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WINTER 2024

Nightwatchman

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

WISDEN



THE Nightwatchman

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

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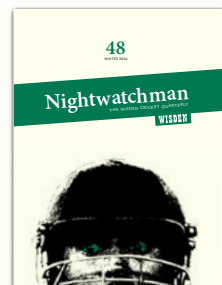
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ISSUE 48 – WINTER 2024

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GUYANA STRIKES LIQUID GOLD

Patrick Hargreaves on how oil and cricket are big news in Guyana

Essequibo is Cinderella country, a place where the past fades and the future dances. On the northwest coast of Guyana this pocket of the world about the size of Greece could be instrumental to the fortunes of two former behemoths who've fallen on hard times - the West Indies cricket team and the Maduro regime in Venezuela. The region will impact the affairs of world cricket, and cricket has a chance to impact world affairs.

In May 2015 it was announced that petroleum had been discovered off northwest South America in the Essequibo region. The hydrocarbon that has promised life and threatened death revealed itself in the small South American country with delight and fear like a bottle of tequila at a house party. The discovery of 11 billion barrels of oil has fundamentally changed the economic outlook for the 800,000

Guyanese people as it is expected to eventually bring in \$10 billion annually into the public purse. Suspecting world demand for the fossil fuel would drop dramatically in the near future, Guyanese leaders quickly set about creating the infrastructure and commercial apparatus required to refine the fossil fuel. The US Energy Information Administration ranked Guyana as the third fastest non-OPEC producing state in 2024, outpacing both China and Norway. It is the fastest growing economy in the world according to the IMF, with GDP growth of 33.9% in 2024. The petro dollars have powered a rise of 27 rankings in the Human Development Index since they started producing oil in 2019.

Along with schools, roads and hospitals, Guyana is investing heavily in sports stadia, especially cricket stadiums. The government

has five major cricket stadium projects in development around the country, with the expectation of being able to host international games. The investment focuses on a major multi-purpose facility in Anna Regina, Essequibo, where the Government hopes to host the 2025 edition of the Women's Caribbean Premier League. Cricket runs deep in the Guyanese Government. Upon opening the Shivnarine Chanderpaul Training Facility, Minister for Youth, Sports and Culture, Charles Ramson - the young chiselled face of the new sports investment in the only English-speaking country in South America - dedicated a not insignificant part of his speech to getting tonked for several boundaries by Chanderpaul in a district game, and how grateful he was to have the former Test batsman carefully explain how he got his lines and field placements wrong. The government values cricket as culturally important and crucial to improving the social and economic outcomes for the country and has invested in 400 new facilities since 2020.

"We're building sport from the bottom up, that is how you change the lives of people in this country. School obviously and education goes without saying, that is the universal formula for changing the lives of the children," said Ramson.

"But community sport is the lifeblood of our communities, it provides a place where there is a safe space to pursue your passion. If there is no alternative, they turn to hanging with the gangs and doing things that are not beneficial for their future. They get involved in narcotics and stealing and we all suffer from that.

"It has been the most important bit of investment that we have been making and we have seen how it has impacted tens of thousands of kids across the country," he said at the opening of the facility.

Guyana has three regions; Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo. The capital Georgetown is in Demerara on the coast, while Berbice is in the hinterlands bordering Suriname. Shamar Joseph worked cutting timber in Baracara, Berbice, while Carl Hooper scored his top of score 233 in Georgetown. Essequibo is separated from the rest of the country by the river that shares its name; anything from the other parts of the country must travel by boat and aeroplane. Ramananesh Sarwan is the most well-known cricketer from the area. Counties contested four-day matches for decades, but Essequibo never won the title. The region had been held back by small populations spread out across large distances which made regular, high-level cricket more difficult to organise than in the rest of the country.

Ravendra Madholall is a cricket journalist who is now based in Canada but grew up in Essequibo. He and his brothers were the first set of siblings to represent the county and he remembers first playing cricket as children using guavas as balls and banana branches as bats.

