

SAMPLE EDITION

25

SPRING 2019

THE
Nightwatchman
THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

WISDEN



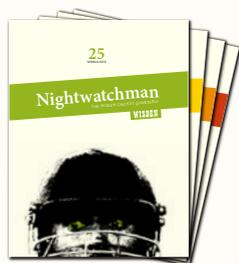
THE Nightwatchman

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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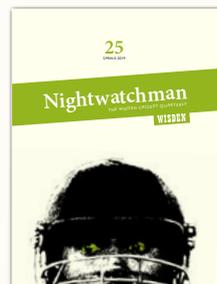
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ISSUE 25 – SPRING 2019

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THE SLOWEST BOWLER IN SUSSEX

James Mettyear on Stan Spiegel

You're batting well. In the zone. If not quite the Athertonian "white space", then at least a sparsely furnished room with walls of light magnolia. Effortless focus on the ball, rhythmic foot movement, perfect timing, a subliminal awareness of where the field lurks. The sun is shining, and you've seen off the quicks. You can't remember ever having batted better. Ah, bowling change. What's this? Little bloke. Must be about 60. Watch him. He'll be wily. Mystery spinner.

Stanley (Stan) Spiegel, only child of Michael and Doris (Dolly) was born 4 October 1938 at the Royal London Hospital, Whitechapel. The Spiegels were first-generation East End Jews, their own parents having separately fled Russia and the pogroms at the dawn of the last century. One of 12 children, Dolly's maiden name was Jeff, arbitrarily given to the family because it was a man called Jeff who oversaw that day's disembarkation at Tilbury.

Stan spent the first year of his life at the council's Hughes Mansions in Stepney, but at the outbreak of war, along with Dolly and two of her five sisters, he was evacuated to Letchworth and the home of a Mr and Mrs Tomlinson. The Jeffs and the Spiegels lived together in one downstairs room, with Stan's bedridden aunt screened behind a curtain pinned to the ceiling at one end. Michael, too old to enlist in the fight against the Nazis, stayed behind, working as a piece-work tailor's machinist, making greatcoats for the army, right through the Blitz. Stan has few memories of his time in England's first garden city, but those he has are happy ones. The Tomlinsons, though they had no say in the matter when forced to decamp to the upstairs rooms of their own house, were welcoming and friendly, and Michael would visit every weekend.

By 1945, with war coming to an end, it was deemed safe for evacuees to start returning to the capital and



plans were made for Stan and Dolly to come home. Moving date was set for Thursday, 29 March. At 7.21am on Tuesday 27th, while Michael was in his kitchen making a morning cuppa before work, there was a loud explosion. Rushing for the hallway, he discovered that it wasn't there. Nor was the rest of the family home. Only the corner of his block remained; the rest reduced to brick dust and rubble by the last bomb – a V2 rocket – to fall on London. One hundred and thirty-four residents lost their lives. The fire brigade and ARP wardens who rescued Michael from the pulverised building thought his survival nothing short of a miracle. Stan still marvels at his father's escape. And his own.

Ball One: *Strewth! What's this? Ball's miles in the air and it's taking an age to get here. Forward? Back? See what Ken Barrington meant by getting caught in Two Man's Land. Got to be back. Keep the pads out of the way. Back it is then. Dead bat, ball drops down at your feet. No turn.*

With Hughes Mansions gone, the Spiegel family were moved west, to a council flat in Hendon. Stan's memories are again blurred but happy. There wasn't always work for Michael and when there was, it was still piece-work, but he can't remember the family wanting for much. He enjoyed his time at Dollis Primary School, where he took his eleven-plus. Dolly and Michael hadn't known he was sitting the exam but were proud as punch when he was one of only three from the school to pass and progress to Hendon Grammar. The other two dropped out after the first term, but Stan flourished. Wirily strong – something he attributes to the

genetic legacy of the *shtetl* survivor – he quickly grew to his full 5ft 6 and became a rampaging left-back, boxed for the school and was 100-yard sprint champion, representing Middlesex Schools at White City.

He also played a little cricket. Hendon had few games, but they were enough for Stan to develop the batting and bowling methods he employs, largely unmodified, to this day. When it comes to batting, then and now, Stan holds the bat the “wrong way round”. Nominally a left-hander (he bowls with his right), he somehow crosses his arms so that his right hand is the bottom one and his left the top. Should be impossible. Try it.

