

SAMPLE EDITION

33

SPRING 2021

THE
Nightwatchman
THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

WISDEN



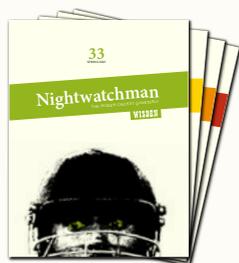
THE Nightwatchman

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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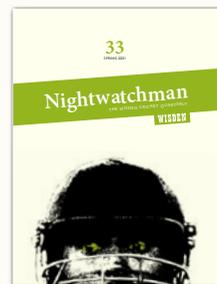
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Image courtesy of the David Frith Collection



A JEWISH CAPTAIN?

Daniel Lightman investigates the misconceptions and prejudices surrounding Percy Fender

It was Frank Keating's article on the front page of the *Guardian* on 17 June 1985 that first piqued my interest in Percy Fender's background. Entitled "Fender the fastest dies", it read:

PGH Fender, one of cricket's best and most colourful captains, scorer of the game's fastest first-class century, and recently characterised in the television series Bodyline as a monocled fop, has died... He played in 13 Tests - indeed, he should have captained England regularly, many said, but he knew he never would when he overheard an MCC president at Lord's referring to him as "the smarmy Jew boy".

This struck a chord with me because a year earlier I had almost been expelled from school for refusing to play cricket on *Shabbat*, the Jewish Sabbath. University College School's headmaster, fresh in his post, was adamant in his view that making oneself available for sports on Saturday was a *sine qua non* for attendance at

the school. There were a number of other Jewish pupils but only a handful observed *Shabbat* - and I alone of that cohort had any sporting pretensions. The cricket coach, who in his youth on the MCC staff had taught Ian Botham how to bowl the out-swinger, berated me in front of the rest of the cricket squad for putting (as he charmingly put it) my "petty superstitions before the good of the team".

I found it difficult to comprehend why so bigoted a stance was adopted by a school which had been founded in 1830 by the University of London. At a time when only communicant members of the Church of England could attend Oxbridge, University College London was established to open up higher education to those of any faith (or none). The school it founded (whose alumni included Hermann Adler, the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire from 1891 to 1911) notionally shared the same ethos. Hence the school song says of its founders: "They laid intolerance



low." Although I always sang that line: "They laid *tolerance* low."

The headmaster decided to expel me but his decree needed to be rubber-stamped by the school's governors. I was told that I was saved by the Bishop of Southampton, who announced at the governors' meeting that he would never play cricket on a Sunday, his day of rest, and that his stance persuaded enough of the governors to vote down my proposed expulsion. However, as a condition of my reprieve, I was banned from representing the school at *any* sport.

Having myself experienced what appeared to be a form of anti-Semitism in a cricketing context, I was troubled by the possibility that it had denied Percy Fender the England captaincy. Fender was a charismatic and fascinating figure. As well as being an exceptionally astute captain of Surrey for a decade (1921-31), he was an idiosyncratic cricketer who was nonetheless one of the best all-rounders of his generation: a big-hitting batsman – his century in 35 minutes in 1920 still remains the fastest hundred (save in contrived circumstances) in first-class cricket – a canny and inventive spin bowler, and an excellent slip fielder.

I noted how many autobiographies of English cricketers of the 1920s and '30s rated Fender as the best captain they had played with or against. "As a captain, he had the best brain in present-day cricket," said Jack Hobbs, who witnessed his captaincy at first hand for Surrey throughout the '20s. "The best captain I ever played against was Mr PGH Fender," opined the Middlesex and England opener HW Lee.

One England captain, Arthur Gilligan, said he had "always regarded him as easily the finest skipper of a county side during my time", while another, RES Wyatt, exclaimed: "What a remarkable player he was! There has never been anyone like him for astuteness and cunning in the field. As far as tactics go, he was the finest captain I ever saw... He was unlucky never to have captained England and to have played in Test matches so seldom." A third, Walter Hammond, described Fender as "perhaps the most skilful strategist of cricket in my time".

The accolades went on. According to Harold Larwood, Fender was "the shrewdest and most astute [captain] I ever encountered in county cricket, especially on slow wickets". Herbert Sutcliffe called him "a cricket genius" and "a brilliant captain", adding: "I could never understand why in his most successful years he was not England's captain; and I say, after paying due respect to DR Jardine's skill and knowledge, that Fender is the best cricket captain I have known."