"My dad used to say if you want to play cricket professionally you have to get used to using a hard ball," laughs Ravendra, known universally as Madho.

Madho has seen the rapid investment from the oil revenues in the region,



not just in hospitals and schools but in cricket and he expects this to lift standards in Essequibo.

“The infrastructure has changed a lot in the last couple of years. I have seen steady development, sports grounds, with more facilities planned and players are taking their game more seriously. There is now a good level of administration, but importantly we’ve more competitive, consistent cricket, which will help with the structure and development of players.

“They’ve put a lot of money into sports and tourism. Things have improved dramatically since we discovered oil. We have seen more pavilions, lights are being installed, it’s very impressive and a good move by the government.”

Guyana has been described as the Qatar of South America; it’s oil rich and it’s investing heavily to attract tourism. However, an argument could be made that it is the Norway of South America. A third of its cabinet are women, and it’s using its well-financed voice to be a strong advocate for climate action. Speaking at the United Nations, President Ali lobbied world leaders to introduce a market mechanism for biodiversity, essentially creating a market mechanism for environmental protection. Its national agriculture policy also supports and prioritises women-owned businesses. While inequality persists, oil revenue has allowed Guyanese leaders to tackle long-standing inequalities with vigour.

But the discovery of petroleum didn’t just bring geopolitical power and cricket stadia. It brought problems. It was discovered in an offshore area that Venezuela believes is their territory. Led by an autocrat with a

penchant for extrajudicial killings, Venezuela is Russia’s strongest ally in South America. Facing economic depression and rising political dissidence, President Maduro has sought to use the Essequibo dispute to solidify support.

“It comes up every time there is an election, it’s like ‘oh this again?’ Even though we have known that the matter was settled in 1899,” Trina Williams, a journalist for the *Guyana Chronicle* tells me, almost smirking down the Zoom line.

The dispute goes back centuries. When the UK first set out to define the borders of its territory in South America with Gran Colombia (the precursor to Colombia), Venezuela, Ecuador and Panama, which had won independence from Spain in 1819. Britain sought to define the borders by what became known as the Schomburg line, after the German botanist who carried out scientific exploration in the area. Britain claimed the territory as far west as the Orinoco river, while Venezuela claimed territory as far east as the Essequibo river. In a precursor of what was to come, it was only with the discovery of gold that the two states delineated a hard border.

Britain’s claim to the territory is based on the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1814 which transferred Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo to the UK, the Dutch having alliances with indigenous groups in the area, effectively giving it a “sphere of influence”. The matter was considered settled after arbitration in 1899 with Venezuela accepting the tribunal’s ruling that gave it just over 10% of the claimed territory. Defeated

and embarrassed, Venezuela left the matter for much of the 20th century, until a diplomat’s letters published posthumously suggested that Britain had colluded with Russia to ensure a positive result.

“All they’ve got is a dead lawyer’s letter!” Williams declares.

Venezuela brought the case to the UN in 1962, which led to the 1966 Geneva Agreement, which tied the parties to “find satisfactory solutions for a practical settlement of the controversy which has arisen as a result of the Venezuelan contention that the 1899 award is null and void.” Effectively, no concessions were made, but all sides promised to not make any further claims on the territory.

The Guyanese claim Venezuela only cares for the territory when they can sense Guyana is weak, or when it is politically convenient for their leaders. They claim the people are culturally Guyanese and support staying in Guyana.

“When the referendum was announced, the streets in Essequibo were filled with people wearing ‘Essequibo is Guyana’ shirts. We are united on this,” says Williams.

With Venezuela militarily strong, through the UN Guyana has consistently pressed for a peaceful resolution to the conflict with independent mediators.

By 2004, after decades of diplomatic back and forth, the dispute was largely considered settled when Hugo Chavez declared it finished. Guyana then submitted claims to the UN

for the purpose of oil exploration. Venezuela objected to this and the area became contested again.

