

CHAPTER ONE

THE CHALLENGE OF CRICKET

INTRODUCTION

In 1893, a Rev. Holmes wrote, 'We know as much of the history of cricket as we shall ever know now, and we have been told everything relating to the science of the game. There is no fresh ground to be explored.'

No doubt the good parson is turning in his grave at the astonishing changes the last century has wrought on a game in which he saw no new possibilities. In terms of science and sports medicine in particular, the last several decades have heralded a flurry of research into every aspect of the game.

But cricket as a game casts a long shadow. Those who play it, coach it, administer it, watch and love it are aware, to greater and lesser degrees, that the game to which they devote their time, and from which they gain great pleasure, is complex, rich, intriguing, demanding and occasionally infuriating. In 1993, a *Times* leader stated that, 'Cricket presents tactical complexities undreamt of on the football pitch; it is chess compared to tiddly-winks.' This claim, and similar ones, have been made about cricket for well over a hundred years: in 1905, A.C. MacLaren announced, 'Cricket develops the mind; there is more *thinking* to be done over cricket than over any other game.' In addition, many realize that the game of cricket has accumulated layers of

meaning beyond those of a sporting contest. The cricket writer and political analyst C.L.R. James, in his 1963 cricketing classic, *Beyond a Boundary*, penned the now famous words: 'What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?'

The nostalgia associated with cricket, which has spurred hundreds of memoirs involving the smack of leather on willow and cucumber sandwiches for tea, derives from a specific period in the long history of cricket – the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. This was the era of the Grace brothers, of umpires with mutton-chop moustaches, of Gentlemen and Players, of John Wisden's *Almanack* and the last blooming of the British Empire. This latter element was the crucial key to cricket's survival: it transported cricket – literally – into the twentieth century and beyond. It was the fervour with which the inhabitants of British colonies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries adopted (and then adapted) the English game that made cricket – once the preserve of minor public schoolboys – a truly international sport.

This eccentric game has not only become a multi-million-dollar enterprise played around the world, but it continues to grow in popularity. More and more countries are fielding cricket teams, and only football is more widely watched on television. Another intriguing factor is that women form the most rapidly growing sector of those who watch the game. Cricket continues to fascinate and engage, in spite of the time it absorbs.

But why is cricket unique? Why do so many find the game irresistible? Conversely, why do some find the game so difficult to understand? Cricket has so many facets that it takes a while to grasp them all. There are almost no other sports in which there are so many variables, in which the player has to continually adapt to such a wide spectrum of constantly changing conditions and aspects of the game. It is a particularly complex and compelling combination of a team sport and a gladiatorial one-on-one challenge (batter versus bowler). Unlike most other games, it can and often does end in a draw, regardless of superb, even heroic performances by individuals and teams. And at the highest level, it is played not just over hours, but days, which demands high levels of concentration, focus, commitment, stamina and doggedness.

'Football is about the group domination of space; cricket is about an individual's encounter with time. In cricket, exceptionally diverse levels of competition are imposed upon the individual. He plays directly against a single other batsman or bowler, against the pitch and conditions, against himself, against the needs of the game in terms of attack and defence, and against ten other participants in addition to his immediate adversary. He does this both for himself and in relation to the mood and intent of his team' (Cook and Scott, 1991, p. 153).

HISTORY AND LAWS OF CRICKET

The game of cricket has a long history, and while it is not necessary for players to know exactly how it evolved over the centuries, its past does shed light on the plethora of rules (Laws) that accompany the modern game. A few scholars argue that cricket dates from a game known as 'Creag' referred to in early medieval literature, but it is generally accepted that the first reliably dated reference is one that showed up in the Guild Merchant Book of 1598. Here a merchant was recorded as swearing under oath that a parcel of land had been used for cricket for 50 years: 'hee and his fellows did runne and play there at Creckett and other plaies.' Clearly, they had trouble preserving sportsfields even in those days, and equally clearly, cricket was established in southern England by the end of the sixteenth century.

