

The MCC

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Part of the fun of starting a club is in the planning and preparation that go into it. If you were to set up a hockey, football or cricket club in your neighbourhood, how would you go about it?

Write down the following details in your notebook and complete the initial plan for your sports club.



- Name
- Necessary equipment
- Venue for meetings
- Membership requirements
- Venue for matches
- Membership fee

The story that you are about to read is set in the fictional town of Malgudi. It is a story about three friends who are part of the Malgudi Cricket Club, or the MCC. The MCC originally stood for the Marylebone Cricket Club of London—a very significant club which was founded in 1787 and made cricket laws until 1969. Let us read and find out what happens when Swami and his friends decide to buy cricket gear for their team.



The three friends sat around Rajam's table in his room. Mani held before him a catalogue¹ of Messrs Binns, the shop for sports goods. He read, 'Junior Willard Bats, Seven Eight, made of the finest seasoned² wood, used by Cambridge Junior Boys' Eleven.'

'Let me have a look at it,' said Rajam. He bent over the table and said, 'Seems to be a fine bat. Have a look at it, Swami.' Swaminathan craned³ his neck and agreed that it was a fine bat, but he was indiscreet⁴ enough to say, 'It looks like any other bat in the catalogue.'

Mani's left hand shot out, held his neck and pressed his face close to the picture of the bat: 'Why do you pretend to be a cricket player if you cannot see the difference between Junior Willard and other bats? You are not fit to be in our team.' After this admonition⁵, the hold was relaxed.

Rajam asked, 'Swami, do you know what the catalogue man calls the Junior Willard? It seems it is the Rolls Royce among the junior bats. Don't you know the difference between the Rolls Royce and other cars?' Swaminathan replied haughtily⁶, 'I never said I saw no difference between the Rolls Royce and other cars.'

¹catalogue: a complete list of items that people can look at and buy ²seasoned: dried in order to harden and make perfect

³craned: stretch out one's body or neck in order to see something ⁴indiscreet: (here) careless, foolish ⁵admonition: a firm warning about one's behaviour ⁶haughtily: in a proud manner



'What is the difference?' urged Rajam.

Mani laughed and teased, 'Come on. If you really know the difference, why don't you say it?'

Swaminathan said, 'The Rolls costs a lakh of rupees, while other cars cost about 10,000; a Rolls has engines made of silver, while other cars have iron engines.'

'Oh, oh!' jeered⁷ Rajam.

'A Rolls Royce never gives trouble, while other cars always give

Why did Rajam ask Swami to list the differences between a Rolls Royce and other cars?

trouble; a Rolls engine never stops; a Rolls Royce never makes a noise, while other cars always make a noise.'

'Why not deliver a lecture on the Rolls Royce?' asked Mani.

'Swami, I am glad you know so much about the Rolls Royce. I am at the same time ashamed to find you knowing so little about Willard Junior. We had about a dozen Willard Juniors when I was in Bishop Waller's. Oh! What bats! There are actual springs inside the bat, so that when you touch the ball it flies. Fine silk cord is wound round the handle. You don't know anything, and yet you talk! Show me another bat, which has silk cord and springs like the Willard.'

There was a pause and after that Rajam said, 'Note it down, Swami.' Swaminathan noted down on a paper, 'Vilord June-ear bat,' and looking up, asked, 'How many?'

'Say three. Will that do, Mani?'

'Why waste money on three bats? Two will do ...'

'But suppose one breaks in the middle of a match?' Rajam asked.

'Do you suppose we are going to supply bats to our opponents? They will have to come provided with bats. We must make it clear.'

'Even then, if our bat breaks, we may have to stop playing.'

'Two will do, Rajam, unless you want to waste money.'

Rajam's enthusiasm was great. He left his chair and sat on the arm of Mani's chair, gloating over⁸ the pictures of cricket goods in the catalogue. Swaminathan, though he was considered to be a bit of a heretic⁹, caught the enthusiasm and perched¹⁰ on the other arm of the chair. All the three devoured¹¹ with their eyes the glossy¹² pictures of cricket balls, bats and nets.