Tired at the lack of resolution the UN Secretary General handed the case to the International Court of Justice to adjudicate whether the 1899 agreement was valid.

The issue exploded in October 2023, when President Maduro promised to hold a referendum to oppose “by all means” Guyana’s claim to the territory. Not dissimilar to Russia’s approach in the Crimea, Venezuela declared all people living in Essequibo had Venezuelan citizenship. This was laughed off by the Guyanese Vice President, Bharrat Jagdeo. “We don’t want their ID cards. People are fleeing your country if you didn’t notice it, Maduro,” Jagdeo said on the eve of the referendum.

The dispute threatened to move to warfare when Venezuela started positioning troops near the border, while the US and the UK started joint military exercises with their Guyanese counterparts, Britain sending a Royal Navy vessel to the area in January 2024.

Both sides signed an agreement promising to not use force and agreed to settle the issue in accordance with international law, although Venezuela rejects the ICJ’s authority to rule in the matter. Both countries continue to present their cases before the International Court of Justice, and the court will likely rule in 2025.

Guyana’s case rests on two factors: the legality of proceedings during the colonial period and the Essequibo residents’ self-identification as

Guyanese. Trina Williams, who participated in marches across Essequibo against the Venezuelan referendum, said, “Yes, maps play a part obviously, but after a hundred years, culture and reality set in.” Put another way, Essequibians play cricket, not baseball.

After submitting evidence to the ICJ on their historical claim to the territory, Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodríguez told reporters: “We have delivered a document with the historical truth of Venezuela and evidence demonstrating that a crime was committed in 1899 with a fraudulent award. We have also shown how they [Guyana] intend to commit another crime by instrumentalizing the International Court of Justice.”

According to international observers, President Maduro has an odd relationship with the rule of law – he lost the 2024 presidential elections handsomely but remains in power and while he is there, Venezuela’s claim over Essequibo is likely to remain a strong focus. This means Guyana is relying on the US and UK, who are directing their efforts at expanding the capabilities of the Guyana Defence Force but would inevitably be asked to do much more if Venezuela were to invade. Russia’s preoccupation with its invasion of Ukraine, and China’s aversion to picking sides, downplays the chances of this happening but it is not impossible.

One way in which Guyana has looked further into its international investment is through establishing the *Global T20 Cricket League*, a five-team tournament taking place in late November. The tournament is sponsored by Exxon Mobil, the

Texan oil company contracted to develop the petroleum wells. The vision is for the tournament to be the spiritual successor to the old champion’s league. The inaugural edition will see the home side Guyana Amazon Warriors compete against England’s Hampshire, Australia’s Victoria, Pakistan’s Lahore Qalandars, and Bangladesh’s Rangpur Riders, all competing for the \$1 million prize money. Hampshire confirmed their participation in 2024 tournament, with Director of Cricket Giles White saying: “Guyana is a beautiful country with a huge passion for cricket, and their ambition to become a global sporting destination is evident through their investment in launching an all-new T20 tournament.

“The league is such an exciting concept. International club competition has proven itself to be successful across other sports and has been lacking in cricket for some time.

“Cricket is a truly global sport and we are embracing the opportunities this presents. It can be challenging to innovate within a crowded market but Guyana really are leading the way in supporting the creation of a franchise tournament that will engage cricket fans from across the world.”

Because of Hampshire’s involvement, the tournament will bring English eyes to Guyana, which could increase trade and relations with the UK. Long term, it’s a lot harder to turn requests for diplomatic support when some of your best cricket players are in the part of the world regularly. As UN debates increasing the Security Council members to include India, cricket offers a soft power way for

Guyana to strengthen cultural ties with prominent geopolitical players.

On the announcement of the tournament, President Ali told reporters: “Cricket is part of our cultural history; it is that unifying force, part of our heritage, and an integral part of our strategic objective in economic diversification with a strong emphasis on tourism.”