We know that the game has rural roots, a legacy preserved in the length of the wicket – 22 yards (20,2 metres), or one-tenth of a furlong, an agricultural measurement used when ploughing fields. Balls were bowled underarm towards a target, and then fended off by a batter who wielded a club with a curved end (rather like a modern hockey-stick). He was permitted to hit the ball as often as he liked in defence of his 'wicket', and whether delivered by the bowler, or struck with the bat, the ball travelled along the ground. The original wicket was sometimes a tree-stump, but more generally a little portable gate used for sheep-pens. Initially, both single- and double-wicket games were played, with the former finally dying out in the mid-nineteenth century. Once the game caught on, artificial wickets consisting of two stumps, with a stick laid horizontally across them, were used. The third stump and bails came along after complaints by bowlers who managed to bowl through the wicket without disturbing it. The need for some sort of referee is almost as old as the game, and the word 'umpire' first appears in English as 'noumpere', meaning a 'non-peer' – literally, an odd man out or neutral party asked to adjudicate. An early eighteenth-century illustration shows that by then it was already traditional to use two umpires.

The above would have been the form of the game for much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Cricket gained steadily in popularity throughout the seventeenth century, in spite of gloomy mutterings by the Puritans, and by the eighteenth century, it was a well-established sport played by adults, and as accepted in urban settings as in the country. It was particularly popular with the aristocracy and landed gentry, with both sexes playing it at home. Formal matches became hotbeds of wagering, gambling, match-fixing and other forms of chicanery, which goes to show that there is nothing new under the cricketing sun.

The game had in the meantime become sufficiently complex to warrant the first compilation and publication of the Laws of the Game in 1744. These form the basis of

today's Laws, and continue to be updated, altered and added to when circumstances in the modern game dictate that changes be made. For instance, after the 'bouncer wars' spearheaded by the great West Indian fast bowlers during the 1970s (and picked up by Pakistani fast bowlers towards the end of the 1980s), the Laws were changed to allow for only two bouncers per over in the multi-day form of the game (to howls of outrage from some sides, and sighs of relief by others).

Detailed as the Laws are, so many of the rules of cricket take the form of unwritten tradition that innovations in the game invariably ruffle feathers. Sometimes these innovations become part of the game; for example, there is no rule yet that says batters have to wear helmets when facing fast bowling, yet this has become normative, with only the truly stupid or suicidal going out bare-headed. And sometimes, they lead to frantic additions to the Laws on the basis that certain traditions are intrinsic to the game – as when Dennis Lillee wielded an aluminium bat during the 1979–80 Ashes series, causing consternation among the cricketing establishment. It was discovered that there was no Law saying that bats had to be made of wood, an omission that was hastily amended.

As explained in Chapter 5, changes in bowling, not batting gave cricket the shape and form with which we are familiar today. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, players began perfecting what we would recognize as a 'length' ball, a delivery that bounced once before reaching the batsman. This meant that batsmen had to start playing forward, developing defensive techniques for the first time. Meanwhile, at the start of the nineteenth century, round-arm bowling was pioneered, apparently by a Miss Christina Willes from a prominent cricketing family. The story goes that she was hampered by her voluminous skirts when bowling (the corsetry hoops that were then fashionable would have been the real problem, forcing her bowling arm above hip-height).

In his 1897 *Jubilee Book of Cricket*, the great batsman Ranjitsinhji pinpointed the introduction of round-arm bowling as the moment of transition between old and modern cricket, and certainly the nineteenth century saw the steady rise of the bowler's arm towards its current position. This, together with the new defensive shots the batsmen needed to master in response, led to the development of the straight bat, as shots were now played through the air, not along the ground. By 1864 (when overarm bowling was legalized in the Laws), the game had become one today's players and viewers would recognize as modern cricket.

SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

On the international stage, cricket is a truly post-colonial phenomenon, with former colonizers and colonized regularly playing against one another, as well as sworn political enemies. India and Pakistan play each other regularly, although at particularly troublesome times, they have had to do so in neutral countries. But in spite of explosive (sometimes literally) political divides, the two countries have toured each other on a regular basis in recent decades. South African sportswriter Michael Owen-Smith described hardened journalists being moved to tears at a one-day game at Eden Gardens in Kolkata, when the Pakistan team snatched victory from the jaws of certain defeat in the last over of the game. After a long and terrifying silence, the 80 000-strong crowd erupted not into boos and cries of outrage, but into a standing ovation for the winning team, which responded by running a victory lap before the applauding masses.

Sport has always had the potential to be a great leveller, and cricket is no exception: it is quite possible for poorer countries to beat richer ones, and at times this has happened with monotonous regularity. Think of the dominance of the West Indian fast-bowling pack attack from the 1960s to the 1980s, in which the descendants of slaves spent nearly three decades harrowing the rest of the Test-playing nations. The history that spread cricket around the world is never quite forgotten – when the England cricket team, fresh from winning the Ashes in 2005, proceeded to a Test series in Pakistan, one wit announced that ‘the Sahibs were soundly walloped’.

Sadly, the last two decades seem to show that in cricket, teams from developed countries seem to be outstripping those of developing countries. This is not purely a matter of hard cash: the cricketing industry in Asia rakes in billions of dollars. Rather, it seems to be a question of infrastructure, research and government support. A country with a large middle-class population, and government-subsidized schools with good sports facilities and reliable infrastructure is more likely to produce star athletes consistently. Talent knows no nationality, class or race, but other factors constantly intrude; for instance, South Africa has identified a host of young black fast bowlers with real talent in the last ten or so years. Yet once they begin playing at first-class level, many break down repeatedly with stress fractures. One theory (as yet unproven) is that poor nutrition in childhood means that their frames simply cannot absorb the extra pounding as they play more and more cricket. Young speed-merchant Mfuneko Ngam burst onto the international stage against New Zealand in 2000 – a blistering edge was grassed in the slips in his first over of Test cricket – and with 11 wickets in his first three Tests, the 21-year-old looked set to fill the massive boots of Allan Donald. But heartbreak followed as his classic action, extreme flexibility and genuine tearaway pace were undermined by chronic stress fractures.

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A lack of solid nutrition during his township childhood had cost him dearly, and Ngam's international career was over less than 12 months after it had begun.

Yet the game continues to grow and even thrive in contexts that may seem all but impossible. In dusty and forgotten corners of the globe, in rural villages in India and Pakistan, shanty-towns in the Caribbean, townships in South Africa, and council estates in northern England, there is an army of unsung heroes: the dedicated cricket coaches and teachers who work with bright and talented youngsters even when there is little chance of ever seeing their charges fulfilling their potential.

In countries with a history of 'baksheesh' and kickbacks, families and coaches without influence despair of ever seeing their children given the opportunity they deserve. In South Africa, the country's citizens are still counting the cost of 40 years of systematic deprivation of the great majority under apartheid, and wrestling with the thorny problems of how to establish equity both on and off the playing fields. Sport has been as impoverished as any other arena, and far too many potential D'Oliveiras have been lost to the game forever. Meanwhile, on the Asian subcontinent, being chosen to play cricket at the elite level is the equivalent of winning the lottery – except that the odds are even smaller, and the ticket is a costly one. Promising young players are taken out of school early (and never finish their education), families beggar

MONEY MATTERS: SOCIO-ECONOMICS AND SPORT

It may seem like common sense to note that the cost of playing a particular sport may limit participation by young children in sport in general and in the more expensive sports in particular – and yet this is not always fully recognized.