Many respected cricket writers shared Sutcliffe's bewilderment. "If there were ever any very cogent reasons why he should not have captained England both on his merits as a player and his astonishing capacities as a captain then they have been concealed from the interested world both at the time and since," wrote Ronald Mason. Denzil Batchelor regarded it as "one of the lamentable things in cricket that he never captained England", while RC Robertson-Glasgow added: "I wish he could have captained England; for surely he earned it."

The Australians were glad never to confront an England team led by Fender. In his autobiography *10 for 66 and All That*, the Australian leg-spinner Arthur Mailey wrote that Fender "will always be well up in my list of England's [possible] captains, and in this I have the support of nearly every member of the 1921 Australian team. We always felt much more comfortable when Fender's name was not on the list of probable captains of the England XI we were to face."

In his acclaimed *PGH Fender: A Biography* (1981), Richard Streeton stated that Fender had "disposed of several myths about [why he never captained England] that were first suggested at the time or have become accepted since". However, in a book of almost 200 pages, the assertion that he failed to get the captaincy "because it was thought he was Jewish" was dismissed in one sentence: "Fender denied he was Jewish and in any event did not believe it would have told against him if he had been."

The reasons that Streeton gave for Fender not being given the opportunity to captain his country do not lack plausibility: his tactlessness, iconoclasm, lack of deference to the powers that be, as well as falling out with Lord Harris, the most powerful figure in English cricket at that time, plainly were not smart moves on his part.

In his biography of the old Warwickshire and England wicket-keeper "Tiger" Smith, who became an umpire in the 1930s, Patrick Murphy recorded Smith complaining about the way Fender led his county:

Surrey weren't a pleasant side to umpire in those days. Fender liked his own way and the air was blue from the amateurs when things weren't going right. Like the Australians of recent years, they'd take the mickey out of the batsmen to upset them and I know Jack Hobbs was happy to be out of it eventually. I was always happy to get away from The Oval in the 'thirties.

Nonetheless, I wondered whether Streeton had delved deep enough into an issue which he described as appearing to modern readers to be a "distasteful and unnecessary" thing to raise; or indeed whether the subject of his biography, then in his late eighties and with a reputation for being testy, might have made clear that he did not welcome further probing. I wondered, too, whether Streeton was aware of, or had put to Fender, Frank Keating's (albeit unsourced) story about an MCC president referring to Fender as "the smarmy Jew boy" – and why, if his lack of tact had truly been the cause of his failure to be appointed England captain, this hadn't been given as the reason in his contemporaries' autobiographies. If that was known to be the case, why did Sutcliffe state that he "could never understand why in his most successful years he was not England's captain"?

Keating wasn't the only modern writer to suggest that Fender lost out on the prize because he was thought to be Jewish. In *The Slow Men*, David Frith noted that the England selectors lacked faith in AP "Tich" Freeman, the legendary Kent and England leg-spinner of the 1920s and '30s – the only man to have taken 300 wickets in a season – and wondered: "Was he, like

Fender, overlooked because he either was, or was supposed to be, Jewish?" (According to Geoff Freeman, his great-nephew, Tich wasn't Jewish.)

In his incisive biography *Wally Hammond: The Reasons Why*, David Foot noted that Hammond learnt most about captaincy from his old Gloucestershire captain Bev Lyon, who was Jewish. Foot, who was friendly with several Gloucestershire cricketers of the 1930s, added that Hammond "often bracketed Fender with Lyon. 'It's all those Jewish brains,' he used to say with real affection, making the same mistake as so many others about Percy's ethnic background." We shall soon return to the question of whether Fender was in fact Jewish.

Allen Synge, author of a history of Test selectors 1899-1990, also hinted at the idea that Fender lost out because of his perceived ethnicity. During the disastrous 1921 home Ashes series, the selectors sacked JWHT Douglas as England captain and, wrote Synge, Fender was the ideal replacement. But he had failed to find favour with Lord Harris, "ostensibly as a result of some dispute over pitch-covering, but in reality, it is now assumed, because Harris was not impressed with Fender's claim to be 'a Gentleman' or even an Englishman".