“As Guyana positions itself as a global shaper in energy, food, and climate landscape, we will use this platform to bring a world-class tournament to our shores.”

Unlike other countries that use sport to ‘wash’ their foreign policy and human rights abuses, Guyana is unique among the oil rich in that it is using sport to tacitly broaden support for its foreign policy that is anchored in peace, climate action, and economic justice for the global south.

“Guyana has the potential to become a new kind of petro state, one that is

a democracy, with friendly relations with the West (through Washington and London) and niche diplomatic engagement internationally aiming to establish itself as a progressive actor, with awareness about topics sensitive to small powers and countries in the so-called “Global South”. However, the Venezuelan leadership currently casts a long shadow on Guyana’s future,” says João Vitor Tossini a visiting researcher at the Defence Studies Department of King’s College London.

It is uncertain how successful Guyana’s Global T20 League will be, if it will become the international domestic pinnacle, make West Indies cricket profitable and in turn fund the Test team, but if it does attract tourism and investors, it will help strengthen commercial ties with key strategic partners while Venezuela becomes increasingly isolated. T20 cricket is supposed to be all-out attack, but in this case it’s all about defence. It’s one small tool the country can use to avoid conflict.

• • •



EXTRACTS

Amiss faced the first ball, a bouncer that he ducked under. “It whistled past Dennis’s nose,” said Old, “and you could actually see him blink and think, ‘Right, it is going to be like this, is it?’ It was a shock to everybody’s system.”

Later in the first over was a delivery so quick that all Amiss could do was get the edge of his bat to the ball, his head snapping in panic towards the four-man slip cordon in time to see it pass through on the way to the boundary. “It was quite frightening,” he admitted, reconsidering the wisdom of trying to get on the front foot. “The ball just flew around.”

DAVID TOSSELL

• • •

Pausing to take in the scene paid dividends. Cowie saw that three lifeboats were now some way towards the nearest shore, but the fourth seemed to be drifting back towards the stricken ship. He and three of the cricketers from Lincoln University watched as it approached and bumped alongside the *Wahine*. At the crest of the wave it was only just below the ship’s railing, but as it dipped into the trough the drop became significant and the water dragged the boat away from the vessel’s side.

The four watched what was happening and decided to take their chances by attempting to jump as the boat rose on the wave to meet them. It would take precise timing, but they all made it. “I don’t think the people I landed on were too happy, but it worked...” says Cowie.

TREVOR AUGER

• • •

The scattered spectators rustled applause like dry leaves, glad to be here after rainy days, the vision we guessed handed down over time,

that was the beauty of it, it was still the same as the one on birthday cards to remind us of what’s unchanging while we change.

JACKIE LITHERLAND

• • •

Little interrupts his reverie: the rasp of a match as he relights his pipe, a not-unfriendly grunt to a fellow spectator, an approving comment to a player near the boundary’s edge. There are memories, on this field and others like it, both great and small. The good times and the bad; the friends and the rivals – all now gone.

HUGH TATHAM

• • •

Australians playing in county cricket during the Golden Age were rare but not unusual. Billy Murdoch had gone on four tours of England between 1880 and 1890 and played and captained in 16 Test matches. In 1884 he became the first player to hit a double century in Test cricket. After 1890 he settled in England and qualified to play for Sussex, who he also captained between 1893 and 1899. He played in one Test for England, at Cape Town against South Africa in 1892, and after finishing at Sussex he played from 1901 to 1904 for London County, for whom both Poidevin and Kermode were to play.

ANDREW STATHAM

• • •

Strange as it now sounds, there was some talk about whether or not Len Hutton was the right man to lead England in their defence of the Ashes in 1954–55 against Ian Johnson’s Australians. The master batter was then 38 and had absented himself from the team captaincy for the middle two Tests at home to Pakistan in 1954, prompting questions about both his mental and physical fitness. There was also press speculation about whether, as a professional, he was quite the right man for the job. The primary rival candidate was 25-year-old David Sheppard, the future Bishop of Liverpool. By then reading theology at Cambridge, Sheppard had proved an astute leader of Sussex in 1953, and appealed to those who still preferred their captains to be amateurs drawn from the ancient universities. England respectively won and drew the second and third Pakistan Tests under his leadership.

