the circumlocutions, evasions and euphemisms of Edwardian prose. Immediately after the Edgbaston Test he was said to have been disorientated during a county match at Lord's. When he withdrew from the next Test match MCC issued a statement that was both prurient and vague, saying he "suffered severely in a peculiar way from the strain on his nervous system". In fact he was epileptic – a disease thought at that time almost to be a sign of moral weakness and possibly caused by masturbation – and the strain of international matches seems to have made his occasional fits worse. Anyone who has seen someone having a fit knows how frightening it can be and how distressing the experience is for the victim. In Blythe's case the cause was publicly admitted only after his death, though it must have been an open secret on the county circuit because there were occasional absences from domestic matches too.

STEPHEN BATES

• • •

It is about the swallows gathering on the telegraph lines in the weeks before the final game of the season. It is about the return of Premier League football, and the scudding grey clouds born a month ago in some hurricane 3,000 miles away. It is the yarrow on the lawn, the drawing of the curtains and getting up from bed in the half light. It is, God help us, the first mention on the news of the party-conference season, the first allusion to Christmas in a Sunday paper. Most of all, it is another page being turned over for good in life's brief book.

ROGER MORGAN-GRENVILLE

• • •

I hope I do it proper honour. Unlike many corporate guests who watch the game largely on the flat-screen television inside the box, I do not enjoy this occasion mainly for the trenching and feasting on the sumptuous free food and drink – much as I relish it. Neither am I here to network, make contacts, seal a deal or advance a career. In honour of my father and all the men and boys with whom I have shared a lifelong love of this game, I have come to watch the cricket with the respect it deserves. I arrive early in order to nab the seat at the bottom of the steps in front of the parapet wall. My father would expect nothing less. I hear him laugh, “Bloody hell, son: best seat in the ground”.

NEIL LYNDON

• • •

Eileen Ash has had much to celebrate in 2017: not only her 106th birthday but also the 80th anniversary of the first women’s Test match played in England, of which she is the sole survivor. She is also the oldest living Test and international cricketer, male or female, on the planet.

I found her perched in the President’s box at Lord’s for the 2017 Women’s World Cup final on 23 July, looking as perky as ever, glass of champagne in hand and flirting with former Prime Minister John Major. She cheered on her country in the proud knowledge that she and her teammates of 1937 had laid the foundation for this momentous occasion. It was Eileen who rang the famous bell outside the pavilion to signal the five minutes before play.

ISABELLE DUNCAN

• • •

It used to be said that, on Test-match days, more MI5 employees could be found in the pavilion at Lord’s than at their former office in Mayfair. The late Chester Crocker, an influential US diplomat in the Reagan administration, told of his bewilderment when sitting in on a meeting of the Joint Intelligence Committee: “A chap stuck his head through the door and bellowed, ‘South Africa, 14 for 3’. All groaned. (I made a surreptitious note in the event that this was code for some crisis in Commonwealth affairs.) ‘Cricket Test match, y’know,’ somebody shouted at me. All laughed.”

ANDREW LYCETT

• • •

In many ways, McGuire’s card had been marked since the day he was born. A Balladong man of the Nyoongar language group in the Avon wheatbelt region of Western Australia, he had grown up worshipping the West Indies sides of the 1960s and earned a scholarship to Guildford Grammar, the same elite school that spawned Test cricketers Tom Moody and Brendon Julian.

His great-grandfather John Blurton was a member of the famous New Norcia “Invincibles” side that trounced Perth’s best in the 1870s and 1880s. His pedigree was impeccable – but his skin colour wasn’t.

“There was always an excuse not to pick me,” McGuire says. “They’d say I was too slow, too fast, too old... too anything. But it was always because I was too black.”

ASHLEY GRAY

• • •

Once unthinkable, it now seems a matter of time before we witness the first true switch batter – someone capable of batting left- or right-handed with equal effect. There are precedents. Sunil Gavaskar once batted left-handed for several hours in a first-class match to combat a left-arm spinner and save the game. More recently, David Warner’s ambidexterity extends well beyond the occasional slog sweep.

NIC COPELAND

• • •

Concerns about profligate spending and lack of transparency had been mounting in South African cricket circles for months. With neither a headline sponsor nor an international broadcasting deal in the bag, the board had decided to pull the plug. In a 364-word press release that arrived during the first session of the Test, CSA confirmed earlier reports. “We recently tried on a few occasions to remedy the situation between Mr Lorgat and the Board, but we have not been successful in finding a satisfactory resolution,” Chris Nenzani, the CSA chairman, was quoted as saying. “The Board unanimously felt that it was in the best interest of the organisation that we agreed to a mutual separation agreement with Mr Lorgat.”