Australian researchers (Kirk et al., 1997) decided to take a closer look at this issue, and found that families make a much larger contribution to supporting their children's involvement in junior sport than is generally appreciated. Direct costs include buying uniforms and equipment, coaching and membership fees, and the costs of transporting children to venues. Indirect costs include the time adults spend travelling and watching their children play the sport, as well as the time they give to volunteer activities – administration, fund-raising and coaching. The result is that in Australia, those children whose parents are reasonably well off make up the majority of players in most club and representative sports.

The authors concluded that the traditional assumption that (Australian) sport is open to children from all sectors of society is simply not true. There is no doubt that similar (if not far greater) barriers exist in other sports-playing societies. This issue must be addressed if we are to promote equitable sports participation across all social classes.

themselves paying for the best coaching and equipment, and the entire enterprise seldom ends in anything but heartbreak. In the Caribbean, where cricketing morale has been sagging for some time, coaches all too often lose their best athletes to the lure of the American dream.

Like all sports, cricket is a glittering dream to some, and a source of bitter disappointment to a much greater majority. Those to whom it remains a gentle and gentlemanly game played in whites on the village green might be shocked to know of the dizzying hope and heartbreak the game can engender.

However, world events largely beyond our control influence all sports, not only cricket. South Africans are lucky enough to be able to make positive and constructive contributions to the future of the game, and many of those involved with cricket at all levels are doing heroic and largely unheralded work in cricket development. While much still needs doing, it is heartening to see members of the national team and many others conducting coaching clinics in impoverished areas, fund-raising, and helping to develop facilities – certainly one of Bob Woolmer’s dreams.

Cricket is thus a game with a rich, complex and at times burdensome history, one that determines its unique political and social context. But there are everyday variables that affect each game of cricket beyond this somewhat sweeping backdrop; variables as peculiar and yet familiar to players and fans as any of cricket’s most famous eccentricities.

WEATHER

Cricket is played in summer (although the playing season gets longer every year, spilling well into spring and autumn) and is an outdoor sport. This means that it is at the mercy of the vagaries of the weather. While this is true of every outdoor sport, in which players may have to contend with rain and wind, cricket is unusual in that it cannot be played if rain is falling (in comparison with rugby, for instance). This is for a number of reasons: the bowler cannot control a wet, slippery ball, players may struggle to see the ball, and the playing surface, the pitch itself, must be kept dry to prevent it from becoming dangerously slippery, and sustaining damage that is difficult to repair.

Given the amount of rain that falls in the average English summer, plus the fact that cricket is often played in subtropical countries that have summer rainfall or, in the case of South Africa and Zimbabwe, summer thunderstorms, rain thus becomes a wild card in many games. Because rain holds up play, confining players to the dressing room until the clouds roll away and the outfield has been dried out, it can force dramatic changes in strategy in multi-day games, given that it steals time from the game. A captain robbed

of an afternoon's play may well have to declare in order to force a result. Rain can also dictate that a team romping towards victory may have to settle for a draw.

But it is not just the course of the game that is affected: inevitably, and no matter how swiftly the covers are drawn over the pitch, and how effective the rollers (and even huge vacuum-cleaners) are, moisture from rain will have altered the playing conditions. Spin and seam bowlers may find that the ball is 'gripping' the pitch or deviating through the air more dramatically. Batters may find that a pitch on which they were belting out runs has slowed down considerably – and all of a sudden, the game swings in favour of the fielding side.

In the one-day form of the game, rain rules have had to be developed to deal with the situation that arises when rain makes it impossible for the side playing second to bat out their full quota of overs. The calculations that come into play, which involve lowering both the targeted number of runs and the number of overs in which they have to be scored, have been far from perfect. They became notorious at the 1992 World Cup in Australia, when the South African team, newly returned to the international arena after decades of isolation under apartheid, performed with commendable courage and flair, becoming a popular choice for a shot at the final. In the semi-final, they were beaten not so much by their opponents, England, as by Messrs Duckworth & Lewis, the devisers of the programme that calculated the rain rules. With the experienced Dave Richardson and all-rounder Brian McMillan at the crease, with 22 runs to make off 13 balls, victory was possible. But then down came the rain. Only eight minutes of play were lost, but the computer ticked away, first recalculating that 22 runs had to be made off seven balls, then 21 off one delivery! The South Africans were thus denied their shot at their first World Cup final by default. This farcical situation was partly due to strict broadcast schedules. However, there was such an outcry that the 'rain rules' were fine-tuned so not as to set illogical targets in future. This did not prevent the South African side misunderstanding them on home ground at the 2003 World Cup and being hustled humiliatingly out of the competition as a result. They also played a role in the damp squib final of the 2007 Cricket World Cup at the Oval in Barbados, reducing it to a mere exhibition game rather than a real contest between the finalists, Australia and Sri Lanka.