Ball Two: *Same again. If anything, this is even slower and lobbed even higher. Easy to get distracted by that passing pigeon as you follow the ball's trajectory across the cloudless sky. Back foot again, even though it ends up pitching in the popping crease. Pat it back down the track. Safely negotiated, but the zone is evaporating rapidly; the magnolia room filling with unwanted furniture and piles of old newspapers. The feet are now dithering in Three Man's Land, the bat twitching indecisively like a dowsing stick. No turn again.*

On playing field, cinder track or boxing ring, there was no stopping Stan; but in the classroom he was less engaged, and he left the Grammar aged 16 with just three O Levels to take up Catering and Hospitality at the local tech. He chose the course, he says, because it seemed “glamorous... you know – silver service, dinner dances, smart suits”. And that, eventually, was how I came to meet him.

January 1994, and I was being interviewed for a job at my local tech. Faced by about 30 middle and senior managers, I had finished my ten-minute presentation on “Managing Change”, where I'd talked authoritatively of “establishing the vision” and the importance of “ownership, empowerment and accountability”. Now was the moment for questions from the floor. The phalanx of my potential future peers remained deathly silent. Many were open-mouthed. This was old-school further education where the very notion of management theory – or indeed practice – was a new one. As far as most of the room was concerned, I might as well have been talking double Dutch. Except for one of them, who'd smiled at me knowingly from the front row throughout my delivery and now stood and introduced himself as “Stan Spiegel, Head of Catering and Hospitality”, before enquiring with feigned innocence: “Can you tell us how all this relates to Performance Related Pay?” My turn for the open mouth.

I later learnt that “PRP” was a controversial topic. The senior managers were keen to introduce it; it's what they had heard happened in “business”. The middle managers, knowing full well that “performance” invariably happened from collective rather than individual effort, didn't agree.

Ball Three: *This one's a bit flatter. And though speed is relative, quicker; the pace of a shuttlecock hit as hard as possible by your ten-year-old son. Got to score off this one. It's only your second game for the club and you've already alluded to having played at a “higher level” in your youth. Must be able to deal with this stuff. Wait. Stay back. There, contact. Miles early on it, but a pull shot*

nonetheless. You set off for a run but the considerable energy generated through your shoulders and forearms has not been channelled into the ball, which has squirted backward of square to be easily gathered and lobbed to the keeper. Your partner, the skipper, is leaning unmoved on his bat and sends you back. He is smiling. Or is that a smirk? It looks like a couple of squatters have now moved into the magnolia room. And that pigeon is fluttering its wings on a perch inside your head. Still no turn.

Somehow, I got the job and Stan and I shared a line manager. The Head of Faculty for Service Industries, a former barber and very bright man, sketched pen pictures of my new colleagues on my first day and told me from the off that for the last three years the sole objective the principal had given him in his annual appraisal was to “sort Stan”. You could see why. It wasn't that Stan didn't run his department well. Indeed, he managed skilfully the inevitable tension between chefs and front-of-house staff to create the best performing team in the college. It was just that he seemed to do it so suspiciously easily and, worse still, without even paying lip service to the new corporate mannerisms and processes now expected. He never said it, but everyone knew that as far as Stan was concerned, most of this stuff was so much pig-weighting tosh. Senior managers, still getting to grips with things like “Human Resources” (no longer Personnel) and “Finance” (no longer the College Bursar), had little idea what the rhetorical notions I'd floated in my presentation meant, let alone how to implement them. And when they tried to, they always sensed that Stan was wordlessly highlighting the fact that they weren't actually

wearing any clothes. And they were right. On both counts.

Before joining the college Stan had accrued more experience of the wider education world than the majority of his peers or seniors. And was better qualified. Having completed his City and Guilds – also meeting his first wife at a dinner dance – he secured a trainee managership at a prestigious West End hotel, before determining that the requirement to “live in” once his apprenticeship ended would be incompatible with bringing up his growing family. He registered on a Certificate of Education. You didn’t need A Levels to do the course in those days, but while waiting to start Stan did two anyway, via the now defunct Metropolitan Correspondence College. He passed both with grade As after a mere four months’ study, all the while continuing with his shifts at the hotel. Pleased with his results, he quickly did the sums and worked out that, in an era when social mobility was given wings by full grants, he could cover the mortgage on the house he’d recently bought in Mill Hill (for £3,700) and might as well by-pass the teaching course and go to university.

