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THE Nightwatchman

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

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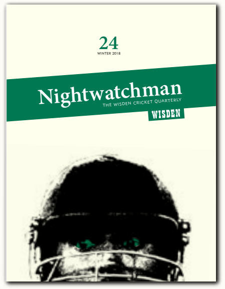

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99.94: THE INEXORABLE RISE OF SIR DONALD'S DUCK

Huw Richards on the game's iconic number – and how hardly anyone noticed it at the time

When Alastair Cook, on 75 in his final Test innings, edged through midwicket for a single, the electronic scoreboard at The Oval sprang into action, informing spectators that this made him the fifth-highest run-scorer in Test history, triggering yet another of the day's many ovations. It was the latest in The Oval's litany of farewells, accompaniment to its traditional role as host to the last Test of the English summer, inevitably provoking thoughts of the most famous of all, Donald Bradman in 1948.

We all know that one, and its context, summed up by Charles Williams in perhaps the best Bradman biography: "It was not just a matter of farewells. Bradman needed only four more runs to achieve a total of 7,000 runs in Test cricket. Furthermore his Test average, when the last Test started, was 101.39. He needed only to score those four runs to keep that average above 100, a record never achieved before or since."

Of course Bradman was bowled second ball for nought by veteran leggie Eric Hollies, leaving him forever four runs short, his batting average 99.94.

Sir Donald's duck is the most recalled moment of that relentlessly achieving 20-year Test career, the number it created invariably cited to illustrate his greatness. To Indian sportswriter Ayaz Menon, he was "the only player who can be defined by a statistic"; to *Cricket Country*, simply "the 99.94 dude".

It has no rivals as the most famous number in cricket. "The one batting average that nobody ever need look up," wrote Gideon Haigh. It reaches beyond the game in Australia, where political commentator Paul Kelly argued that it "equates with the prime ministership and the great Australian novel in the Antipodean cultural imagination". The decimal point is silent, but the reference evident, in the Australian Broadcasting Company's PO Box 9994.

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"That must have caused a fuss," was the reaction of a Sports Journalism student when told of Bradman's duck and its statistical consequences nearly 70 years later in a lecture room a mile from The Oval.

It did, but not in the terms we understand now. The pathos of the duck and its incongruity with the rest of Bradman's career were well understood. But this was not a world in which career milestones were transmitted to spectators within seconds; in which cricket fans around the world could know, as they did in 2007, that Inzamam-ul-Haq needed 20 runs in his final Test to equal Javed Miandad as Pakistan's all-time highest run-scorer – and then be informed almost instantly via a mass of multimedia when he fell three short.

Perhaps the most evocative account of Bradman's final innings is John Arlott's famous commentary for BBC radio:

> *It's rather good to be here when Don Bradman comes in to bat in his last Test. And now here's Hollies to bowl to him from the Vauxhall End. He bowls, Bradman goes back across his wicket and pushes the ball gently in the direction of the Houses of Parliament which are out beyond mid off. It doesn't go that far, merely to Watkins at silly mid off. No run, still 117 for 1. Two slips, a silly mid off and a forward short leg close to him. Hollies pitches the ball up slowly… and he's bowled…*
>
> *Bradman, bowled Hollies, nought. And what do you say under these circumstances? I wonder if you see the ball very clearly, on your last Test in England, on a ground where you've played some of your biggest cricket of your life and where the opposing team have stood around and given you three cheers and the crowd has clapped you all the way to the wicket. I wonder if you see the ball at all.*

Not a mention of career aggregates or batting averages. This is of course Arlott the poet, more interested in humanity than numbers, and grasping Bradman's state of mind. Bradman himself later confirmed that he might not have been seeing with his usual clarity.

There was a 40-second pause between "and he's bowled…" and "Bradman, bowled Hollies, nought" which was filled with the initial roar and then applause from the crowd. Arlott, even without pictures and in only his third year of radio commentary, knew the rule lost on many modern commentators (and stadium announcers): you say nothing when the story is being told for you.

As well as being adept in the professional disciplines of the broadcaster, Arlott was too good a journalist to ignore the story of a great batsman falling just short of a truly extraordinary lifetime achievement, had he known. But Arlott did not know. Nor did Bradman, nor the England

team, nor the overwhelming majority of the huge crowd.

This was not a world unaware of, or lacking an appetite for, cricket statistics. Records are, as historian Allen Guttmann argued in *From Ritual to Record*, part of what separates modern sport from its predecessors. The Greeks kept lists of champions, but were not terribly concerned whether the winner of the javelin had thrown further than his predecessors. Modern sport, and its fans, wants to know both.

Cricket, the oldest of organised modern team sports, was quick on the uptake. Peter Wynne-Thomas notes in *Cricket Historians* that averages were recorded as early as the 1790s and that *Bell's Life* listed seasonal averages by the 1840s. *Wisden* introduced seasonal averages in 1887 and "Some Cricket Records" in 1889. By 1906 it had a 23-page records section which, according to Wynne-Thomas, "set the standard which in essence remains in the *Almanack* to this day".

Statistics were sufficiently well established by the inter-war years to attract the satirical attention of Herbert Farjeon. In an article which appears to date from the late 1920s, he told of watching a Surrey v Middlesex match punctuated continuously by mysterious applause, all explained by the omniscient youth sat next to him:

It appears that if you really understand the finer points of the game, you can find a thrill in every ball, for every ball sets up a record of some kind.

Now Hobbs had run out his 1,000th victim. Tremendous sensation.

Now a stolen single had brought the total number of runs scored by Middlesex that season up to exactly 5,500. This sent the crowd perfectly delirious.

Not a single point escaped the boy at my side. Every one escaped me. By lunchtime he had become so patronising that he was explaining to me exactly what was meant by a recurring decimal.