⁷jeered: made rude and mocking remarks, typically in a loud voice ⁸gloating over: looking at with pleasure ⁹heretic: a person having an opinion that disagrees strongly with what most people believe ¹⁰perched: sat on something high ¹¹devoured: read quickly and eagerly

¹²glossy: (of a magazine or photograph) printed on high-quality smooth, shiny paper

In about an hour, they selected from the catalogue their team's requirements. And then came the most difficult part of the whole affair—a letter to Messrs Binns, for ordering goods. Bare courtesy¹³ made Rajam offer the authorship of the letter to Mani, who declined¹⁴ it.

Swaminathan was forced to accept it in spite of his protests and he sat for a long time chewing his pencil without producing a word—he had infinite¹⁵ trouble with spelling and the more he tried to be correct, the more muddled¹⁶ he was becoming; in the end, he sat so long thinking of spelling that even such words as 'the' and 'and' became doubtful. Finally, Rajam took up the task himself. Half an hour later, he placed on the table a letter:

Why did the boys want to write a letter to Messrs Binns?

What difficulties did they face in writing the letter?



From _____
MCC (And Victory Union Eleven), _____
Malgudi _____

To _____
Messrs Binns, _____
Sportsmen, _____
Mount Road, _____
Madras _____

Dear Sir, _____
Please send to our team two Junior Willard bats, six balls, _____
wickets and other things quick. It is very urgent. We shall send _____
you money afterwards. Don't fear. Please be urgent. _____
Yours obediently, _____
CAPTAIN RAJAM (Captain) _____

This letter received Swaminathan's benedictions¹⁷. But Mani expressed certain doubts. He wanted to know whether 'Dear' could stand at the beginning of a letter to a perfect stranger. 'How can you call Binns "Dear Sir"? You must say "Sir".'

Rajam's explanation was: 'I won't say "Sir". It is said only by clerks. I am not Binns' clerk. I don't care to address him as "Sir".'

So this letter went as it was.

After this exacting¹⁸ work, they were resting with a feeling of relief, when the postman brought a card for Rajam. Rajam read it and cried, 'Guess who has written this?'

¹³courtesy: the showing of politeness in one's attitude and behaviour towards others ¹⁴declined: politely refused (an invitation or offer) ¹⁵infinite: impossible to measure or calculate ¹⁶muddled: not clear or coherent; confused ¹⁷benedictions: (here) blessings and approval ¹⁸exacting: requiring a lot of effort

'Binns.'

'Silly. It must be our Headmaster.'

'Somebody.'

'J.B. Hobbs¹⁹'

'It is from Sankar,' Rajam announced joyfully.

'Sankar! We had almost forgotten that old thief.' Swaminathan and Mani tore the card from Rajam's hand and read:

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I am studying here because my father came here. My mother is also here. All of us are here. And we will be only here. I am doing well. I hope you are doing well. It is very hot here. I had fever for three days and drank medicine.

I hope I will read well and pass.

Is Swami and Mani doing well? It is very hot here. I am playing cricket now. I can't write more.

With regards,

Your dearest friend,

SANKAR

P.S. Don't forget me.

S

They were profoundly²⁰ moved by this letter, and decided to reply at once. Three letters were ready in an hour. Mani copied Sankar's letter verbatim²¹. Swaminathan and Rajam wrote nearly similar letters—they said they were doing well by the grace of God; they hoped that Sankar would pass and also that he was doing well; then they said a lot about their cricket team and hoped that Sankar would become a member; they also said that Sankar's team might challenge them to a match.

The letters were put into a stamped envelope and the flap²² was pasted. It was only then that they felt the need of knowing Sankar's address. They searched all parts of Sankar's card. Not a word anywhere, not even the name of the town he was writing from.

How did the three friends try to find out Sankar's address?

¹⁹John Berry Hobbs (1882–1963) an English cricketer regarded as one of the best batsmen in the history of cricket

²¹verbatim: word by word ²²flap: (here) the part of an envelope covering its opening

²⁰profoundly: deeply

They tried to get this out of the postmark. But a dark curved smudge²³ on the stamp cannot be very illuminating²⁴.

The MCC and its organizers had solid proof that they were persons of count²⁵ when a letter from Binns came addressed to the Captain, MCC, Malgudi. It was a joy, touching that beautiful envelope and turning it over in the hand. Binns were the first to recognize the MCC and Rajam took a vow that he would buy every bit that his team needed from that great firm.



There were three implications²⁶ in this letter that filled Rajam and his friends with rapture²⁷:

(1) that His Majesty's post office recognized their team was proved by the fact that the letter addressed to the captain was promptly delivered to him.