The only mature student on his Economics degree, Stan never had much of a student life, though he formed a strong bond with the young but worldly David Sullivan, he of West Ham, *Sunday Sport* and soft-pornography fame, at the time making good money from trading old football programmes, and “by far the brightest student” among them. From there, there was an MBA (“Masters in Bigger All”) and then finally into teaching at Middlesex Polytechnic; with his degrees and at the enhanced salary point he’d

planned for. Stan was happy. At least, until “polys” became “universities” and “high-level technical courses for industry” were turned into “half-arsed degrees”. While he personally found the transition easy enough, it was a change that he discovered came with a fair helping of “bollocks”.

The one thing Stan hadn’t done during all this time was play cricket. Not a single ball bowled, or even watched, for 35 years. It was only at the age of 51, two years after the sudden and tragic early death of his wife, that he was persuaded to come along to a colleague’s local club to help him “get out of himself”.

Ball Four: *Is he taking the piss? This one’s even slower and tossed up way above the sightscreen. Ridiculous. This is supposed to be league cricket. You didn’t join the club to play against this type of shite and bile. Careful though. Nothing worse than giving your wicket to the pie-man. Get forward this time, smother it. That’s it. That’s the squatters evicted, and the piles of newspapers cleared, even if there’s still a load of furniture cluttering the place up. No turn.*

The bowling blueprint Stan developed at Hendon is deceptively simple. You toss the ball up as high and as slowly as possible and wait for the batsman to either miss it and get stumped (the ball dislodging the bails if it reaches the wickets is only a 50/50 call) or, more often, hit it in the air to a strategically placed fielder. Stan possesses an uncanny ability to assess any given batter’s ability to resist temptation and, as importantly, the likely catching reliability even of a neophyte, and then where to place his chosen collaborator. This almost preternatural reading of the human clay

with which he works, together with a head for figures which allows for rapid, brass-necked, cost-benefit analysis (number of runs allowable per wicket bought), still forms the template for his singular art. It used to drive his school cricket master mad. How could he keep getting all these wickets when he wasn’t even a “proper bowler”?

And for his first years at the club, as he was well aware, the question of whether Stan could be considered a cricketer at all, let alone a proper one, was widely debated. It was a good club, still is, and most who played for it had a rooted acceptance of their place on the local amateur cricket pyramid, but there were a powerful few who took themselves more seriously than perhaps their skill warranted. There always are. One of them, who had played under-17s for the county, firmly stated that he’d never turn out in the same team as Stan. It perhaps didn’t help that when he first joined the club, the debutant turned up in the same yellowed flannels he’d worn over 30 years previously and, though he’d never played the game, golf shoes.

It took time for Stan’s singular art to bear fruit. In 1990, his first season, he wasn’t given the ball at all and batted No.11. By 1993 he’d bowled just 17 overs for upwards of 150 runs and just a single wicket, a leading edge hit straight up in the air and taken by the keeper. But he’d still clocked up over a hundred games, and what with the teas, organising the fixtures, stats collation, scoring, umpiring, putting out the boundary markers, being invariably cheerful (even if he didn’t smoke or drink) and, most important of all, recruiting new players, it was clear he wasn’t going away.

It wasn’t until 1995, when his working life came to an end, that Stan’s cricket really took off.

Ball Five: *Here we go again. Up it goes. Fuck this for a game of soldiers. You’re going down the pitch to this one, get it on the full. There, didn’t quite middle it; it’s hard to get much momentum off a ball that’s barely moving, but that’s just about cleared the boundary between midwicket and long on. Not a cow-corner type of player normally, but sod it. Forty-eight not out if you’ve counted right. The magnolia room is clearing; the pigeon roosting in your skull has taken flight.*

After our initial interaction at my interview, I got on well with the Head of Catering, even though I’d been recruited primarily to weigh the pig. Stan knew how heavy the thing was just by looking at it and couldn’t see the point of continually putting it on the scales, but he forgave my technocratic meddling once he learnt I played cricket. Provided I made myself available for selection on Saturday.

I remember the end of his career as if it was yesterday. It was the last day of an Ofsted Inspection. Usually by then, the whole charade is all over bar the shouting. On this occasion though, Her Majesty’s Inspector still had a few further points to clarify with the Head of Catering and Hospitality before he could deliver his judgment. An urgent call went out for Stan to report to the principal’s office without delay. This was before mobile phones and only the Health and Safety Officer was allocated a pager, so a bevy of anxious emissaries were dispatched from the Executive Suite to search far and wide. Stan was nowhere to be found.

