
Chapter-7 History

History and Sport: The Story of Cricket

CONCEPTS

Cricket grew out of the many stick and ball games played in England. By the 17th century it evolved enough to be recognisable as a distinct game. It became so popular that its fans did not mind to be fined for playing it on Sunday instead of going to church.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CRICKET AS A GAME IN INDIA

Cricket was given its unique nature by the history of England. Peculiarities of cricket

- A match can go on for five days and still end in a draw.
- Length of the pitch is specified — 22 yards — but the size or shape of the ground is not.

Reasons:

- Cricket rules were made before the Industrial Revolution when life moved at a slow pace.
- Cricket was played on the commons. Each common had a different shape and size. There were no designed boundaries or boundary hits.

The First Written Laws of Cricket (1744)

- Principals shall choose from among the gentlemen present two umpires who shall absolutely decide all disputes.
- Stumps must be 22 inches high and bail across them six inches.
- Ball must be between 5 to 6 ounces.
- Two sets of stumps 22 yards apart.

The world's first cricket club was formed in Hambledon in 1760s.

The Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) was founded in 1787. In 1788 the MCC published its first revision of the laws and became the guardian of cricket's regulations.

A series of changes in the game occurred in the 2nd half of the 18th century.

- It became common to pitch the ball through the air.
- Curved bats were replaced by straight ones.
- Weight of ball was limited to between 5½ to 5¾ ounces.
- Width of the bat was limited to four inches.
- A third stump became common.
- Three days had become the length of a major match.
- First six seam cricket ball was introduced.

Cricket as a game changed and matured during the early phase of the Industrial Revolution but remained true to its origins in rural England.

Unlike other games, cricket has refused to remake its tools with industrial or man-made materials. Protective equipment, however, has been influenced by technological change.

The Game and English Society

The organization of cricket in 'English reflected the nature of 'English society. The players of this game were divided into two categories.

Amateurs: These were the rich who played for pleasure. They were gentlemen.

Players: These were the professionals who played for money.

Rules of cricket were made to favour the gentlemen. These gentlemen did most of the batting. Their superiority over players made only the batsmen captains of teams. It was said that "the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton."

THE SPREAD OF CRICKET

Cricket remained a colonial game. It was its colonial oddness that made it difficult to be accepted by other people. It was played in colonies by the white settlers or the local elites who wanted to copy their white masters.

This game became very popular in the Caribbean. Success in cricket became a measure of racial equality and political progress.

Through the early history of Indian cricket, teams were not organised on geographical principles and it was not till 1932 that a national team was given the right to represent India in a test match.

Cricket, Race and Religion

The first Indian club, the Calcutta Cricket Club, was established in 1792.

The first Indian community who were to play cricket were the Parsis. They founded the first Indian Cricket Club, the Oriental Cricket Club in Bombay in 1848. This became a precedent for other Indians who in turn established clubs based on the idea of religious community. By the 1890s there was talk of a Hindu Gymkhana and Islam Gymkhana. The colonial government encouraged communal clubs and institutions. Cricket began to be organised on communal and racial lines.

This was Quadrangular tournament because it was played by 4 teams — Europeans, Parsis, Hindus and Muslims. Later it became Pentangular when a fifth team was added namely the Rest. By 1930s and 1940s many people including India's most respected political figure, Mahatma Gandhi, condemned the Pentangular for dividing India on communal lines.

THE MODERN TRANSFORMATION OF CRICKET

Modern cricket is dominated by Test and One-day internationals, played between national teams.

Decolonisation and Sport: Decolonisation was a process which led to the decline of English influence in many areas including sports.

The colonial favour of world cricket during the 1950s and 1960s can be seen from the fact that England and the other white Commonwealth countries, Australia and New Zealand continued to play matches with South Africa. It was only with political pressure from countries of Asia and Africa (recently decolonised) combined with liberal feeling in Britain that forced the English cricket authorities to cancel a tour by South Africa in 1970.

COMMERCE, MEDIA AND CRICKET TODAY

The 1970s were the decade in which cricket was transformed.

1971 saw the first one-day international being played between England and Australia in Melbourne.

In 1977 the game was changed forever by an Australian television tycoon, Kerry Packer. He saw cricket as a money-making televised sport. He signed up 51 of the world's leading cricketers and for almost two years staged unofficial tests and One-day Internationals under the name of World Series Cricket. Packer drove home the point that cricket was a marketable game which could generate huge revenue. Continuous television coverage made cricketers celebrities. Television coverage also expanded the audience and children became cricket fans. Multinational companies created a global market for cricket. This has shifted the balance of power in cricket. India has the largest viewership for the game and hence the game's centre of gravity shifted to South Asia.

This shift was symbolised by the shifting of the ICC headquarters from London to tax-free Dubai. The innovations in cricket have come from the practice of sub-continental teams in countries like India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka — doosra and the reverse swing are Pakistani innovations.