(2) that they were really recognized by such a magnificent²⁸ firm as Binns of Madras was proved by the fact that Binns cared to reply in a full letter and not on a card and actually typed the letter!

(3) Binns sent under another cover carrying four annas²⁹ postage a huge catalogue. What a tribute³⁰!

The letter informed the captain that Messrs Binns thanked him for his letter and would be much obliged³¹ to him if he would kindly remit³² 25 per cent with the order and the balance could be paid against the VPP³³ of the railway receipt.

Three heads buzzed³⁴ over the meaning of this letter. The trouble was that they could not understand whether Binns was going to send the goods or not. Mani promised to unravel³⁵ the letter if somebody would tell him what 'obliged' meant. When they turned the pages of a dictionary and offered him the meaning, he was none the wiser. He felt that it was a meaningless word in that place. 'One thing is clear,' said Rajam, 'Binns thanks us for our letter. So I don't think this letter could mean a refusal to supply us goods.' Swaminathan agreed with him, 'That is right. If he did not wish to supply you with things, would he thank you? He would have abused you.' He scrutinized³⁶ the letter again to make sure that there was no mistake about the thanks.

What didn't the friends understand about Binns' letter?



²³smudge: cause (something) to become messily smeared by rubbing it; (here), the blurred postal stamp ²⁴illuminating: helping to inform or clarify ²⁵count: of worth or significance ²⁶implications: (here) something that is suggested or indirectly stated ²⁷rapture: a feeling of intense pleasure or joy ²⁸magnificent: extremely beautiful, elaborate or impressive ²⁹annas: a former monetary unit of India and Pakistan, equal to one sixteenth of a rupee ³⁰tribute: (here) gift given as a sign of respect ³¹obliged: (here) be indebted or grateful ³²remit: send (money) ³³VPP: similar to 'cash after delivery'; here payment was made to the postal department or the Railways against the receipt ³⁴buzzed: work quickly or busily with some excitement ³⁵unravel: (here) make the meaning clear ³⁶scrutinized: examined or inspected closely and thoroughly

'Why has the fool used this word?' Mani asked, referring to 'obliged,' which he could not pronounce. 'It has no meaning. Is he trying to make fun of us?'

'He says something about 25 per cent. I wish I knew what it was,' said Rajam. Swaminathan could hardly contain himself, 'I say, Rajam, I am surprised that you cannot understand this letter; you got 60 per cent in the last examination.'

'Have you any sense? What has that to do with this? Even a BA cannot understand this letter.'

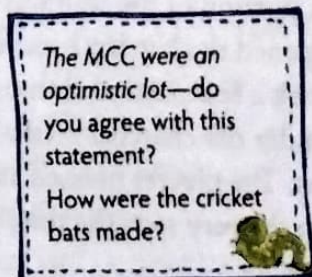
In the end, they came to the conclusion that the letter was sent to them by mistake. As far as they could see, the MCC had written nothing in their previous letter to warrant³⁷ such expressions as 'obliged,' 'remit,' and '25 per cent.'

It could not be that the great firm of Binns was trying to make fun of them. Swaminathan pointed out 'To the Captain, MCC' at the beginning of the letter. But he was told that it was also a part of the mistake.

This letter was put in a cover with a covering letter and dispatched. The covering letter said—'We are very sorry that you sent me somebody's letter. We are returning this somebody's letter. Please send our things immediately.'

The MCC were an optimistic³⁸ lot. Though they were still unhonoured with a reply to their second letter, they expected their goods to arrive with every post. After ten days, they thought they ought to start playing with whatever was available till they got the real bats, etc. The bottom of a dealwood³⁹ case provided them with three good bats, and Rajam managed to get three used tennis balls from his father's club. The Pea⁴⁰ was there, offering four real stumps that he believed he had somewhere in his house.

A neat slip of ground⁴¹ adjoining Rajam's bungalow was to be the pitch. Everything was ready. Even if Binns took a month more to manufacture the goods, especially for the MCC (as they faintly thought probable⁴²), there need be no delay in starting practice. By the time the real bats and the balls arrived, they would be in form to play matches. Rajam had chosen from his class a few who, he thought, deserved to become members of the MCC.



At five o'clock on the opening day, the MCC had assembled, all except the Pea, for whom Rajam was waiting anxiously. He had promised to bring the real stumps. It was half an hour past time and yet he was not to be seen anywhere.