In a letter sent to the *Jewish Chronicle* a few years ago, Philip Rose wrote that he played cricket in Kenya in the 1950s with an ex-county player who told him that the reason for Fender's nickname, "Mossy", was "because he was Jewish and connected to the Moss Bros family". Rose added: "I never found out if this was true but, when Fender died, I

heard Jim Laker on BBC Radio say that Fender never captained England because he was Jewish."

• • •

Over the years I have tried to investigate this issue further. The first time I did so was almost 20 years ago but by then there was hardly anyone still around who had played with Fender. The only man I could think of was the former England paceman Alf Gover, then aged 93 and the last man alive to have played regularly with him for Surrey.

I telephoned The Oval. They could not give me his contact details, but if I wrote to him c/o Surrey CCC they would forward the letter. Three weeks went by, no response. One evening I plucked up the courage to call another former Surrey and England bowler, Alec Bedser. To my surprise, his home in Woking was not ex-directory.

Bedser was very friendly. He said that he had been captained by Fender only once, when playing for a Surrey club-and-ground side in 1938. Even from that one game, he could see that Fender was a good captain, knew the game backwards and was a fine tactician. He did not know whether Fender was Jewish but had heard a rumour about it. He had heard, too, that Fender rubbed people up a bit the wrong way. He gave me the name of the old-age home in Wandsworth to which Gover had recently moved. I looked up the number and that evening called it twice. Each time I rang 20 rings, but there was no answer. For the next couple of days I was distracted by work deadlines. The following morning, on opening *The*

Times, I was dismayed to see Gover's obituary. He had died the day after I tried to call him.

I took this as a heavenly sign that I was not fated to explore this issue. A decade later, however, when reading a cricket-auction catalogue, my eyes were drawn to one of the lots: a cache of copy correspondence in early 1992 from Irving Rosenwater (a highly talented, if somewhat eccentric, cricket writer, statistician and collector of cricketana, who was Jewish) to Richard Hutton (the editorial director of the *Cricketer*) on the subject of Fender's supposed Jewishness.

I bought the lot, which I discovered consisted of carbon copies (some of them multiple copies) of Rosenwater's letters, which he had individually signed. Presumably he had preserved them. Christopher Martin-Jenkins once described Rosenwater as living "surrounded and eventually virtually buried by paper, because he hoarded everything like a squirrel in autumn". CMJ went on to note that Rosenwater "would even go fossicking into waste-paper baskets at Lord's in case any letter that might be of historical interest had been discarded."

The correspondence arose from an article in the *Cricketer* published in October 1991 entitled "Hardly a Living, My Boy", in which Barry Nathan described Fender as "the first major Jewish cricketer". This prompted Geoffrey Copinger (a noted cricket statistician and collector, who used to arrange those of his 12,000 cricket books which he kept in his drawing-room by colour) to write in to say he "would be interested to know from what source he based his statement

that Percy Fender was the first major Jewish cricketer". Copinger pointed out that Streeeton, in his biography of Fender, had said that the man himself denied he was Jewish.

It was Nathan's published response to that letter which raised Rosenwater's hackles. Nathan asserted (inaccurately) that "Richard Streeeton's excellent book on Percy Fender states that Fender was Jewish, even though he denied he was". Rosenwater berated Nathan for failing to read Streeeton's biography with care:

I have had the privilege of talking to PGH Fender's only son, Mr Peter Fender, who confirms - with familial authority - that there is not, and has never been, an atom of truth in the suggestion that Percy GH was Jewish. Nor indeed has any forbear been Jewish. PGH Fender was born a non-Jew; lived his entire life as a non-Jew; and died and was buried a non-Jew. This includes his marriage at Frinton-on-Sea Parish Church in 1924 and his Christian burial in Exeter in 1985. The further evidence for it... is profuse, but would simply weary a cricket readership.

He concluded the letter as follows: "Mr Nathan must not perpetuate a 70-year-old myth."

The cache included a cover letter to Richard Hutton in which Rosenwater expressed the hope that he could find room to publish what he described as an "important" letter - and carbon copies of three letters from Rosenwater to a Mr PRK Fender, in Exeter, in which he thanked him "very kindly for your help and goodwill in bestowing on my letter just the stamp of authority it required".