There were others who felt the same. Readers of the 1949 *Playfair Cricket Annual* were treated to vintage harrumphing from EW Swanton, at 42 already adept in sounding 30 years older: "With those whose knowledge of the game derives largely from what they read in the press, averages and records hold a position quite disproportionate to their true place in the scheme of things."

There were clear limits to the statistics available at the time. As Anthony Weigall wrote in November 1945 to the *Cricketer*, whose letters section was the main forum for statistical debate, there was "no reliable list in evidence showing the total batting and bowling figures of our leading cricketers, both past and present". His letter helped prompt the creation that year of the Society of Cricket Statisticians (since 1950 the Cricket Society).

A partial answer to his plea came in 1947 with the publication of Ernest Roberts' *Test Match Cavalcade 1877-1946*, which boasted: "Hitherto there has been no single book in which all the 277 Tests played during the last 70 years can be seen as a connected story." Roberts also tabulated every player's career records and listed the highest aggregates, led on 1 September 1946 by Walter Hammond with 7,002 runs at an average of 60.88, followed by Hobbs with 5,410 at 56.94 and then Bradman on 5,093 runs at 97.94.

One reason for this "connected story" taking so long to tell was that statisticians had none of the electronic resources now taken for granted. Scores had to be transcribed and totalled up manually from *Wisden*, newspaper reports or scorebooks.

Another may have been the extremely limited scope of Test cricket. Of the 277 matches chronicled by Roberts, more than half were between England and Australia. In fact the two matches between New Zealand and South Africa in 1931–32 were the only Tests which did not feature England or Australia. Not until India hosted West Indies in November 1948 was there a Test involving neither England nor the "white dominions".

Ashes cricket was well chronicled and both nations were still wont to dismiss anything else as second-class. Writing the week before Bradman's fateful innings, Brian Chapman of the *Daily Express* discussed the selection of the England party for that winter's visit to South Africa to play for "the Gold Dust, or whatever passes for the Ashes in those parts".

Wisden reflected this outlook. The 1948 edition, a primary reference for most writers covering that summer's Tests, split its usual records section into two. An enhanced 21-page Ashes section included summarised scores from the 148 matches so far, lists of centurions and other statistics. It showed that Bradman, with 4,520 runs at an average of 92.24 and a highest of 334, was comfortably the top-scorer. The main 31-page section remained as before, with no aggregated Test career records.

There were references to Bradman's Test average in the pocket annuals which appeared on the eve of his final summer as a Test cricketer. In *Playfair* Roy Webber gave his current record as 6,488 runs at 102.93, while the *News Chronicle Annual* agreed on runs but miscalculated the average as 104.64. But these were mentions in passing, buried amid other detail rather than headlined.

So a statistically-alert journalist might have been aware of Bradman's record, provided he had either read Roberts and added on his subsequent performances against England and India in Australia's two home summers, or had picked up and read in detail either of the pocket annuals. Maybe some did, but the evidence suggests otherwise.

Those writers had other constraints. Newspapers were being read in unprecedented numbers – the *Mirror* and *Express* both sold more than four million copies daily – but were subject to newsprint rationing (as they would be until 1955). Papers were limited to four or six pages, so previews and match reports, which would once have flowed over multiple columns, had become matters of concision, perhaps ten to 15 paragraphs amounting to 250 to 400 words. Australian papers were less tight for space but transmitting copy from Britain remained expensive. It created an economy of style in writing, focusing on immediate events rather than broader analysis.

Nor was the Ashes the only major sporting event competing for column inches that summer. The Headingley Test, famed for Australia chasing down 404 in the fourth innings, ended on 27 July, while the Oval match began on 14 August. London's second Olympic Games filled the interim, running from 29 July to 14 August.

Most English papers devoted their Oval Test previews to uncertain prospects of play on the opening day, a Saturday, although there were one or two statistical observations. A *Daily Graphic* columnist wrote: "To write the story of Bradman's cricket career would be to write down all the numbers you can think of." The *Express* ran Bill O'Reilly's syndicated column noting that, by captaining Australia against England for the 19th time, Bradman was overtaking Joe Darling's record.

The Australian media showed more interest in Bradman's other numbers. The *Sydney Morning Herald* said that he needed 674 runs in his remaining first-class matches in England to total 10,000 from his four visits, while the *Western Australian* drew attention to the 83 he needed for 2,000 on this trip. An inexplicable *Melbourne Age* picture caption said that Bradman, who was playing his 52nd Test, "will play his 24th – and last – Test match at The Oval today".

However, two small papers did mention the numbers which now dominate the record.

Perth's *Western Mail* wrote: "Don Bradman has got a chance to cap his farewell Test… with the greatest record of all. He needs 254 more runs to break WR Hammond's record of 7,249 in Tests against all countries.

"Don's overall Test average is overwhelmingly better, too," it added in a seeming afterthought, though slightly miscalculating his number of innings and not-outs.

The *London Daily Worker* offered a reminder that good sportswriting is sometimes found just outside the mainstream. Its sports page on the morning of the match was dominated by a preview from AA Thomas which paid full tribute to Bradman, examining his achievements back to 1930 and drawing the parallel with Jack Hobbs' Oval Test farewell that year. It cited both his career record against England: 5,028 runs with 19 centuries and a highest of 334 at an average of 91.41; and, in less detail, his overall Test numbers: 6,488 runs at 101.39.

Unfortunately Thomas had omitted to add in the 508 runs Bradman had scored so far in the series. That both he and the *Western Mail* writer made small factual mistakes says something about the fragility of statistics in an era of pen-and-paper calculation as well as the occasional carelessness of journalists

In any case, very few people saw what they had written. The *Western Mail*, a weekly, was "primarily created to provide farmers with up-to-date information" in a sparsely populated state, while the *Daily Worker* was the organ of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Not many journalists would have seen it either. Swanton's politics were less antediluvian than appearances suggest – 20 years later he resoundingly denounced Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech – but it is unlikely that the *Daily Worker* was regular reading for him or any other Fleet Street correspondent.