At last his puny figure was discovered in the distance. There was a catch in Rajam's heart when he saw him. He strained his eyes to find out if the Pea had the things about him. But since the latter was coming from the west, he was seen in the blaze of the evening sun.

³⁷warrant: deserve ³⁸optimistic: hopeful and confident ³⁹dealwood: wood of a pine tree ⁴⁰Pea: the nickname of a boy called Samuel, a close friend and classmate of Swaminathan's ⁴¹slip of ground: small piece of ground ⁴²probable: likely to happen or to be the case

All the twelve assembled in the field, shaded their eyes and looked. Some said that he was carrying a bundle, while some thought that he was swinging his hands freely.

When he arrived, Rajam asked, 'Why didn't you tell us that you hadn't got the stumps?'

'I have still got them,' protested the Pea. 'I shall bring them tomorrow. I am sure my father knows where they are kept.'

'You kept us waiting till now. Why didn't you come earlier and tell us you couldn't find them?'



I tell you, I have been spending hours looking for them everywhere. How could I come here and tell you and at the same time search?'

A cloud descended upon the gathering. For over twenty hours, every one among them had been dreaming of swinging a bat and throwing a ball. And they could have realized the dream but for the Pea's wickedness. Everybody looked at him sourly⁴³. He was isolated. Rajam felt like crying when he saw the wood planks and the tennis balls lying useless on the ground. What a glorious⁴⁴ evening they could have had if only the stumps had been brought!

Amidst all this gloom somebody cast a ray of light by suggesting that they might use the compound wall of Rajam's bungalow as a temporary wicket.

A portion of the wall was marked off with a piece of charcoal and the captain arranged the field and opened the batting himself. Swaminathan took up the bowling. He held a tennis ball in his hand, took a few paces and threw it over. Rajam swung the bat but missed it. The ball hit the wall right under the charcoal mark. Rajam was bowled out with the very first ball! There was a great shout of joy. The players pressed around Swaminathan to shake him and pat him on the back; he was given on the very spot the title, 'Tate'⁴⁵.

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayan (1906–2001) was one of India's leading novelists. Narayan's fiction is rich in humour, energy and simplicity. He created the fictitious town of Malgudi. Most of his unforgettable characters live in this town. Some of his well-known works are *Swami and Friends*, *The Bachelor of Arts*, *The English Teacher* and *The Guide*.



⁴³sourly: feeling or expressing resentment, disappointment, or anger ⁴⁴glorious: having striking beauty or splendour

⁴⁵Tate: (1895–1956) a famous English fast bowler

MAKING CONNECTIONS


Quick answers

1. Answer the following questions in not more than a sentence.
 - a. What was the Junior Willard referred to as by the catalogue man?
 - b. Why did Rajam want to buy three bats?
 - c. What was the most difficult part of the affair?
 - d. Where did the MCC members find the pitch to play?
 - e. How did everyone treat the Pea when he did not get the stumps?

Reference to context

2. *All the three devoured with their eyes the glossy pictures of cricket balls, bats and nets.*
 - a. Explain the term 'devoured with their eyes'.
 - b. Why were the three so enthusiastic about the glossy pictures?
 - c. What did they 'order' from the catalogue?
3. *The letters were put into a stamped envelope and the flap was pasted.*
 - a. Who wrote the letters and why?
 - b. Why was it important to post the letters immediately?
 - c. Why couldn't the envelope be posted?
4. *What a tribute!*
 - a. What is the 'tribute' that is being referred to here?
 - b. Why did they receive the tribute and who sent it to them?
 - c. What were the other 'implications' of the letter with which the tribute came?

Read, reflect and write

5. Do you think Sankar will continue to correspond with his friends? Give reasons.
6. Why did the three friends think that the letter from Messrs Binns was sent to them by mistake? Give reasons.
7. If you had been a member of the MCC, what would you have done on receiving the letter from Messrs Binns?
8. With what did the MCC members finally play? Describe the arrangements made.
9. At the end of the story, when a cloud descended over Swami and his friends, they found a ray of hope. What does this tell you about them? What conclusion may one draw from this?
10. **Extended writing:** Describe your own experiences of finding a place to play cricket and the adjustments that you had to make when you did not have appropriate equipment or place to play. What were your innovations?  **HOTS**