Not only rain, but wind, dew, humidity, cloud cover and even tides can affect the game of cricket, for two main reasons: they affect the pitch itself; and they influence the movement of the ball as it is bowled, either through the air (some bowlers benefit from bowling into the wind, for instance) or off the pitch. This is why experienced cricketers pay close attention to weather reports and conditions, and develop the ability to gauge how these conditions will affect the pitch – a skill that requires considerable canniness, not to say a crystal ball.

THE PITCH AND OUTFIELD

The art and science of preparing a cricket pitch and outfield are extremely complex. A good groundsperson is by definition a botanist, engineer, geologist, agriculturalist, chemist and hydrologist. While the nitty-gritty of pitch preparation and maintenance is an arcane business, involving matters such as drainage, cultivation and cutting techniques, soil analysis, rhizomes, rollers and much else besides, it is an excellent idea to ask local groundstaff to give junior players a talk on the topic, or take them on a guided tour that includes the equipment used.

While not every player needs to understand how a pitch is laid and maintained, all of them will need to learn how to 'read' a pitch. This refers to the rapid (and continuous) assessment of the behaviour of a pitch the minute one begins to play on it. This evolving 'behaviour' of the pitch ('What is it doing now?') is one of the most significant variables in the game. No-one can ever determine exactly what a pitch will 'do' until the first ball is bowled on it, and we have all seen experts do the pitch report and get it completely wrong. What is more, the captain who wins the toss has to decide whether to bat or field depending on the likely performance of the pitch, a decision that can also go horribly wrong if the pitch does not behave as anticipated. This is why it is considered so unsporting to sneak down to the grounds on the eve of a match and bowl a few balls on the competition pitch. In any case, the groundsperson responsible for nursing the pitch to match-readiness, and who will be anxiously running tests preparatory to the last few tweaks (which might include wetting, rolling and brushing before putting it to bed under covers) would almost certainly have stern words with anyone trying this.

Although experience in reading a pitch and the technical ability to adapt as quickly as possible to a specific pitch are paramount, it is worth gathering as much information as possible about the different components of a pitch and its outfield.

The pitch is the 22-yard (20,2-metre) strip with wickets at either end; the outfield refers to the rest of the ground on which the game is played. The latter is roughly oval or lozenge-shaped, and is circled by a boundary rope or marker. The east-west measurement (square of the wicket, in other words) must be a minimum of 140 yards (128 metres), and the north-south measurement needs to be at least 120 yards (109,72 metres) – hence the oval shape. No boundary may be shorter than 60 yards (54,86 metres), but there is no upper limit, although it is obviously not in the interests of the game to have an outfield much bigger than is stipulated in the Laws. But this explains why no two Test venues are exactly alike.

If one could look at a cross-section of a cricket field, it should look somewhat like an upside-down saucer; the pitch itself should be flat, but slightly proud (raised) above

the rest of the field, which should slope away evenly. This is essential to allow rain and other moisture to run off the pitch. In other words, all bowlers run in to bowl at a very slight gradient. Of course, each ground varies slightly, with some requiring that the bowler run rather more uphill than others. Others have ends of differing gradients, some are bounded by rivers and estuaries, some are slightly tilted (Lords is famous for its slope – the north-west end of the ground is more than two metres higher than the south-east), and some even have permanent fielders in the shape of mature trees.

