Cricket

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Cricket is a bat-and-ball game played between two teams of eleven players on a field at the centre of which is a 20-metre (22-yard) pitch with a wicket at each end, each comprising two bails balanced on three stumps. The batting side scores runs by striking the ball bowled at the wicket with the bat, while the bowling and fielding side tries to prevent this and dismiss each player (so they are "out"). Means of dismissal include being bowled, when the ball hits the stumps and dislodges the bails, and by the fielding side catching the ball after it is hit by the bat, but before it hits the ground. When ten players have been dismissed, the innings ends and the teams swap roles. The game is adjudicated by two umpires, aided by a third umpire and match referee in international matches. They communicate with two off-field scorers who record the match's statistical information.

There are various formats ranging from Twenty20, played over a few hours with each team batting for a single innings of 20 overs, to Test matches, played over five days with unlimited overs and the teams each batting for two innings of unlimited length. Traditionally cricketers play in all-white kit, but in limited overs cricket they wear club or team colours. In addition to the basic kit, some players wear protective gear to prevent injury caused by the ball, which is a hard, solid spheroid made of compressed leather with a slightly raised sewn seam enclosing a cork core which is layered with tightly wound string.

Historically, cricket's origins are uncertain and the earliest definite reference is in south-east England in the middle of the 16th century. It spread globally with the expansion of the British Empire, leading to the first international matches in the second half of the 19th century. The game's governing body is the International Cricket Council (ICC), which has over 100 members, twelve of which are full members who play Test matches. The game's rules are held in a code called the Laws of Cricket which is owned and maintained by Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) in London. The sport is followed primarily in the Indian subcontinent, Australasia, the United Kingdom, southern Africa and the West Indies, its globalisation occurring during the expansion of the British Empire and remaining popular into the 21st century.[1] Women's cricket, which is organised and played separately, has also achieved international standard. The most successful side playing international cricket is Australia, having won seven One Day International trophies, including five World Cups, more than any other country and having been the top-rated Test side more than any other country.

Cricket is one of many games in the "club ball" sphere that basically involve hitting a ball with a hand-held implement; others include baseball, golf, hockey, tennis, squash, badminton, and table tennis.[2] In cricket's case, a key difference is the existence of a solid target structure, the wicket (originally, it is thought, a "wicket gate" through which sheep were herded), that the batsman must defend.[3] The cricket historian Harry Altham identified three "groups" of "club ball" games: the "hockey group", in which the ball is driven to and fro between two targets (the goals); the "golf group", in which the ball is driven towards an undefended target (the hole); and the "cricket group", in which "the ball is aimed at a mark (the wicket) and driven away from it".[4]

It is generally believed that cricket originated as a children's game in the south-eastern counties of England, sometime during the medieval period.[3] Although there are claims for prior dates, the earliest definite reference to cricket being played comes from evidence given at a court case in Guildford on Monday, 17 January 1597 (Julian calendar; equating to 30 January 1598 in the Gregorian calendar). The case concerned ownership of a certain plot of land and the court heard the testimony of a 59-year-old coroner, John Derrick, who gave witness that:[5][6][7]

"Being a scholler in the ffree schoole of Guldeford hee and diverse of his fellows did runne and play there at creckett and other plaies".

Given Derrick's age, it was about half a century earlier when he was at school and so it is certain that cricket was being played c. 1550 by boys in Surrey.[7] The view that it was originally a children's game is reinforced by Randle Cotgrave's 1611 English-French dictionary in which he defined the noun "crosse" as "the crooked staff wherewith boys play at cricket" and the verb form "crosser" as "to play at cricket".[8][9]