Having as ever ensured his house was in good order, Stan had left at lunchtime for the ground. As it happens, he wasn't down to play but was doing the teas and had to unlock the pavilion and put the urn on. The incident would provide both parties with the perfect opportunity for Stan to decide to retire. He would miss the exasperating but rich world of further education. Where else could you enjoy working alongside cooks and carpenters, beauty therapists and nursery nurses, electricians, engineers, motor mechanics and teachers of higher mathematics and philosophy, all committed to providing second chances to students who'd missed out first time round? But he was, after all, 58 years old. It was about time he started taking his cricket career seriously.

And, with the blessing of his beloved second wife, that's just what he's done for the last quarter of a century. And counting. He started with a bang that very year - 81 wickets at 17 with four five-wicket hauls and a best of 7 for 17. Since then up until the end of last season he's taken 1,764 wickets from 9,020 overs in 1,679 matches; over 70 games a year. Virtually nothing stops him. Stan's action is a mechanism with few moving parts, a machine that needs little oiling, but lobbing it up as he does takes physical as well as mental chutzpah, and there have been several injuries; all of them given short shrift. Hit on the head attempting a caught and bowled, seven stitches above the eye, he returned from A&E to finish the game; hit on the leg by a ball clubbed straight back at him, ambulated to hospital and told not to play for six weeks, back that weekend; badly broken right arm (another straight

drive), a nine-week spell in plaster (he umpired), and when freed from it, despite orders not to go near a cricket ground for a minimum of two months, back the following Wednesday. A truly incorrigible cricket man. A player rather than an armchair expert, as his appearance on Channel 4's *Fifteen to One* quiz show, when he reached the last two only to fall at the final hurdle, nicely demonstrated. The question that stumped him? What does the sword symbol in a cricket scorecard denote? "Always thought it was a cross and had never given it any thought."

Ball Six: *Right, down the pitch again and it's going over that tree. Oh no, it's a fraction shorter this time, and you don't make it on the full. Too late to stop now and you throw your arms at it anyway. It's gone up miles. Might make it all the way. Wait. What's that fielder doing? He wasn't there before. Anyway, he'll never catch that, he's fat and he's got glasses and he was smoking a fag between deliveries the previous over. Bugger, two easy steps to the right and he's pouched it. "Dave never drops them," the keeper informs you as you set off for the pavilion. You pause on your way back to let the incoming batsman know the pitch is playing.*

"That last one spun a mile," you tell him.

"Really?" he says. "That'll be a first, then," before adding in more conciliatory tones: "You've been Spiegeled, mate. Don't worry, it's happened to us all."

Stan's *Fifteen to One* failure served only to add another layer to his myth, one in which he was no longer an idiosyncratic embarrassment to his teammates but, for much of his belated career in the

game, captain of the Saturday second XI, Sunday XI and mid-week sides. The club itself grew with him, and any vestiges of self-delusion faded, while his irrepressible appetite for the game and the people who play it thawed the hearts of even the most self-important. Above all, there was his bowling: his maddening, orthodoxy-defying bowling; testing the batsman's patience to its outer limits; infinitely phlegmatic and entirely devoid of vanity, playfully seeking out and cunningly exploiting any trace of it in others.

He's become the club's very own local treasure. Not just theirs. Ever available for selection, Stan continues to play for a whole gamut of local sides; from jazz-hat occasionals to the county's over-70s XI where, as he delightedly observes: "Everybody else once played at a much higher level, whereas I've always been crap!" Once, after an emergency late call-up for a mid-week representative fixture, he found himself bowling to Richie Richardson and Eldine Baptiste. He took the only three wickets to fall and in the bar at the end of play, the recently retired West Indies captain told him poker-faced that he was the "most difficult slow bowler" he'd ever come up against. One of his more prestigious sides (founded 1870) has bestowed on him their revered Contribution to Sussex Cricket award. Previous winners include England greats Jim Parks and John Snow. Another club, against whom he took his 1,000th wicket, invited him to their annual dinner and surprised him with their Player of the Year trophy, despite him never having played for them.