An ideal five-day pitch will start off firm, with a little moisture in the soil and even some grass on top, offering consistent and even bounce for the first few days, and pace for both bowler and batter. The outfield should be slightly spongy, to allow for fielders to slide and dive without injury, but should be smooth enough to allow the ball to travel across it at speed. On the second and third days, the pitch becomes quicker as it dries out, becoming ideal for batting. Towards the end of the third day, minute cracks in the pitch should be starting to widen as the pitch dries out, and a fourth- and fifth-day pitch is likely to be dusty and beginning to crumble, slowing the ball down and allowing spinners' deliveries to grip and deviate off the ground. Bounce will become uneven, and there will be scuffmarks made by the bowler's feet as he delivers the ball at either end of the crease. These too can be exploited by spinners, and present a danger to unwary batters.

But there are a thousand subtle variations on this basic theme. It should also be clear that pitches will be prepared differently for the multi-day and one-day forms of the game. (The ideal one-day pitch should resemble a five-day pitch on about the third day of a game – dry, but still lively, and offering even bounce.)

Among the most significant challenges that elite cricketers face is playing on the wide variety of pitches around the world. South African, Zimbabwean and Australian pitches are similarly constructed: they are made of a clay mix known as bulli, which is laid to a depth of anywhere between 300mm and 70mm over drainage layers of gravel and red soil. Test match venues require at least 250mm of bulli, but less is acceptable for club and junior cricket (the deeper the layer, the longer the pitch lasts). This is then usually planted with a hardy subtropical grass, sometimes the same species for both pitch and outfield, but more commonly two different kinds. The type is determined by ability to recover from damage (this is why different grasses are used for golf courses, where grasses sustain very little battering, cricket fields, where there is considerable wear on the grass, and race-courses, where the surfaces are regularly torn up) and the local conditions. For instance, some grasses thrive in coastal, salty or humid zones, but cannot tolerate frost; others are frost-resistant, but develop diseases in wet areas, and so on. In South Africa alone, Newlands in Cape Town experiences rain in winter, dry summers and no frost, while Kingsmead in Durban is hot, steamy

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and exposed to sea air and heavy summer rains. The Wanderers in Johannesburg meanwhile sees sharp frosts in winter and sudden thunderstorms in summer. Each of these micro-climates demands that different grasses, drainage systems, maintenance routines, cutters, rollers, fertilizers, herbicides and so on, be used. It is also because of all of these elements that a pitch can change from season to season. A cricketer may feel that he has the hang of a particular ground, then discover that the pitch has been relaid, or new turfs have been imported, or even a different watering regime has been used since the last time he played there. Now translate this to the worldwide arena, and one gets an inkling of the tremendous variations found in pitches around the globe – and the exceptional flexibility they demand of those who play on them.

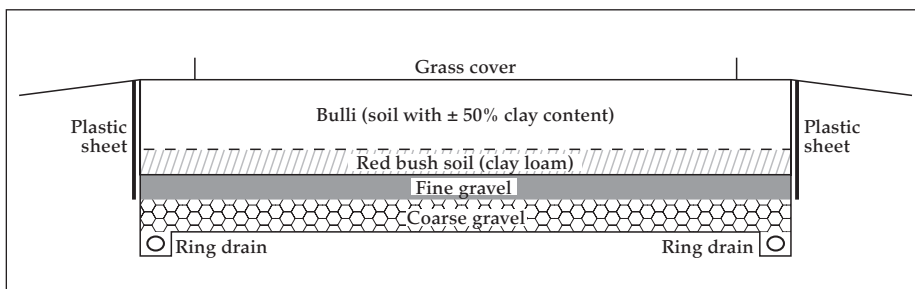
Generally, the more clay in the pitch, and the more compacted the soil, the firmer, faster and bouncier it is, with the bounce tending to be even. This is why Australian and South African pitches tend to be so speedy. There is more sand and organic matter (and less moisture) in subcontinental pitches, which is why they tend to be slower and to crumble more easily, offering opportunities both to wristy batters who like to flick late cuts down to the boundary, and spinners, who want to see as much deviation as possible after pitching, and who like to exploit scuffmarks, dust patches and cracks for this purpose.