One possible source for the sport's name is the Old English word "cryce" (or "cricc") meaning a crutch or staff. In Samuel Johnson's Dictionary, he derived cricket from "cryce, Saxon, a stick".[5] In Old French, the word "criquet" seems to have meant a kind of club or stick.[10] Given the strong medieval trade connections between south-east England and the County of Flanders when the latter belonged to the Duchy of Burgundy, the name may have been derived from the Middle Dutch (in use in Flanders at the time) "krick"(-e), meaning a stick (crook).[10] Another possible source is the Middle Dutch word "krickstoel", meaning a long low stool used for kneeling in church and which resembled the long low wicket with two stumps used in early cricket.[11] According to Heiner Gillmeister, a European language expert of Bonn University, "cricket" derives from the Middle Dutch phrase for hockey, met de (krik ket)sen (i.e., "with the stick chase").[12] Gillmeister has suggested that not only the name but also the sport itself may be of Flemish origin.[12]

Growth of amateur and professional cricket in England

Evolution of the cricket bat. The original "hockey stick" (left) evolved into the straight bat from c. 1760 when pitched delivery bowling began.

Although the main object of the game has always been to score the most runs, the early form of cricket differed from the modern game in certain key technical aspects. The ball was bowled underarm by the bowler and all along the ground towards a batsman armed with a bat that, in shape, resembled a hockey stick; the batsman defended a low, two-stump wicket; and runs were called "notches" because the scorers recorded them by notching tally sticks.[13][14][15]

In 1611, the year Cotgrave's dictionary was published, ecclesiastical court records at Sidlesham in Sussex state that two parishioners, Bartholomew Wyatt and Richard Latter, failed to attend church on Easter Sunday because they were playing cricket. They were fined 12d each and ordered to do penance.[16] This is the earliest mention of adult participation in cricket and it was around the same time that the earliest known organised inter-parish or village match was played – at Chevening, Kent.[5][17] In 1624, a player called Jasper Vinall died after he was accidentally struck on the head during a match between two parish teams in Sussex.[18]

Cricket remained a low-key local pursuit for much of the century.[9] It is known, through numerous references found in the records of ecclesiastical court cases, to have been proscribed at times by the Puritans before and during the Commonwealth.[19][20] The problem was nearly always the issue of Sunday play as the Puritans considered cricket to be "profane" if played on the Sabbath, especially if large crowds and/or gambling were involved.[21][22]

According to the social historian Derek Birley, there was a "great upsurge of sport after the Restoration" in 1660.[23] Gambling on sport became a problem significant enough for Parliament to pass the 1664 Gambling Act, limiting stakes to £100 which was in any case a colossal sum exceeding the annual income of 99% of the population.[23] Along with prizefighting, horse racing and blood sports, cricket was perceived to be a gambling sport.[24] Rich patrons made matches for high stakes, forming teams in which they engaged the first professional players.[25] By the end of the century, cricket had developed into a major sport which was spreading throughout England and was already being taken abroad by English mariners and colonisers – the earliest reference to cricket overseas is dated 1676.[26] A 1697 newspaper report survives of "a great cricket match" played in Sussex "for fifty guineas apiece" – this is the earliest known match that is generally considered top-class.[27][28]

The patrons, and other players from the social class known as the "gentry", began to classify themselves as "amateurs"[fn 1] to establish a clear distinction vis-à-vis the professionals, who were invariably members of the working class, even to the point of having separate changing and dining facilities.[29] The gentry, including such high-ranking nobles as the Dukes of Richmond, exerted their honour code of noblesse oblige to claim rights of leadership in any sporting contests they took part in, especially as it was necessary for them to play alongside their "social inferiors" if they were to win their bets.[30] In time, a perception took hold that the typical amateur who played in first-class cricket, until 1962 when amateurism was abolished, was someone with a public school education who had then gone to one of Cambridge or Oxford University – society insisted that such people were "officers and gentlemen" whose destiny was to provide leadership.[31] In a purely financial sense, the cricketing amateur would theoretically claim expenses for playing while his professional counterpart played under contract and was paid a wage or match fee; in practice, many amateurs claimed somewhat more than actual expenditure and the derisive term "shamateur" was coined to describe the syndrome.[32][33]