It's tea, and as you sit on the warm grass in front of the pavilion with your sandwiches you become aware that some sort of presentation is going on. Turning, you see that your nemesis is about to blow out the candles on a large birthday cake. You get up and join the throng. Everybody, from both sides, is huddled round. The cake depicts a cricket pitch, complete with scoreboard made of matchsticks and bearing the legend: "Stan Spiegel, 80 Not Out". You've been done by an octogenarian, for crissakes. You wish you hadn't mentioned the "higher-level" business. But as the cheers die down, you approach the birthday boy to congratulate him. And to talk through your dismissal. Stan shakes you warmly by the hand, tells you well batted and confirms that yes, the ball that got you did indeed turn a mile. Generous slice of cake in hand, you find yourself feeling surprisingly good about yourself; about your new club, and about the game itself.

Stan does that to you. And long may he continue to do so. A couple of seasons ago, his school-boy trousers finally gave up the ghost and he was forced to buy only the second pair of his lifetime (same waist size: 28). But he still plays in the original golf shoes, even if they are on their last legs now. This winter he bought a new pair, just in case. Proper cricket boots this time. He reckons they should just about see him out. We all hope that they don't. Here's to the next thousand games.

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EXTRACTS

More detailed analysis sharpens the point of our enquiry. In his book *Lancashire County Cricket Club - 100 Greats* Keith Hayhurst profiles those cricketers he regards as the best to wear the Red Rose prior to 2004. Five of Hayhurst's hundred were born in Accrington (current population approximately 35,000) but only four in Liverpool (500,000), the same number produced by Westhoughton (25,000). Widening the qualification to include schooling allows us to add the redoubtable Harry Makepeace to Liverpool's quartet; his family moved to the city from his native Middlesbrough when Makepeace was ten and he learned both his cricket and football on Merseyside before making 487 appearances for Lancashire and becoming a double international.

PAUL EDWARDS

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The Charterhouse chapters in *Shadows on the Grass*, however, are more concerned with House cricket than public-school matches, and with William Rees-Mogg than Peter May. Rees-Mogg – future editor of *The Times*, chair of the Arts Council, vice-chair of the BBC, and father of Jacob – was Raven's main rival as a Classics scholar at Charterhouse. Excused from games because of his acknowledged status as a permanent invalid (Raven says that he “looked pretty awful, but that may have been due to an aversion from washing and an economical habit of cleaning his teeth with school soap”), Rees-Mogg was nevertheless in demand as an umpire in inter-House matches, being “exceedingly knowledgeable and accurate about the game”. And also Machiavellian. Raven gives a wicket-by-wicket account of how in one such match Rees-Mogg fixes the result by a series of bizarre but unchallenged decisions in order to settle a score with the Head of House of the losing team. Rees-Mogg also figures prominently in the *Alms for Oblivion* series, the novels for which Raven is best known, as Somerset Lloyd-James, a devious Papist who eventually slits his wrists in the bath after discovering that he had fathered an idiot child with a servant at his boarding school.

ROD EDMOND

• • •

I grew up a 17-minute walk from Lord's but never once witnessed the crackle of the first morning of a Test match, nor the picnic frenzy of the weekend. Instead my father and I would follow the meanderings of the Test over four days, hoping it would tee up an intriguing Monday. Then, assuming there was no rain, the match was poised and my grades were good, Dad would phone the headmaster and tell a lovely little white lie, and we'd hop along Prince Albert Road. There were no queues at the gate. It was usually a fiver for an adult, nothing for kids. Even as a little boy, staring around a largely empty Lord's, it struck me as an odd scene. These were two international teams fighting it out for victory in a Test match at the world's most famous cricket ground, and hardly anyone was here. There was even a chance of an exciting finish. I could hardly believe my luck.

Many years later I covered whole Test matches for the *Cricketer* magazine and still relished the ethereal mood of Monday cricket; the absence of the masses and the sense that you are in on a secret, glimpsing something rare and special and weird while the rest of the world has its back turned. I would circumnavigate the ground with my press pass and sit in every stand, consider every vantage point.

BENJ MOOREHEAD

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It is an oddity that cricket has not featured in the Commonwealth Games for so long, even though it is the most widespread sport across the Commonwealth. Birmingham 2022 is looming and cricket would take on a very different complexion this time – if the ICC and ECB's joint bid is successful. Forget the men and forget 50 overs. It's all about the women and it's all about T20.