Nor, it seems clear, did Bradman know what was at stake. He was certainly aware of other numbers. In *Brightly Fades The Don*, former teammate Jack Fingleton recalls what Bradman told his vice-captain Lindsay Hassett ahead of his final innings of the tour at Scarborough: "I worked it out that to average 100 for every innings I have had in England, I would have had to make about 500 not out, and this game, you know, is limited to three days." Bradman was about right; he would have needed either 516 or 416 not out at Scarborough to have averaged exactly 100 in matches played in England.

The definitive version of what he knew – or didn't know – at The Oval emerged nearly 50 years later when Bradman was asked if he laughed at having made the most famous duck in Test history:

"No, I didn't laugh much about it, because I'm very sorry that I made a duck and I would have been glad if I had made those four runs so I could finish with an average of a hundred."

"You didn't know that?"

"No, I did not know at the time. I don't think that the Englishmen knew at the time or they might have let me get those four runs."

Both Alec Bedser and wicket-keeper Godfrey Evans have confirmed that England did not know and that each would have been inclined to let Bradman have the runs. It is less clear whether Hollies would have felt so charitably inclined. "Best bloody ball I've bowled all summer," Hollies is reputed to have said about the second-ball duck, "and they're applauding *him*."

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The best-known press reaction to Bradman's duck is the mutual glee of O'Reilly and Fingleton (Swanton, who was in the press box, told Williams: "I thought they were going to have a stroke, they were laughing so much"), his adversaries in the Australian team's cultural conflicts of the 1930s. But unless press boxes were then vastly different places, the main reaction will have been curses. The last thing any reporter wants, least of all those of 1948 with their abbreviated word counts and need to factor in time to dictate reports down a phone line, is something else newsworthy at the end of an eventful day.

Bradman came in at 5.50pm, 40 minutes from the close of a very eventful day. England had been bowled out for 52, their lowest score at home since 1888, of which Len Hutton, first in and last out to a stunning leg-side catch by keeper Don Tallon, made 30. Arthur Morris and Sid Barnes put on 117 for the first wicket, so that Australia – as Denzil Batchelor reported in the *Morning Herald* – had made "more progress towards total victory than any side before has wrung out of a day's play in a Test match".

England's collapse inevitably dominated Sunday's reports, with Bradman's demise shoehorned in at the end. The *Sunday Times* ran the headline: "England's Deplorable

Batting. Out For 52. Hutton Alone Defies Lindwall." Underneath it Neville Cardus reported that Bradman was "cheered generously by thousands who had more than ceremonial reasons for acclamation when Hollies defeated him second ball".

In the *Observer* Raymond Robertson-Glasgow noted that "the business restarted" after England gave Bradman three cheers, adding that "leg-spin bowling by Hollies, who at times reached greatness, alone saved England from total ignominy".

The *News of the World*'s special correspondent blamed "sheer bad batting" for England's collapse, appending a brief description of Bradman's dismissal. Its "White Friar" gossip column offered what would now be recognised as "clickbait" with its headline: "Was He Batting With Tears In His Eyes?" The answer – presented in much smaller type – was that there was "no truth in the rumour", something that has since been corroborated to David Frith by England players who were fielding closest to Bradman, Godfrey Evans and Allan Watkins, both incredulous at the thought, and a mildly nettled Bradman.

With Sunday a rest day, more might reasonably be expected in Monday's papers. But the focus remained firmly on explaining England's disintegration, with Bradman a footnote.

Crawford White, as compiler of the *News Chronicle Annual*, might have been alert to statistical developments but referred simply to the "anti-climax" which followed the cheering for Bradman. Swanton evoked parallels with Hobbs in the *Telegraph* while the *Daily Herald*'s Charles Bray reckoned – with a fine, unconscious irony – that, because of the match situation, "personal failure did not matter this time".

Even AA Thomas of the *Daily Worker*, demonstrably aware of the numbers, felt the pressure of other events. His report was more illuminating than most but said nothing of Bradman's final Test batting average, concluding: "A half-hearted roar and plenty of what might be called sympathetic applause... Yet not a clap for Hollies' wonderful over. A most curious day."

It is worth remembering that Bradman's failure was in the first innings, leaving a second possible. Nobody had the ill-taste to speculate on the possibility of his concluding with the first pair of his career. As Chapman pointed out in the *Express*: "The England players chose wisely to give Bradman the three cheers in his first innings. The second opportunity may not arise." And so it proved, as Australia drove home their advantage, with further defiance by Hutton and rain stretching the match into a fourth day before the tourists prevailed by an innings and 149 runs to take the series 4-0.

Writers chronicled these developments faithfully if matter-of-factly; indeed the most eye-catching news is the death on 15 August of American baseball giant Babe Ruth. The rumbustious, hard-drinking and womanising Ruth was the strait-laced Bradman's temperamental antithesis. Teammate Ping Bodie spoke of a relentless night-life: "I didn't room with him, but his suitcase." Bradman and Ruth's one encounter, when the Australians toured North America in 1932, was reportedly "a series of uncomfortable silences", although Bradman enjoyed New York because nobody wanted an autograph.

But Ruth was his cultural equivalent: a defining, dominant figure in his sport whose fame extended far beyond its usual boundaries. Allan Schwarz's verdict was that Ruth "put up statistics so marvellous, so downright preposterous, year after mind-boggling year, that journalistic coverage of him shot off in a different direction". This applies equally to Bradman. Ruth's "preposterous" numbers – the 60 home runs in 1927, 714 in his career, both unchallengeable all-time marks in 1948 – were fully emphasised in the reports of his death.