CHRIS SANDFORD

• • •

“No brother, things aren’t good. It’s chaos, there’s looting and fires burning everywhere. I need to leave, I need to hide.”

The desperation in Shahdot’s voice, my cousin of an almost identical age, was startling. Over a number of weeks, the intermittent news coming out of Bangladesh, gleaned from family WhatsApp groups and social media, signalled an increasingly dire situation. Listening to Shahdot’s voicemail was jarring, it put paid to the vague notion that everything would be alright in the end, a belief in large part informed by distance.

TAWHID QURESHI

• • •

So Len was my man. So intense was my devotion that in the school classroom I pressed my thumb to my nose hour after hour, hoping it would take on a new profile in keeping with Len’s. Many years later, back in England, I found myself near to him in the press-box. I also discovered that he lived not far away (in New Malden, Surrey) so I arranged to call to have him sign some books which covered his career.

As we chatted I noticed that his collection of *Wisdens* extended precisely from the start of his playing career until the end. The books I took to him were mainly tour books, and as he signed them one by one, this man whose astounding 13-hour 364 at The Oval in 1938 still seemed like something out of fiction murmured an enquiry about the health of each of the authors: “How’s old Lyn [Wellings]?” “How’s John [Arlott]?” “Ah . . . how’s Jim [Swanton] these days?” My responses were on the whole quite unavoidably negative. So we changed the subject.

DAVID FRITH

• • •

In the first half of the 1970s, the only batters under 30 given an England Test debut were Greig (raised in South Africa), Bob Woolmer, Frank Hayes, David Lloyd, Graham Roope and Graham Gooch. Experienced journeymen and overseas stars dominated the county batting averages between 1974 and 1976. Other than Greig, Roope and Woolmer, the only English-qualified 20-somethings in the top 30 or so batters from 1974–76 were Peter Roebuck, Roger Knight, Graham Barlow and Brian Rose.

CRIS ANDREWS

• • •

For T10, the main source of income appears to be from undisclosed financial backers and advertising, which is given a boost by the TV distribution deals. And that’s where the Max60 and so many other of the flood of T10 competitions begin to get murky.

Two of the main Max60 sponsors were betting company Dafabet – an increasingly familiar name in cricket as the last issue of the *Nightwatchman* revealed – and online casino JSK1. Home side the Grand Cayman Jaguars were sponsored by Babu88, while the New York Strikers have been sponsored by 1xBat and had another website, Profit777 on their shirts at the Zim Afro, where the franchise played as the NY Lagos Strikers.

STEVE MENARY

• • •

“Geez, Marty, can’t you make that cricket game last three hours instead of 30?” With that question in September 1995, Nate Smith, the American CEO of New Zealand’s Sky TV, set Martin Crowe the challenge of creating a new version of the sport: Cricket Max.

Just as Kerry Packer’s World Series Cricket revolution in one-day cricket in the late 1970s had been prompted by a confrontation over TV rights, so 20 years later it was television that also led to the development of Cricket Max. “Sky had quite a few subscriptions during the rugby season, naturally, because New Zealand’s a rugby-mad country but then people were turning off the subscription during the summer,” says James Cameron, who was an editor for the company at the time but went on to become responsible for their cricket coverage. Television New Zealand, the free-to-air broadcaster, had the rights to all the Kiwis’ international games, thus Sky needed something to bridge the fallow period of November to February and minimise subscriber churn.