ISABELLE DUNCAN

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Back in 1989 the Australian Ashes adventure started at West Bromwich Dartmouth CC against the League Cricket Conference XI – a team of club cricketers bolstered by a few overseas pros plying their trade in the northern leagues who, for a ten-year period from 1984, were rolled out as semi-sacrificial opposition for the international tourists, back when tours were longer than package holidays. Dean Jones (or “Mike Veletta” to the announcer) spanked 170 not out from 101 balls and Geoff Marsh (“Gerry Marsh”, according to the Black Country malapropisms hissing from the PA) chipped in with 101 as the tourists won a 55-over match by 165 runs.

SCOTT OLIVER

• • •

Sam King was among the celebrating West Indians. He had arrived on the *Windrush* and would go on to become the first black mayor of Southwark, as well as play a prominent role in the creation of the Notting Hill Carnival. At the time of the Lord's Test he was Corporal King, a 24-year-old technician in the RAF. He listened and watched as Kitchener wrote the celebration calypso "Cricket Lovely Cricket" along with Egbert Moore, known as Lord Beginner and who later recorded the song as "Victory Test Match". With its chorus hailing "those two little pals of mine, Ramadhin and Valentine", the calypso told the story of the match before describing the joyous scenes:

Hats went in the air

They jumped and shouted without fear

So at Lord's was the scenery

Bound to go down in history.

The austere home of cricket had never experienced anything like it. The BBC's John Arlott was moved to write that the celebrations were "of such quality that every spectator in the ground must have felt himself their friend". But the party atmosphere nearly turned sour. Around 30 policemen created a cordon to prevent the fans getting too close to the pavilion and one arrested Kitchener as the small group of fans followed him around the ground. However, the PC was quickly embarrassed into releasing the singer after the home crowd heckled him: "Leave him alone! They won! Let him enjoy himself!" Kitchener then led the group dancing their way past bewildered onlookers to Piccadilly Circus as the celebrations continued around the statue of Eros.

ROGER DOMENEGHETTI

• • •

Much has been written about cricket and music. David Rayvern Allen's book *A Song For Cricket* is a comprehensive account covering the earliest references, through the Victorian and Edwardian eras to the present day, and calypso's cricket links have been well documented. But there have also been a strong relationship between cricket and jazz. There are certainly common elements - technical expertise and skill, interaction with fellow players and response to their contributions, plus the opportunity for individual expression and improvisation within a structured context.

MATTHEW WRIGHT

• • •

Usually I'm not that bothered about figures, and lists, and rankings. In fact, before Jimmy started making his charge, my instant recall of the all-time top-ten wicket-takers probably wouldn't have extended far beyond Warne and Murali. The more we were told that their figures were untouchable, never to be replicated, the less attention I paid to the rest.

Anderson's own rise through the ranks had snuck up on me. He was the solid core of a bowling attack that sometimes struggled at its periphery; the man whose return always felt the best hope of a breakthrough. But there was something about his presence in the England team that was so dependable and understated that it was easy to take his wickets for granted. But still they came. His contribution to the team - to the sport - had become so large as to be almost impossible to see any more. He wasn't the greatest pace bowler in the world. He was just our Jimmy.

EMMA JOHN

• • •

Operation Marine Drive U-Turn began late on a humid evening in the middle of May 2013, just yards away from the Arabian Sea. Shanthakumaran Sreesanth pulled out of the main gate of Mumbai's Wankhede cricket stadium a little before midnight. His team, the Rajasthan Royals, had lost that evening's match in the Indian Premier League (IPL). But no matter: drinks were in order, and the star bowler sped off to join friends in a nightclub in Bandra, a fashionable northern suburb. He had no idea the police were following him. Or that they had been doing so for weeks.

Operation U-Turn took its name from the quiet cul-de-sac at the end of the city's Marine Drive where a team of police officers waited as the game wound on, close enough to hear cheers floating over from the ground. When it finished, three squads fanned out across the city. One trailed Sreesanth as he drove north. A few hours later the squad moved in, pulling the disorientated fast bowler from his car. Two more Rajasthan Royals players were arrested that same evening, while 11 bookmakers were taken in night-time raids across the country. The most serious scandal in the history of India's treasured national game had begun.

JAMES CRABTREE

• • •

WG Grace played cricket so long the game changed around him. He played first-class cricket before it was first-class cricket. He faced underarm, round-arm and overarm bowling. He batted without boundaries and scored runs called “boundaries”. He batted against fields with upwards of 20 men. He faced four-, five-, six- and eight-ball overs. The man was perennial. Under his *Vanity Fair* caricature it simply read: “Cricket.”