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It appears, unless there was some stats-smart writer toiling in obscurity, that the number which would become to Bradman what 60 and 714 were to Ruth finally reached the public domain in the Brisbane *Courier-Mail* on 18 August. This was the morning of the fourth day in England but – given the time difference – the evening of the third in Australia.

Lance Kearney, described when he died in 1952 as the "doyen of Queensland sports journalism", had been brought to Brisbane by legendary rugby league journalist Harry Sunderland in 1919. He was probably better known for writing about rugby league, but he wrote about cricket too, and like any smart columnist was seeking a fresh angle. From the far side of the world, he also had the advantage of immunity from the pressures and preoccupations of the Oval press pack.

Kearney's column was headlined: "Test Average 99.94: Don's Duck was Costly." Underneath he wrote:

Don Bradman's duck on Saturday has robbed him of the distinction of being the first Test player to retire from Test cricket with a century batting average.

In all Tests – against England, South Africa, West Indies and India – Bradman has averaged 99.94 runs an innings.

Don also passes from the cricket scene with one honour still eluding him – Walter Hammond's all-Tests aggregate of 7,170 runs. He needed 174 runs in the fifth Test to equal the Englishman.

This last paragraph was inaccurate, since Hammond's final tally was 7,249. The source of the error was characteristically Australian, since it ignored New Zealand. Kearney stated that "Hammond closed his Test career against Australia in 1946–47", omitting his 79 in the single Test at Wellington which concluded the tour.

The oddity is that, elsewhere in comparing them, Kearney noted that Hammond, unlike Bradman, had played against New Zealand and made his then record 336 not out against them. He may have been unclear about New Zealand's post-war status, since their heavy defeat by Australia at Wellington in 1946 had still to be recognised as a Test.

But the error has the virtue of marking a trail through other papers. The following day's *Sydney Morning Herald* included, unattributed, a compressed version including both the 99.94 revelation and the error in its round-up of the series. It was also trailed in papers such as the *Balonne Beacon*, the

Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate and the *Scone Advocate*. Though headlined "Four More Runs for 100 Average" and citing both average and run tally, the *Sydney Morning Herald* story was buried well down the page below Goodman's match report and O'Reilly's column.

The average and number of runs were now part of the record, but only referred to in passing or in statistical tables.

Chapman is the one London-based writer to have offered a whiff of the story, reporting in the *Express* on 18 August: "Bradman, musing on the fourth morning, may well take a last lingering look at his total of runs in all Test matches and sigh, not too deeply, for the missed chance of scoring the last four runs needed to complete his 7,000." It seems unlikely, unless the *Express* had an alert stringer in Brisbane, that Kearney's column had crossed the world in a few hours, not least because Chapman said nothing of Bradman's average. Nor does he seem to have regarded this as anything other than a space-filling aside in his report of a rain-affected day.

The following day Chapman listed his outstanding memories of the series, lauding Arthur Morris, Ray Lindwall and the defiant batting of England tail-enders Alec Bedser and Jim Laker. Bradman was there for his "ovation at Leeds and his match-winning 173 (this one was his real farewell)". In an accompanying piece, Bradman's Test record was listed by opponent, with full totals and average in the bottom line, but with no comment. Bradman's home-town paper, Sir Keith Murdoch's (Rupert's father) *Adelaide Advertiser*, found space amid its quest to locate a red under every Australian bed for the headline: "BRADMAN IN TESTS: Ends with 89.78 Average." In fact that was his record against England.

The view was that, while 6,996 at 99.94 was worthy of note (or at least tabulation), it was just one more amid a mass of astonishing Bradman numbers. This was replicated in the subsequent crop of annuals and other books.

The *Daily Mail*'s *52 Years of Sport: Complete Sporting Record 1896-1948*, covering winners and records from angling through to yachting, promised "complete Bradman records" on its cover. The unnamed compiler placed the first-class career numbers at the start of his three-page feature and grasped what truly amazes about Bradman: that over a 20-year career he maintained standards that the best of the rest attain only fleetingly. The book gave his batting figures for "All Matches" as 667-107-50,648-90.44. The compiler added that "the majority of even top-ranking batsmen would be glad, and few have contrived, to produce an average of over 90 runs an innings for a year, a Test series or even a month". The reference further down to his falling four short of averaging 100 in Tests at least merited an exclamation mark with the comment that "his constant brilliance reached its peak in Test cricket".

The cricket annuals were similarly matter-of-fact about things. Robertson-Glasgow made no mention of statistics in the 1949 *Wisden* tribute, which famously called Bradman "a business-cricketer", but a listing of the main current numbers included the 99.94 average. Neither the *Almanack*'s account of the tour, nor its match report, mentioned it.

The *News Chronicle Annual* placed its statistical summary at the foot of an article about whether Neil Harvey should be Bradman's successor. *Cyril Washbrook's Cricket Annual*, a one-off in 1949, gave the Test average pride of place in tabulation but emphasised the first-class average. So did the veteran Roberts in the *Cricketer Spring Annual*, calling his first-class average of 95.14 "the most amazing figure ever compiled by a run-getter" and noting the missing four runs from his Test tally.

Perhaps most striking is that Bradman, in his autobiography *Farewell to Cricket* (1950), has so little to say about what was generally known by then. He is far from uninterested in numbers and averages, particularly when they can be used to make a point in a narrative which sometimes sounds like a speech for the defence. Yet the numbers 6,996 and 99.94 appear nowhere except in statistical tables at the back. His Oval account describes Hollies' delivery as a "perfect-length googly" and admits that "in the midst of my great jubilation at our team's success, I had a rather sad heart about my own farewell". But it is most interesting when he quotes a London newspaper report which could be of his own innings but is in fact of Hobbs' finale at The Oval in 1930 (which was also Bradman's first Test at the ground).