More than 20 years after Rosenwater's exchange with the *Cricketer*, my research threw up a Fender still living in Exeter, whom I discovered to be Peter Fender's ex-wife. She put me on to their son, Guy Fender, who told me that he was not aware of any Jewish ancestry in his family, which 300 years ago came from the borders of Scotland – the Glen Fender, a Celtic area. Guy pointed out that his great-grandfather was also called Percy Fender. (There is a longstanding Ashkenazi Jewish custom not to name a child after a living relative.) The family came from Worthing. None of his grandfather's artefacts and memorabilia were suggestive that he was Jewish. Guy noted that being called Jewish was a common slander in Percy's day; there was a lot of stigmatisation of minority groups in the 1920s. His grandfather had riled the Establishment (and notably Lord Harris) at Lord's by leading the Surrey players out of the same gate – instead of Gents out of one, Players the other. The Establishment was suspicious of him and thought he was a radical, a socialist, a free-thinker.

Guy put me in contact with his father, Peter, then in his late eighties, who confirmed that there was no Jewishness in the Fender family, and that it was his appearance (in particular his long nose) which may have led people to think that his father was Jewish.

A possible source of the rumour, he felt, was a drawing by the cartoonist Tom Webster, published in the *Daily Mail* in 1924 [see page 16], which accentuated his father's nose and curly hair. "People thought: because he has a long nose he must be Jewish," said Peter, "but this was just tommy rot."

Certainly, Fender's strikingly stereotypical Semitic appearance would have made him stand out in the 1920s. "Percy Fender, tall, angular, beaky, balding, surprisingly reminiscent in appearance of Groucho Marx, looked about as unpromising material for an all-round cricketer as could be conceived", wrote Ronald Mason in his biography of Jack Hobbs. "He looked decades older than he really was, and his large horn-rimmed spectacles on the long inquisitive nose over the assertive tufted moustache gave him the air of a fierce cashier peering angrily among the ledgers for a lost sixpence."

Brian Johnston wrote an amusing story about the difficulties which Fender's long nose caused him in the BBC commentary box. On one occasion the sound engineer in the control scanner told Fender through his headphones that they were not getting enough voice from him. Johnston looked across and saw that Fender was holding the lip mic some way from his mouth. The engineer suggested: "Hold the mic a bit closer so that it's touching the end of your nose." Johnston wrote: "Percy whispered angrily to me: 'I am.'"

In *The Cricket Captains of England*, Alan Gibson wrote that one of the things which told against Fender becoming England captain was that "it was hard for the more solemn judges to take him seriously. The principal reason for this, though not the only one, was his appearance." In Fender's time, a man who looked different from the Anglo-Saxon norm was likely to be considered Jewish. Fender's seemingly Semitic appearance may have gone along with a general sense of unclubbability. The cricketing authorities wanted England cricket captains who fitted

the mould, who accorded with their preconceptions of what a captain should look like. Fender didn't fit that mould for various reasons, of which perceived Jewishness may well have been one.

There was undoubtedly anti-Semitism in English cricket during the 1920s and '30s. The jolly prose of *The Two Maurices Again*, an account by England cricketers Maurice Turnbull and Maurice Allom of the 1930–31 tour of South Africa, included this jarring passage:

We were paying Johannesburg our last visit and we approached it soon after sunrise. We liked it best at this hour when the early-morning sun makes golden the mine dumps. At such a time, one felt one glimpsed at the real Johannesburg, whose great soul by day is hid by coarseness and Jews and commonness.

And CB Fry, then one of English cricket's most influential figures, recounted in glowing terms in *Life Worth Living* (1939) his audience with "Herr Hitler" in 1934. Fry reported that, during their private meeting at the Reich Chancellery, Hitler "touched upon the Jewish question":

He said that we in England did not understand the Jewish question as it existed in Germany. The Jews became good citizens of England, and though many of them achieved powerful positions individually, especially in finance, they were not an organised community within the community: an imperium in imperio. In Germany,

he insisted, the Jews had obtained a stranglehold on finance, medicine, law, and all the learned professions. They were organised as a sub-community, and their support permeated all Communitistic activities... England ought to understand that the National-Socialist State must be all or nothing, and it could not be all unless the antagonism of the Jews – even the passive antagonism – was destroyed. He admitted that there were apparent injustices and hardships in his treatment of the Jews, but that, he added, was their fault because they hung together like a hive of bees.