LUKE ALFRED

• • •

One's adolescent fixations are never entirely predictable. Mine wavered between Viv Richards, Ian Botham and Gordon Greenidge on the one hand and Kim Wilde, Tiffany and Madonna on the other. While there were obvious differences in precisely what kind of feelings these sporting and cultural giants produced, there was at their core a sense of wondrous exhilaration, thrilling in its newness and impossible to contain.

Sad to say, I really was as excited about cricket as about girls. My sense of loss at the end of a Test match was much the same as that I felt at the end of a Kim Wilde video. The emptiness was tempered only by the thought of the next Test or the arrival of the latest issue of Smash Hits.

NICK CAMPION

• • •

In other words, players call their own fouls; a discussion takes place between the individuals involved and a resolution is found. This may mean that the disc is moved back a phase of play, or that the game continues as if the foul or violation had not occurred.

Other matters such as “disrespectful conversations” and “win-at-all-costs behaviour” are contrary to the Spirit of the Game. Examples of the right attitude include “reacting calmly towards disagreement or provocation”. In fact, cricket's preamble contains similar ideals including “Any action which is seen to abuse this spirit causes injury to the game itself.” There is also, a crucial difference. The rules from Lord's say: “The major responsibility for ensuring the spirit of fair play rests with the captains.” In Ultimate, the onus is on every single player at all times.

MICHAEL PATTISON

• • •

Country cricket in Australia differs hugely from its equivalent in the UK, my adopted home of ten years. I often wonder why cricket in Britain is regarded by many as a sport for richer home-county types, while in Australia it's particularly strong in the more disadvantaged rural areas. Indeed, a glance down the list of Australia's top 30 Test players (by number of matches played) reveals that half grew up in the country. That is double the proportion one would expect given the spread of the population.

LUKE TEMPLEMAN

• • •

Walking has become a fascination of mine, as has the literature it inspires. There is no better condition for contemplation than being on the move, exploring a familiar or new environment with eyes peeled and nerves pricked. For centuries, writers have sought material on the road – Matthew Beaumont, in his book *Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London*, explains that for the Romantic poets walking “assumed the form of an intellectual, political, even spiritual vocation”.

Charles Dickens would take a kind of mad walk through the gas-lit capital when stuck for ideas or sleep, while Thomas De Quincey spent opium-fuelled Saturday nights trekking “without much regarding the direction or the distance, to all the markets, and other parts of London”. So many more have continued in this vein – the Beats, the Situationists, psychogeographers, new nature writers and countless others in between. This journey of mine would be a way of examining my childhood relationship with cricket, of delving into memory and reconnecting, and perhaps of coming to terms with a very significant loss.

TIM COOKE

• • •

I was told there was an opposition captain – an international – for whom these ringleaders reserved specific contempt. He wasn't trusted, mainly because he never had a drink after play. In one account, he entered the home dressing-room after stumps. The home team, as was their ritual, were drinking the “two-dozen stubbies” that had been supplied by a sponsor. The visitor refused the offer of a drink, instead eating the apple he'd brought with him. Once he had left the room, the apple was the talk of the team. They were mystified that he'd forego a beer for a piece of fruit. “What was he doing in here with that apple?”

SAM PERRY

• • •

It was more than just a radio. It was an old record player, with a cheap plastic lid on top. It sat in my bedroom on a box designed to look like wood, as much as wallpaper on a giant electrical device can look like wood. It also had a radio built in, with dials almost as big as cricket balls. At least they felt that way in my 12-year-old hands. When I was given it at the end of 1992 it was already ancient.

My parents had always been very strict with bedtimes: 7.30 until I was 12, 8.30 for a few years after. But I could never fall asleep, and instead I'd open my curtains and stare at the outer suburban Melbourne sky for hours, awake long enough to hear my parents go to bed.

JARROD KIMBER

• • •

My first delivery to Inzamam did not exactly threaten him but he was kind enough not to clobber it out of the ground. The second was a devilish piece of cunning, slanted across him and skidding just enough to – there is no other or modest way of putting it – beat him. Our wicket-keeper Nick Taylor, an Oxford Blue and by some distance the most accomplished cricketer in the party, thought there was nothing to be lost by appealing. Sensing that such an opportunity might never occur again, I joined in raucously.

Even so, it was with a sense of gawping amazement that I saw our umpire Ian Vaughan-Arbuckle – a former army officer who, among other distinctions, has umpired in the Over-50 World Cup – raise his finger. It is hard to convey the giddy astonishment of the moment. For a second, time seemed frozen: Inzamam ct Taylor b Massie.

ALEX MASSIE

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