One is left to wonder if Bradman, in 1950 at least, considered the Ashes to be the only true Test cricket. After all, he was an open Anglophile, and his matches against opponents other than England were confined to three home series in which Australia won 13 Tests out of 15, nine by an innings. In discussing the best players of his time, he wrote only about English and Australian players – admittedly those of whom he had most experience – and cited only their Ashes statistics. This excluded Herbie Taylor (South Africa), Vijay Hazare (India) – scorer of a century in each innings at Adelaide in 1947 – and most glaringly George Headley (West Indies), reduced to a single if highly complimentary reference.

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In fact there was somebody at The Oval that day who probably knew exactly what it meant, and what's more he gave an interview published during the match. Roy Webber was "a bespectacled young man with a green trilby hat pushed on to the back of his head", a chartered accountant who did only "enough accountancy to keep the wolf from the door", and he was the subject of the "Bird's-Eye View" column by Pat Taylor which appeared alongside the *Mirror*'s report of the third day.

References to England batsmen "trooping off in a procession of failure", along with the hope that the diagrams Webber used to record play would "never record another 52 all out for England", indicate that the interview took place on the Saturday.

Taylor noted that Webber's records "reveal little insights like the fact that Yardley scores faster off Lindwall than anyone else. That Compton has aggregated 100 or more off each of Australia's leading bowlers – Lindwall, Johnston, Toshack and Johnson –

just as he did last year off the South Africans. That Loxton is Australia's fastest scorer (66 runs off every 100 balls) and that Laker is England's with 54 runs off every 100 balls."

There is a simple explanation for Taylor's failure to ask about Bradman or, if she did, for Webber to say anything which demanded inclusion in the ten paragraphs allotted her. Her description of Webber animatedly making notes while all around him mourned England's collapse implies strongly that they talked long before Bradman came in to bat at 5.50pm. The moment came too late.

If timing cost Webber his chance to be first to tell the world of the conjunction of 6,996 and 99.94, he made up for it over the next few years by publishing three ground-breaking books of record.

Irving Rosenwater, an acerbically demanding critic, recalls Webber as "the first man to bring cricket statistics from a cottage industry to national significance. Never a scholar, never a profound thinker, he nevertheless catered for a mass audience that in a way he was partially responsible for shaping." Wynne-Thomas, who shares Rosenwater's intolerance of the slipshod or foolish, credits Webber with a diligence which "flowered into books that provided cricket followers with the basic statistics to be able to check new records as they occurred" and with building "the foundation on which later statisticians could expand".

The first of Webber's trio, the 320-page blue-bound *Playfair Book of Cricket Records*, focused on first-class cricket and explained that a companion volume on Tests was in preparation. Bradman appears frequently, most strikingly in Webber's remark that if he had played as much as Hobbs, his first-class aggregate "might have been 115,961 runs and 453 centuries". But there is no reference to his Test numbers.

It sold fast enough to demand a reprint within months, part of a wave of works whose success showed a previously unsatisfied demand for authoritative statistics and records. The "52 years" of the 1948 *Daily Mail* book looks odd but resulted from the success of a predecessor published in 1946. The *Baseball Encyclopedia* was first published in 1951, and the following year career records began to appear on the back of baseball cards. The first *Guinness Book of Records* arrived in 1955.

Webber's Test volume became two books, one covering Tests up to 1939 and the second the post-war game, along with an extensive records section. They appeared in 1953. "No previous volume had ever recorded the entire score of every Test played," wrote Rosenwater.

A section in the second volume is devoted to career records. Bradman's appearance at the top of the averages underlined the stupefying extent of his superiority. He is distantly followed by Stewie Dempster (65.72), Neil Harvey (65.29), Frank Worrell (64.32), George Headley (63.91), Sid Barnes (63.05) and Everton Weekes (62.33) – all careers either incomplete or not containing even half of Bradman's 52 matches – and the first seriously comparable pursuer, Herbert Sutcliffe (60.83, 54 matches).

In the 1952 *Wisden*, record-keeper Geoffrey Copinger listed for the first time, by country, Test career aggregates of more than 1,500 runs or 75 wickets. It was a key moment in the gradual but steady expansion of the Test section, which saw the introduction of most wickets in a match and slowest innings in 1953, wicket-keeping records in 1958, tabulation by country of all-time results in 1963, and partnerships in 1967.

Listing by country meant that Bradman's average and aggregate, though still more than double that of second-placed Clem Hill (3,412 runs at 39.21), did not dominate as much as in Webber's listing for all players. But *Wisden*'s wider circulation and quasi-biblical role in cricket culture made 99.94 part of the game's furniture.

Around the same time, 99.94 became the first (and sometimes only) number attached by Australian writers to stories about Bradman. The first significant cluster comes in the Australian media's coverage of his resignation as a Test selector in August 1952 following his son's diagnosis with polio. The *Courier-Mail* called him "the greatest run-getter of all time. In 80 innings he scored 6,996 runs, averaging 99.94."

From here Bradman's defining number steadily ascended to become cricket's version of the baseball phenomenon observed by Schwarz: "Eventually the best of these numbers ascend to a meaning well above the simple digits which compose them."

A measure of how Bradman's last ball in Test cricket – and the number it produced – has grown in significance is illustrated by comparing Eric Hollies' autobiography in 1955 and a biography of the player in 2001. In 1955 Hollies could rely on the fame of 20 years at the top of the game and more than 2,000 wickets. Thus *I'll Spin You A Yarn* is an almost entire chronology of his career, with one notable deviation. Aside from a glancing reference in the section on 1948, he keeps the reader waiting until four pages from the end for a fuller exposition of Bradman's duck.

By 2001 the cruel but ineluctable process of anno domini, by which all but the very greatest fade from collective memory, had taken hold. How many of the players at The Oval in 1948 are now known, other than among the hard-core cricket aficionados, by those not old enough for personal recall? A guess says Len Hutton, Denis Compton and maybe Alec Bedser on the English side and – other than Bradman – Ray Lindwall, Keith Miller and perhaps Neil Harvey of the Australians. Hollies, wonderful bowler as he was, is not among them, except by association with that single moment.