Fry went on to conclude:

What did I think of Herr Hitler, for what my ideas are worth? I was attracted by him. He looked fresh and fit, and, as I say, notably alert. He was quiet and courteous and simple... He has an innate dignity... I am just writing of this great man as I then found him.

There is an intriguing postscript to this story. The cricket writer Rob Steen recently told me that in 1998 he interviewed Alf Gover and asked him the question I had wanted to ask him – whether Fender was Jewish – to which Gover responded (as is recorded in Steen's excellent book *This Sporting Life: Cricket*): "Well, he was cut like a Jew, from what I saw in the showers."

So was PGH Fender Jewish after all? I think I will leave it to others to research how prevalent circumcision was among non-Jewish middle-class families in Balham, Surrey, in the early 1890s...

• • •



EXTRACTS

He moved to the shed window and looked out into the morning light.

He focused on the garden and the back of the house, working through ten of the Gordon Greenidge eye exercises: eyes closed then opened with exaggerated effect, to get the eye muscles fully functioning. A few deep squats, a twirl of the bat, and he was ready.

It was 10.58am.

JOHN BUDDEN

• • •

So here is a modest proposal. In a bid to make the world fall back in love with the five-day game before it is too late, how about creating an IPL-style carnival of Test cricket involving franchises and to be staged in the heart of the English summer – the one time in the calendar year when nobody else in the world is playing?

ROBERT WINDER

• • •

It is easy to see why Ross's writing was immediately admired and also why it continues to attract champions. In an era when tour books often consisted of little more than profoundly dull reports on matches, he was as interested in the countries he visited as the cricket that was played. Yet his accounts of the cricket reveal both a lyricism and a perception that was far beyond most of his colleagues. Take, for example, this passage from Australia 55 on Tom Graveney:

A player of yacht-like character, beautiful in calm seas yet at the mercy of every change of weather. There are no obvious faults in construction but the barometer has only to fall away a point or two from fair for way to be completely lost and the boat broached to, if not turned for harbour.

PAUL EDWARDS

• • •

“Cricket is like light,” says Spinghar Shinwari, or “Spin” as he is known in his new home. It was the glare of the strip-lights at the indoor school that illuminated Spin's first visit to the County Ground at Eaton Road, Hove. On a dark mid-winter night, he went with his team, Worthing CC, for pre-season nets. It had been a long journey.

Spin was born and raised in Haska Mena Dihalba, a small village in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan. His father never came home from work in uniform and it was never spoken of openly, but everyone knew he was an officer in the Afghan Army.

JAMES METTYEAR

• • •

When Claude Henderson became the first Kolpak cricketer, signing with Leicestershire in 2004, he unwittingly became the first member of a divisive group of players. When the clocks strike midnight on 31 December 2020, signalling the UK's divorce from the European Union, the 17-year era of the Kolpak will come to an end.

DANIEL GALLAN

• • •

Cardus loved a flight of fancy, but Richardson was more than just an old man's whim. He was beloved by cricket-lovers of the 1890s for his stirring bowling performances for Surrey and England – and was practically unplayable for four wonder years. A bowler of high pace and long strides, he would break the ball back into the right-hander in a way that was highly unusual for those of his speed. He was unerringly accurate, bowled wicket to wicket – an unusually high proportion of his dismissals were bowled – and possessed a deadly yorker that he would use sparingly but with highly attuned accuracy. He was also very likeable – if he ever hit a batsman he would deliberately bowl wide of the wicket to avoid hitting him again – with a weakness for “big breakfasts and plenty of stout”. He also had a magnificent moustache.

TANYA ALDRED

• • •

I didn't stand a chance really. Dad played club cricket to a good standard, Mum did the teas and scored, and my older brother Jack started playing as soon as he could lift a bat. I was too young for pre-war cricket to make much of an impression and wartime (no, the last one – I'm 86 not 116) found us preoccupied with other things. So the second half of the 1940s and into the 1950s was when the great game started to influence me.