English and New Zealand pitches use various forms of winter grass (i.e., grass that remains green throughout winter), usually rye grass, which, together with cooler, wetter conditions, create the green wickets beloved of seam bowlers, and on less well-drained grounds, the ‘sticky dog’ wickets dreaded by batters.

The impact that pitches have on individual cricket innings is greatly underestimated: a score of 60 not out on a crumbling or sticky wicket is sometimes much harder to achieve than 150 on a fast, flat track. For instance, Rahul Dravid’s unbeaten 27 against South Africa at Durban in 1996 was a titanic effort in light of India being dismissed for 66. Batting as he did for 120 minutes, with wickets falling constantly at the other end and the South African seam attack in brutal form on a lively track, was surely as impressive – at least mentally and technically – as a five-hour century ground out on a more placid surface.

Much of the technical advice given to players is actually as much about pitches as shots – as in the old saying ‘Thou shalt not cut before July’ (see p. 150), or even the adage that the first hour of any game belongs to the bowler. The

FIGURE 1.1: Cross-section of a typical southern African/Australian top-level cricket pitch. Note the layering of bulli, red soil and gravel used in construction.



latter is dominant at this stage of the game because the batter is at this stage trying to establish a strategy not only for playing the bowlers, but also the pitch, and he cannot do so until he has accumulated a certain amount of information about both.

This is why elite cricketers should learn as much as they can about pitches and outfielders. For some, this is essential: coaches should definitely bone up on the subject, as should umpires, who are responsible for overseeing the maintenance of the pitch and outfield during the game. They are the ones who call for sawdust (to mop up moisture), chalk for redrawing creases and signal a halt in play and call for covers if it starts to rain. It is also their duty to establish whether a pitch is in sufficiently good condition to allow for safe play. Popular South African umpire Cyril Mitchley, now retired, said that the most difficult moment of his umpiring career was his decision to cancel a one-day international fixture in 1997 at Boland Park on match day, as the pitch did not meet the required standard.

Finally, it is clear that proper preparation of a grass pitch and outfield is labour-intensive, expensive, and requires specialist skills. As a poorly maintained and bumpy grass pitch is useless, if not downright dangerous for practice purposes, artificial pitches are popular, especially at junior and schools level, and in less well-resourced communities. These usually consist of concrete, although tar or compacted sand can also be used. Concrete-based pitches and nets are covered with cricket matting, usually made from polypropylene or polyethylene. Currently, jigsaw-type plastic mats are being

THE PITCH THAT KILLED A TEST MATCH

The opening Test between England and the West Indies at Sabina Park in Jamaica in 1998 became the first Test to be called off in 121 years because of the state of the pitch. After less than an hour's play, with England on 17 for 3, and the batters ducking and diving to avoid the balls deviating off the wide cracks in the pitch, officials decided to abandon the match. In only ten overs, the batters had been hit seven times. Commentators, sponsors and fans were understandably outraged that the pitch was in no condition for an international match. The players kept a diplomatic silence, but Michael Holding and Ian Botham (both of whom created a fair amount of mayhem themselves with bat and ball during the 1980s) used words like 'disgrace' and 'death-trap' to describe the pitch.

What was particularly distressing about this incident was that Sabina Park had an august history as a particularly fast track. It has been the scene for some of the world's most notable batting triumphs – the world's first Test triple century in 1930, Sir Garfield Sobers's record-breaking 365 not out against Pakistan (for 36 years the highest score by a batsman), and Lawrence Rowe's Test debut of 214 and 100 not out against New Zealand in 1972.

promoted, as these have the advantage that they can be removed, leaving the area free for other sports to be played. The problem here is that young players who grow accustomed to playing on these surfaces may struggle to adapt to grass pitches. Junior players who show promise should be enabled to play on grass from time to time.