So in 2001 Norman Rogers opened his life of Hollies with three pages on "The Ball That Bowled Bradman", including an explanation of Bradman's Test average before and after.

• • •

Developments since the 1950s, both sporting and cultural, have served to preserve and further elevate 99.94.

Continuing growth of interest in statistics prompted the formation of the Association of Cricket Statisticians, aficionados whose work was before long vastly aided by the democratisation of computing, and then the spreadsheet in 1973. The pre-modern game of cricket proved peculiarly well adapted to the post-modern internet. It made Cricinfo briefly the biggest site on the web – even now it is the most-used online platform devoted to a single sport – the interactivity of its statistics enabling instant reference and calculation. Meanwhile Cricket Archive supplies a vast, more reflective resource.

There has also been massive growth in Test cricket. The 1948 Oval Test was the 303rd Test since the first in 1877; there have been more than 2,000 since. Indeed, over half of all Tests played have taken place since 1990.

And Tests have been largely immune to the theological debates endemic to historical statistics, which in cricket have focused most on which games count as first-class. Statisticians looking at Test cricket can feel they are comparing like with like, continuity and integrity supplied by sources like *Wisden*, Cricinfo and Cricket Archive.

The importance of this statistical authenticity can be seen by looking at other sports. Football's statistics have been needlessly but deliberately corrupted by the rise of the "Premier League Record" and rugby league is handicapped by the absence of either a *Wisden*-like annual record or a comprehensive website. And club rugby union, outside France at least, is lacking any longstanding competitive structures.

Unlike Jack Hobbs' 61,237 first-class runs or Wilfred Rhodes' 4,187 wickets – both still records – 99.94 has not been made unattainable by changes in the game. The expansion of Test cricket has meant that its records, unlike those in the first-class game, are constantly being challenged and beaten. But, unlike Ruth's iconic marks in baseball, 99.94 remains unbeaten.

It also remains theoretically beatable, much like Joe DiMaggio's 56-match hitting run in baseball. Adam Voges briefly averaged more than 100 a few years ago. But in reality it is the most outlying of all outliers, calculated by Australian statistician Charles Davis as equating to a .392 lifetime baseball batting average (unmatched by any player in even a full single season since 1941), or a golfer winning 25 majors (the record is Jack Nicklaus's 18).

Batting average also continues to be accepted as the best measure of a batsman's quality. There are of course significant variables, such as the quality of the opposition and the balance between bat and ball. But when in 2017 researchers at Calcutta's Institute of Management – presumably provoked by endless comparisons between Bradman and Sachin Tendulkar – threw a range of variables into a probability analysis model, Bradman emerged at the top with a recalculated average of 109.42, ahead of Tendulkar, Hutton, Ken Barrington and Jacques Kallis.

Non-cricketing factors have also helped grow the mystique which surrounds 99.94. In Britain, Bradman is synonymous with Australia. The toy koala sat on the nearest shelf as I write, a present on my first Christmas in 1959, was christened "Bradman", and it is inconceivable that my grandparents would have called something so Australian anything else.

In his home country, Bradman's elevation to "greatest Australian" has been more contentious. As Gideon Haigh has written, this apotheosis was enabled by copious retro-fitting to various national myths and archetypes. Some have detected a political agenda. The most sustained analysis, Brett Hutchins' *Donald Bradman: Challenging the Myth*, is as much a polemic against then premier John Howard, who was one of the noisiest and most influential of the idolators.

It sits oddly with the social transformation of Australia over the last 70 years. In 1948 it was an Anglo-Celtic society of some seven million afflicted by the "cultural cringe" bemoaned by Victor Courtney in the *Perth Times* on 17 October that year:

> *For some misguided reason anything sporting that comes from Australia, be it on two legs or four, is fit to compete with the rest of the world. But literature, poetry, arts or fashion that originate in our country are always subject to cynicism.*

The modern multicultural society of around 25 million has few such insecurities. But Bradman retains a strong appeal to those uncomfortable with change, while his achievements also fit a modernity that erects statues to athletes rather than soldiers, politicians or preachers and seeks secular alternatives to religious idols. Historian Carl Bridge saw something of a "secular shrine" in the Bradman Museum at Bowral. Former *Wisden* editor Matthew Engel called him Australia's Churchill, while cricket writer and broadcaster Peter Roebuck equated Bradman's cultural centrality with Shakespeare in Britain.

Bradman's record speaks to a world increasingly beguiled by numbers, however spurious. Marking footballers out of ten has spread from the *Sunday People* to outlets that would once have condemned it as typical of a lowest-common-denominator paper. The BBC's thoughtful and accomplished education correspondent Sean Coughlan recently debated the growing influence of university rankings, while confessing: "Put things in a numbered list and we're all hypnotised. We've done plenty of ranking stories."

But 99.94 continues to represent real, remarkable achievement, as Rosenwater wrote: "The classic instance where numbers do mean something." It is also perfect in a way that 100 could never have been. It tells a poignant, human story of falling just short. That .06 might be seen to represent the extent to which Bradman was subject to standard human fallibility. The four runs, that tantalising single shot by which he fell short, is the perfect margin. One or two would have been too ridiculously close; six – something he rarely hit – just too far.

It was a relief when Charles Davis, after suggesting that the missing runs might be located in an early-career partnership with Jack Ryder, dismissed its likelihood and pointed out that rigorous re-examination of every scorebook was as likely to reduce the final tally.

So maybe it is just as well that nobody seems to have known what it meant when the soon-to-be Sir Donald made his momentous duck at The Oval, a lifetime ago.