BRIAN BAKER

• • •

A couple of weeks later, Skip took his own life. No note, no last-minute call to his wife or parents, no samaritan to talk him out of it. I don't know the exact details and I don't want to know them. All I know is my mate, my skipper, the seemingly happy, successful, funny bloke, was in such a bad way that he felt the only way out was suicide.

His funeral was a sad, quiet affair. Never had our group of guys struggled for what to say to each other. Behind all the blokey banter was affection; to a stranger it might have sounded mean, but it never was. Among the team there was nothing but love for each other, from the father and son to the teetotal Muslim to the beer-guzzling veteran. We were all devastated to say goodbye to our Skip.

THOMAS CLARK

• • •

Listen, teenagers, for I speak to you as one myself.

In the beginning, God created cricket. And the game was without form, and darkness covered the faces of those who watched it. Then God said: "Let there be a Test match." And there was a Test match. And God saw that the Test match was good. And God separated the Test match from other, inferior, sports, and the youthful humans participated with glee. And then some satanic heathen invented a perversion of God's game – the ODI – and the weak-minded young humans were tempted by its poisonous fruit. The teenagers strayed further and further from God, and Jesus was powerless to stop them. God watched on in horror. The final straw came when Satan invented Twenty20. God sent a prophet, armed with his gospel of sporting verities. That prophet is me.

FRANK MORRISH

• • •

A good quiz question is one that a decent proportion of people can figure out with some careful thought but isn't so obvious that everybody can guess it in an instant. I suspect I'll never know whether this particular question is a jaffa, probing away in the corridor of cerebral uncertainty, or a rank long-hop dispatched by all and sundry. But here goes...

Which former England keeper, with 23 international caps to his name, is still playing league cricket into his fifties in a small market town in North Yorkshire?

Clue 1: he's Cornish.

Clue 2: his international teammates included a mercurial talent who had a larger-than-life personality and a propensity to consume alcohol at inappropriate times when abroad with England.

Clue 3: it was 24 years between the last cricket match he played as a teenager and his next competitive game of cricket.

KEVIN OWENS

• • •

Curious but not convinced, Kanhai sought out Basil D'Oliveira. "He said it would be a good experience," Kanhai, now 85, says from his home in Blackpool. "I was free that winter with no international commitments and, what with Clive taking the side to the subcontinent, there was nothing holding me back."

Kanhai duly caught an overnight flight to Jan Smuts airport east of Johannesburg. He was collected, introductions were made, and he was installed at the swanky Landdrost Hotel in the centre of town. So far, so good, but there was a catch. Kanhai was able to stay at the Landdrost only by being designated as an "honorary white", a category invented by the Apartheid authorities with the express purpose of giving mainly East Asian businessmen – South Africa sold vast amounts of pig iron to Japan – licence to do business in the country.

LUKE ALFRED

• • •

It's the first Sunday morning in May and he and the team are at Booth Park, home to ECB Premier League side Toft CC. Formed in a neighbouring civil parish of that name in 1928, nowadays the club sits on the outskirts of what road signs call "Historic Knutsford", in a leafy part of Cheshire that is home to Coronation Street divas and footballers' wives, among other such celebrity residents. This is also where, every ten years since 1980, a penny-farthing endurance race has taken place, the last, in 2010, ending in controversy as the celebrations of Czech competitor Josef Zimovčák - "best penny-farthing rider in the world" - were cut short when he learned of his expulsion on only the second lap. Organiser Glynn Stockdale told Cheshire Life: "It's a great tragedy that he had to be disqualified and didn't take kindly to it. He was riding recklessly, took out two other riders and was immediately disqualified by the race marshal, but he doesn't speak English and didn't understand so he got back on..."

TONY HANNAN

• • •

Added to the enormous trunk loaded onto the Queen Mary shortly afterwards, therefore, was my cricket bag: "Pads, gloves, box, cap, bat, boots, socks, trousers, shirts, sweaters." It was a litany I'd learned by rote to ensure I never forgot an essential piece of equipment.

Winnetka is a posh suburb north of the city centre along Lake Shore Drive. The University is at 55th Street on the south side, so my wife and I had quite a way to go. We had only been in Chicago about a week, and a taxi was the only option. Eventually we were decanted onto an extensive green meadow, with a golf clubhouse and course and various other sporting activities going on around. In the middle distance stood a lone figure in a gaudy blazer at the centre of "a corner of a foreign field", approximately the size of a cricket ground.