UMPIRES

Umpires hold a strange place in the cricket pantheon. They have their quirks, they are sometimes suspected of bias (to the extent that neutral-country umpires are now required to stand in all international matches), they can be utterly, disastrously wrong – and yet their decision is law on whether a player is out or not. Their role underlines the fact that in almost no other sport can a player be ejected when he has committed no error – or spared when he is legitimately out. The spectacle of the umpire raising a finger is intrinsic to cricket: it means that there can be no argument, no appealing, not even a hint of dissent (cricketers can be fined if the match referee considers their disappointment to be so visible as to constitute a show of dissent).

One of the great pressures on the twenty-first century game is to replace or at least support umpires with increasingly sophisticated technological aids. We discuss these important developments, and their implications for umpiring and the future of the game in Chapter 11. There have been a few spectacularly bad umpiring decisions in recent years: during the 2006 England-Pakistan Test series, umpire Darrell Hair first docked runs from the Pakistani total for allegedly tampering with the ball, then announced that they had forfeited a game they were otherwise certain to win.

And at the 2007 Cricket World Cup final, with the result a foregone conclusion, the match officials and umpires forced players to return to a darkened, damp field they had abandoned because the ball was no longer visible. Here they were made to play out the final few overs of the game – a performance made meaningless by the fact that the dominant Australians agreed to use only slow bowlers, and the Sri Lankan batters promised not to try and chase the total. These and other debacles are likely to lead to stricter regulation of umpiring at first-class level.

AND THAT'S ASIDE FROM THE GAME ITSELF...

Aside from all these external factors, within the game itself, the multiplicity of variables continues:

- There is a wide variety of bowling forms, discussed in Chapter 5.
- The different types of bowling and different deliveries make up an even wider variety of bowling strategies, discussed in Chapter 7.
- The bounce of the ball off the pitch differs almost every time, even if only by a tiny fraction (see Chapters 4 and 5).
- The ball itself changes slowly but continually, as it becomes steadily more worn and misshapen as a result of repeated contact with the pitch, outfield and bat. Once the new ball is taken after 90 overs, the nature of the game will change once again.
- Adjustments need to be made according to whether batters (in particular) and bowlers are right- or left-handed. In almost no other sport does this have such an impact.
- From the perspective of the batter, there is a wide range of possible strokes to play, discussed in Chapter 3.
- There are also ongoing variables in field placings. It is impossible to protect the entire field against the batter, so these have to change constantly and strategically (see Chapter 7).
- Different forms of the game demand different approaches – strategies for one-day games differ markedly from those for multi-day matches (see Chapter 7).

LADY LUCK

Finally, in no other sport does luck play such a significant role – winning or losing the toss can significantly tilt the game towards one side, depending on the conditions. Rain interrupting play at a crucial stage of play, wind springing up to assist the drift of a spin bowler, dew slowing down the outfield, a strike bowler pulling up at the end of his follow-through with an injury, a batter assailed by cramp, a poor umpiring decision (or two or three), a delivery hitting a crack opening up on the pitch and deviating in a direction that the bowler didn't intend (or that ambushes the batter), the ball hitting the wicket-keeper's helmet and going for five byes, the rare occasions on which a ball grazes the stumps but the bails remain intact (a ball bowled at Pat Symcox when South Africa were touring Pakistan in 1998 went directly through his wicket, passing between two stumps – but neither bail was dislodged, so he remained not out) – the list of bad breaks and strokes of good fortune is endless. This is partly why cricket is a game that tests not only technical and athletic ability, but also character.

And perhaps this explains why old-school cricketers are so fond of quoting Rudyard Kipling's poem 'If', especially the lines 'If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster / And treat those two imposters just the same'!