Thanks to Dan Shalom for prompting the original idea, Neil Robinson and his staff at the Lord's library, the staff of the Newsroom at the British Library for their patient advice in my struggles with their microfiche readers and to Rob Steen, a wise and generous counsellor on this and so many other things.

• • •

EXTRACTS

When I review the annual attendance figures in the Church of England and their slow but steady decline, I find comfort that things could be worse: I could be managing the County Championship.

The Church and the Championship have various similarities. Both link to a geographical division of England, be that county or diocese, that makes sense only from the perspective of history; both hark back to the early 20th century as a time of their pomp and popularity; most crucially, both have pretensions to having a soul. And, right now, for each of these great English institutions, there is a sense that their soul is under threat.

REV ROBERT STANIER

• • •

Everyone thinks they have David Warner's measure. He's a meathead thug with no self-control, or a passionate top-bloke family man who would do anything for a mate. People don't think they have the answer because they don't think there's a question. He's a statement of the obvious, something you need only behold to understand. But somewhere a fake Einstein quote must say that the true mark of complexity is when something appears simple. Having covered the Australian team since his Test comeback in 2013, I'd call Warner one of the most complicated humans in cricket.

GEOFF LEMON

• • •

Sometime during the winter of 1897–98, a Yorkshire journalist named Alfred Pullin had an idea for a series of articles. He had a lot of space to fill in the Yorkshire Post and its evening stablemate every day and he decided to go in search of former cricketers and interview them. What he found evidently shocked him and the book that emerged from his researches, Talks with Old English Cricketers, drawn from his newspaper articles for the Evening Post, has some claim to being one of the most influential books written about the game.

While some of those he interviewed had done rather well for themselves – often because their families had money, which allowed them the leisure and affluence to play as amateurs – some of the game's former professionals he sought out had sunk into near destitution. Their old clubs had lost contact with them and saw no obligation to help those who had fallen on hard times. When he tried to trace John Thewlis, a famous Yorkshire all-rounder of the 1860s and '70s, the club told him brusquely: "Think dead: if not, Manchester."

STEPHEN BATES

• • •

One May afternoon in 2002, Saqi left his Oval "office" and was making his lordly way through south London to his Tooting home when, feeling peckish, he stopped off by Balham tube station for a kebab roll. It took a moment for him to recognise the man who was serving him, a few minutes for his meal to come, and then a few minutes more for the tears to start flowing. It wasn't the onions that brought them on, but the old acquaintance's reply to Saqlain's not-entirely-rhetorical question: "Oh my God, what are you doing here?"

Ashfaq Ahmed had been part of the Pakistan International Airways (PIA) dressing-room when Saqlain made his first-class debut in September 1994. He took a catch to give the spindly tyro his second professional wicket. Now 28 years old, under different circumstances he might have been a county overseas pro or perhaps resting up ahead of an international tour. In 1993 he had made a promising Test debut against Zimbabwe in Rawalpindi, taking Dave Houghton as his first Test scalp in one of the most quintessentially Pakistani victories of the decade – Zimbabwe were 135 for 1 chasing 240 before being wasimandwaqared for 187. But now, he told Saqlain, he had retired. A motorbike accident had left him unable to bowl like the young man he no longer was, so instead of playing cricket for a living he was asking people whether they wanted salad and sauce on their kebab.

SCOTT OLIVER

• • •

Despite the grease, the leather cover had a texture that provided friction and grip. And a ball with a leather cover sewn around a core of cork and wool was far better for striking than a wooden ball in terms of its resilience, the leather helping to dampen the harsh contact between bat and ball. The leather cover was invariably dyed red from the earliest times as a matter of convention, long before rules governing the ball's colour were introduced. Red was a cheap and effective colour that stood out well against grass and did not show the dirt.

GARY COX

• • •

It is one of history's great truisms that nothing occurs in isolation. The French Revolution didn't just happen. Decades, or even centuries, of ruling-class profligacy, married to the Enlightenment thinking of Diderot, Holbach and Rousseau, created a perfect storm of discontent married to expressions of anger. Another of these truisms is that once the groundwork has been laid, or the fire set, it takes only a spark for it to take hold. Sarajevo in 1914 is the most famous example; the shattering of Yugoslavia after the death of Marshall Tito was another.

Cricket politics of the early 1970s largely revolved around South Africa. While there was precious little sympathy for apartheid politics in Britain, there was enough self-interest and apathy to ensure that England would continue to play South Africa. That is until Basil D'Oliveira was finally selected and then refused permission to play in the land of his birth. Public opinion shifted, Peter Hain was vindicated and the Wilson government acted – cutting sporting links had become a popular move. Australia and New Zealand remained, by and large, unaffected by the rumpus in the northern hemisphere.

PATRICK FERRIDAY

• • •

For one perfect summer, Garry Sobers and Mike Procter played in the same side. The world's two most dynamic all-rounders were recruited to play for the Rest of the World in a hastily arranged five-Test series to replace the cancelled South African tour of England in 1970, and both grabbed the opportunity. "It was all pretty relaxed," says Procter. "Garry was never really one for anything like practice or team-talks – he was too laid-back for that. We'd all just find our way to the hotel the night before and play the following day."

English cricket had been bracing itself for trouble throughout the spring of 1970, so the cancellation of the South African tour came as a private relief. Photographs of The Oval in February show a snow-dusted outfield creased with coils of barbed wire, while Lord's was erecting the barricades as if preparing for an alien invasion. So concerned was the TCCB about Peter Hain's anti-apartheid protestors that the English players' lives were insured at £15,000 per man. Hain's followers had even found a disused London Underground branch line with an air vent which came up inside Lord's, and Hain has said they would have used it if they'd had to.

LUKE ALFRED

• • •

If there are few more poignant images in sport than a once-great venue crumbling into dust, then the sight of the Bourda cricket ground in Guyana must be one of the saddest to behold.