“Cricket and Grace were synonymous,” said Lord Hawke, captain of Yorkshire and England, in *Memorial Biography* (1919). “For nobody ever spoke of cricket without alluding to WG. He symbolised cricket for everyone who began to play after he became champion.”

MATT CLEARY

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Ireland was in the midst of rebellion, yet despite two years of guerrilla warfare cricket continued virtually unscathed. British Pathé footage of the opening of the Irish cricket season in 1921 is a picture of tranquility. Spectators lounge by the tree-lined, picturesque surroundings of Trinity College Dublin, chatting, smoking and enjoying a university trial match.

During the years of the Great War, College Park had been an un-mowed meadow as Trinity men enlisted for service, but cricket was a central part of college life and was re-established quickly after the Armistice, even as Ireland’s War of Independence broke out. Those happy faces in the newsreel could not know that within two weeks one of their own would be killed on those same grass banks.

DAVID WYNNE

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For all his confident swagger, those curt, barked commands at his batting partner and the faded club sweater that spoke of past heroics in some far-off league, he was a goner. For all that retaking of his guard every third over, for the contemptuous look that he would bestow on the young bowler who had the temerity to appeal for a ball that had pitched outside leg, and for the endless chewing of the faded bit of gum in his mouth, he was on cricket’s death row. He would not be back next season for this club. Or for any other. And he wouldn’t be back for the simple reason that he didn’t understand the fundamental golden rule of what he was doing. Instead he would stay at home mending things, listening to talkSPORT and wondering vaguely what had gone wrong with his life.

In this last game of the season, he was unconsciously taking up his place as its designated casualty, and we knew this because we could see a mile off that his own teammates had given up on him. Wrapped up in their rolled eyes and shrugged shoulders was the reality of a turd that bore no more polishing.

Here, my friend, you can be good company or a good cricketer, preferably both, but you manifestly cannot afford to be neither.

ROGER MORGAN-GRENVILLE

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Who ran women’s cricket before the ECB took over in 1998? The answer is even better. An achievement that threatens to be unbeatable but just falls short. For instance, a nine-darter is darting perfection; two of those in a row would be doubly magnificent. Yet Michael van Gerwen’s 17 throws of perfection at the 2013 PDC World Darts Championship, followed by a missed double from throw No.18, seems greater because of what it could have been, but was not.

Cricket is no different. The most celebrated perfect imperfection is Don Bradman’s Test batting average. Had he come down with mumps before his final innings and been unable to take to the crease, Bradman would have finished with 6,996 Test runs at 101.39 – a revolting number. A last-innings duck took that number down to the beautiful 99.94. If only Bradman had been dismissed for three, we would have had 99.99 on our hands.

ELGAN ALDERMAN

• • •

“Watch this,” he said, turning to me with a grin.

He tossed the yellow lighter into the blaze. The gas inside the canister ignited and the capsule exploded, sending a whirling rush, like lava, into the heavens. The climbing flames stretched like limbs around the black guttering attached to the roof and slithered along the length of the building. Suddenly, as if by some supernatural force, the entire roof was engulfed, red and orange demons rising and falling like ancient sea serpents swimming between the tiles.

With the dark presence swooping back and forth above our heads, we raced into the night, a torrent of smoke pouring in the direction of my parents’ house. We crossed two rugby pitches, adjacent to the floodlit athletics club, and reached the car park beneath the recreation centre, stopping only to catch our breath. We crossed the stone bridge into town and heard the distant sirens singing their songs. As I ran up the hill towards the derelict bingo hall, overlooking the centre, I wiped hot tears from my eyes. Nothing would ever be the same again.

TIM COOKE

• • •

It unsettles me every time I walk into the garage. Lying there, slightly unkempt, in garish purple, hardly an icon of cricketing style. It’s a cricket bag. Not just any old cricket bag, but my cricket bag. I know its days have gone but I can’t quite bring myself to say goodbye.

Just to notice it brings a tumble of memories – an adrenalin rush of happiness, regrets and half-truths. There seems to be half a life hidden beneath those pads and sweaters, an obsession that enhanced a life and occasionally unbalanced it, where I made friends and sometimes let down family. All for the sound of bat on ball.

DAVID HOPPS

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THE Nightwatchman

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

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