ROGER DOMENEGHETTI

• • •

I spent much of my adolescence searching for male role models – the stoic, steely type who never complained, who you could depend upon in a crisis, and who did it all with a swagger. Somewhat predictably, I rarely found such men in real life, so instead I sought out male heroes in fiction and in sport. As a youth county cricketer growing up in the nineties, Graham Thorpe was my batting idol. This, despite the fact, that I was a) right-handed b) an opening batsman and c) had a textbook Atherton skillset. Fortunately, when I was ten, my father bought me a full-length mirror which I had to practise every shot a hundred times in front of to build the perfect technique. Suffice to say, I hated it. But being right-handed meant that my reflection looked left-handed, so for the next five years I spent every night replicating Thorpe’s trademark square cut with that flamboyant, propeller-like follow through (or as flamboyant as Englishmen were legally allowed to be in the nineties). There was a particular way he dropped his hands to evade anything short of a length that I still mimic to this day, barely aware that I am doing it.

KRIS PATHIRANA

• • •

Garry Sobers heard the sound of smashing glass outside. Instinctively he looked around the dressing-room to see which players were close to the windows. He forgot to knot his tie.

He was relieved to see the players seemed none the wiser. Maybe he was tense because he guessed what was coming after Tony Greig had run out non-striker, Alvin Kallicharran, off the last ball of the day. The Trinidad crowd could be rowdy. And they had a reputation to uphold. But this was something else. Sobers sensed menace in the air.

“Send Greig home, apartheid Greig. Send him home.”

LUKE ALFRED

• • •

If you are both a cricket and a rugby union fan, a not uncommon combination in South-West Wales, mixed feelings were inevitable in July when the Ospreys rugby union franchise announced plans to make their long-term home at St Helen’s, Swansea. Survival for rugby came at the price of extinction for cricket, at least at St Helen’s, where the upgrades and amendments required will make first-class cricket impossible.

As a rugby fan, Robert Croft, the Glamorgan player who played most Tests for England, and one of the finest of many from Carmarthenshire, due west of Swansea, gets what it means for the Ospreys. But he spoke for many when he said: “If this is at the expense of cricket at Wales’ most iconic and historic cricket ground then it’s disappointing, heartbreaking and sad.”

HUW RICHARDS

• • •

At the AGM, he stands by
the dead BBQ counting ash
snowflakes into the eaves

of the clubhouse and overhears
cruel resolutions.

JAMES THELLUSSON

• • •

Playing in a charity match in a stately home, Close batted scratchily and was out for not many. The next man in, facing the same bowler, proceeded to hit three gigantic sixes into the next field. “Stupid berk,” Brian muttered. “I could have done that, but I didn’t want to lose the ball.”

In another such match Imran Khan hit Brian back over his head for three perfect straight sixes, only for Brian to snatch his sweater at the end of the over and say, “That’ll do for me. I could never bowl at bloody sloggers.”

STEPHEN CHALKE

• • •

In the town bookshop, I approach the counter. “Should I sign it?” I ask the assistant. A pause. “Ah, you’re him.” Another staff member chips in: “You could do our book festival. It’s making a comeback.”

Words by the Water in Keswick in the Lake District, has missed a year. Book festivals have seen a downturn post-Covid, suffering from sponsors withdrawing, podcasts covering everything authors have to say, inflation and saturation.

MATT APPLEBY

• • •

Bestwick, Mitchell, Copson and Jackson. Four legendary Derbyshire bowlers. Four proud ex-miners. It used to be said that if Derbyshire were short of a star bowler all they needed to do was whistle down the nearest pit shaft and up one would pop. It was never quite that simple of course but it is indisputable that several of the most outstanding bowlers in the county’s long history, and certainly some of the most colourful characters, emerged from the mines.

Had Derbyshire been able to produce high-class batters as readily as it unearthed great bowlers the county would likely have dominated the County Championship for significant chunks of the twentieth century. They never managed to do so.

JOHN STONE

• • •

THE **Nightwatchman**

THE WISDEN CRICKET QUARTERLY

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