Bourda was – and just about still is – one of the most wonderful cricketing stages. The oldest major ground in the Caribbean, opened in 1885 on eight acres of former sugar-cane fields once owned by the Frenchman Joseph Bourda, it was a picturesque, idiosyncratic and sometimes volatile tropical home to West Indies from 1930 to 2005.

PETER MASON

• • •

He was that figure, the artist kneeling
in joy and ecstasy as he performed
a miracle of gesture and hit the ball
with the unfolding of the bird's wings.

Today the months are empty, no time
put aside to watch something exquisite
in the service of a game. We're left
with something less than marvellous.

SJ LITHERLAND

• • •

Marin County is known more as the birthplace of modern mountain biking than for cricket. To the north is George Lucas's Skywalker Ranch. To the south, San Francisco, the 101 and Silicon Valley. But over the Golden Gate Bridge is a cricket ground located somewhere that sounds like a hamlet in the Cotswolds: Larkspur.

There is no pavilion, no clubhouse and no changing-room – unless you count the shade of the fir trees over the boundary. Rusty bicycles, brought out of a shed, shuttle players and spectators 100 metres to the toilets, past a pristine allotment and along a winding path of gravel.

Over the boundary are Douglas fir trees, maples, plums, skinny bay trees, non-native palms and a willow, still mourning the passing of its brother.

To the sides, a swamp; and houses with yachts and pleasure boats moored like cars in a suburban drive.

DANIEL REY

• • •

Alone, aloof, he never married. His career as a first-class cricketer drew to a close. He was sick of the smell of linseed oil, sick of the endless anecdotes, sick of the aura of mystique which bestowed a spurious significance on the whole business. It was time to get out. He astonished his acquaintances by spending a part of his savings on an isolated cottage in Snowdonia. There was a good reason for his choice, for he needed to be somewhere the absurd mythology of cricket had not reached, where he would try to think if there was anything he could do with the rest of his life which might atone for all those years in flannels.

STEPHEN GREGORY

• • •

What is true: Michael Holding didn't choose his moniker, and neither did his teammates or his opponents. He earned it on the famous tour of '76 when, in the heat of a long English summer, the West Indies team transformed into a cricketing superpower and made Tony Greig grovel. Unable to hear Holding coming, the English umpires would have to check over their shoulders to see if he'd started his run-up. The devastation he caused at the striker's end was almost the exact opposite of the serenity of his approach at the other end, so they baptised him accordingly. Whispering Death. But where does the name come from?

TAM WATSON

• • •

Who ran women's cricket before the ECB took over in 1998? The answer is ostensibly simple: the Women's Cricket Association (WCA). The organisation was the brainchild of a group of female hockey players who came upon the idea when they travelled to Colwall in Herefordshire for several days' cricket on the Malvern College Ground in October 1926.

At the first meeting of the WCA, 19 women elected a chairwoman and formed a committee to arrange fixtures around the country. Two aims were declared: "To encourage the foundation of cricket clubs throughout the country" and "to provide facilities for and bring together… those women and girls who previously have had little opportunity of playing cricket after leaving school and college". By 1938, 105 clubs had affiliated to the WCA, which was described in Wisden as "largely responsible for the success of this phase of the game".

But that's not quite the whole story.

RAF NICHOLSON

• • •

There he was, the magisterial figure, standing tall and proud on Sandwich station platform, dressed in a three-quarter-length dark-green overcoat – just as he said he would be. My train, a real rattler that had snaked around the south-eastern extremities of England at a glacial pace, had given me plenty of time to gaze out of the window and contemplate our meeting. The South East was in the grip of a very cold spell, but as we neared Sandwich it was the prospect of being in the company of the cricketing pope which made me shiver. Catching a glimpse of him as the train pulled in initially eased my fears but they immediately re-surfaced as we came face to face.

I'm tall, 6ft 6, but I felt small in his presence, the handshake strong from a figure in his mid-80s. "David, welcome to Sandwich. Good trip?" The voice was as mellifluous as ever. "Yes thank you Mr Swanton," I replied in a thin and reedy voice. "Just don't call him Jim" said another voice in my head. What I didn't know was that it was to be the start of a friendship.

DAVE EDMUNDSON

• • •

For the 32 years I worked for The Times I cut out the pieces I wrote and stuck them in scrapbooks, though in a rather hit-and-miss kind of way. I'm still not sure why – in the vain hope that I might avoid repeating myself, especially my jokes; also in the sure and certain knowledge that when all else fails, I can always plagiarise myself. But perhaps the main reason was to give myself the illusion of permanence: that what I wrote still mattered the next day. As if.

Eventually those shelves full of useless clippings taunted me into action. What the hell was I doing, for those 32 years? What did it mean? What did I learn? Just how much of a waste of time was it?

SIMON BARNES

• • •

I was working at Lord's then, and part of my job was to administer the MCC cricket staff, a band of around 20 young players hoping to crack the big time. Every year some of them got signed up by counties or dropped out, creating vacancies which were filled after one of these trials. Don Wilson, MCC's head coach, would look on with his assistant and a few trusted mates who'd been through the county mill. And on that day in January 1980, one of the triallists was a bit different. Paul Charles Crump was just 15... and had only one arm. It's probably true to say that, before the event, no one there thought he had much chance. And then we saw him bat and bowl, and wondered...

But how did he come to have one arm too few in the first place? "There was a magazine article a few years ago that said I was a thalidomide victim, but that was completely wrong. My mum never touched that stuff, and she was upset by that," he says, in a rich, lilting Welsh accent redolent of the Valleys. "What actually happened was that I had a twin – a girl – and in the womb she was laying on my left side, so the left arm didn't develop properly. That sort of thing would easily be sorted out these days, but they couldn't do it then. To make it worse, my twin sister died very soon too."

STEVEN LYNCH

• • •

THE Nightwatchman THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

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