FRANCIS NEATE

• • •

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SAM MANNING

• • •

For as long as I can remember, cricket has provided the punctuation to my life. My earliest memories of bonding with my father are fused with those of watching the 1983 World Cup with him. My angsty adolescence is neatly bookended by the heartbreaks at Adelaide in 1992 and Calcutta in '96, one featuring a stoic Mohammad Azharuddin, the other a more emotive Vinod Kambli. The match-fixing scandal of 2000 felt as much a loss of innocence as the actual beginning of my adulthood. When Kohli lifted Tendulkar on his shoulders in 2011, a gesture the world recognised as the passing of the baton between generations, the moment was made more personal to me by the imminent arrival of my first child. Cricket helps me remember the small moments, and the big emotions, which otherwise would get swept up in the dustbin of time.

RITESH BANGLANI

• • •

It was also Paine's first real slip since being tasked with not only the captaincy of the national team but also the rehabilitation of its reputation. From the time he was ushered in to help mop up the ball-tampering mess in 2018, Paine has generally walked the tightrope between hard-nosed competitiveness and acceptable conduct.

But the scene was always set for him to fall at the first misstep. The release last year of The Test, a fly-on-the-wall documentary series on Amazon Prime, may have hindered him despite its subtext as a story of restitution. The cameras provided a rare and fascinating insight to the inner workings of the dressing-room but the eight-part series arguably reinforced the theme of the Australian men's team as custodians of sportsmanship. OK boys, we stuffed up, but the story arc finishes with us as the elite good guys who have elately learned our elite lesson.

MELINDA FARRELL

• • •

The blade master with his bat, cold in the hand,

looks ahead, his art put aside on walking.

Spring returns, but not the wingbeat of his willow

with the swallows, summer departs with his walking.

JACKIE LITHERLAND

• • •

For some years now the UK has been crippled by an unhealthy fascination with the Second World War. And by some years, I mean about 75. It has, quite appropriately for a war, been further weaponised over the last decade by “patriotic” culture warriors seeking to root out treacherous, leftie milquetoasts who would gladly have sold Douglas Bader and Vera Lynn to the Cubans if it meant a regular supply of cheap avocados to crush onto their neo-Marxist sourdough of a morning, washed down with an oat-milk, fairtrade, decaf latte. Indeed, I confess to recreating the war over a cooked breakfast most mornings. The toast (or fried bread – I consider myself a full-fat patriot) becomes Germany. The egg is France. The bacon is, of course, plucky old Blighty. The bread invades the egg, and it requires the bacon to sort out the mess. The last mouthful therefore is always the final forkful of bacon. Marvellously, this is the gift that keeps on giving. Get a full English from a hotel buffet and you can convert sausages into the Russians, baked beans into the Japanese (so hard to finish off), hash browns into the Americans (obviously) and the tomatoes into Italians (you have to eat them quickly before they get cold).

DANIEL NORCROSS

• • •

I’m not sure what made me do it... my precocious curiosity? I put my hand into the pockets to see what I might find.

Nothing at all in one of the coats. In another, the stub of a pencil and an empty cigarette packet. And then, in another, I felt something... some things... which made me hesitate for a few moments before I took them out and examined them.

STEPHEN GREGORY

• • •

How did Glamorgan gain promotion to the first-class ranks? Not by being a dominant force in the Minor Counties Championship – they finished sixth in 1920. And not because the Championship felt they needed another member – in 1914, the last season before the war, there was a consensus that 16 counties were too many. There were not enough spectators for all the matches, and Gloucestershire and Worcestershire, close to bankruptcy, were on the verge of dropping out. Yet in 1919, after four years of grim warfare, a shortened programme of two-day matches attracted large, sport-starved crowds; the summer of 1920 built on that success, and for 1921 the freshly confident Championship was happy to welcome a 17th member.

Back in 1890 the counties had voted in favour of three divisions of eight, all playing each other twice, with promotion and relegation. But this proved too vulgarly competitive for the Victorian purists, and instead they muddled along with a higgledy-piggledy system in which counties arranged their own fixtures – in 1919 Yorkshire played 26, Northamptonshire 12. Newcomers could join if they could persuade enough counties to play them.

STEPHEN CHALKE

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