

# Batsman and Bowler: The Key Relation of Victorian England

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It is one of history's best jokes that the social invention which has been the most widespread, and almost certainly the most lasting, creation of Victorian England passed virtually unnoticed by the great sages of the time. One can search in vain for any reference to the growth of organised games in the works of Karl Marx or John Stuart Mill. Nor will you find commentary on the phenomenon in the works of William Morris or of Benjamin Disraeli; the latter must be the last Prime Minister of Great Britain who could admit quite freely that he hadn't the faintest idea how to begin to throw a ball. Yet less profound social thinkers were aware of the enormous impact of the rise of games, though they were often uncertain what to make of it. Witness a *Times* leader of 1897:

The taste for sport, inherent in all Englishmen, has of late years been most conspicuous in the extraordinary development of interest in all forms of athletic sports. . . . in every stratum of middle-class society, cricket and football are among the most absorbing interests of life. . . . The growth of the newspaper Press helps to stimulate and spread such interest. . . . And as every one, at least above the labouring classes, reads a daily paper, every one can be familiar with the names and doings of the heroes of sport. . . . The result is the extraordinary development of interest in such games all over the Empire, till it would be almost unsafe to say that even Mr. GLADSTONE or LORD SALISBURY is more famous than DR. W.G. GRACE or PRINCE RANJITSINHJI. At our public schools and Universities, we need hardly say, the *cultus* of athletics reigns supreme. It was always strong there; but increased publicity and notoriety have encouraged many boys and young men to feel that distinction in athletics is the one thing most worth striving for.<sup>1</sup>

The writer quotes advice rumoured to have been given to a young man going up to Oxford and who intends to become a schoolmaster. "Get into the eleven" he was told "and get a first class, too, if you can, but be sure not to miss the eleven." Then he goes on to consider whether or not all this athleticism is a good thing. It certainly has its good points: ". . . players themselves, in cricket or in football matches, learn some valuable lessons—the *esprit de corps* of playing for a side and not merely for their own hand, and

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the necessity of self-control and sobriety.” Even for the crowd there can be serious benefits. Undoubtedly, those who go to watch a cricket match at Lords are spending their time better than they would be at the races. Though, and here the writer reveals an interesting inverted snobbery, this is only really true of those who go to the serious county and Test matches, not of those who attend the “society picnics” such as Eton versus Harrow or Oxford versus Cambridge. And yet . . . the writer is convinced that the cult of games is at least on the verge of going too far: the danger is that England will have an unthinking class of leaders, concerned only with sports and games.

By the time this leader was written almost all of the sports and sporting institutions of modern England were established.<sup>2</sup> In Football, the Association was founded in 1863, its annual Challenge Cup begun in 1872 and the professional Football League started in 1888. In Rugby Football the first distinct club (Blackheath) began in 1863 in reaction to the formation of the (antihandling) Association, and the Rugby Football Union was established in 1871. At around that date the first international matches began, though the tradition of a fully-fledged International Championship can only really be said to have started in 1881 when Wales entered the arena. By 1897 the great schism had already occurred in the world of Rugby and the Northern Rugby Football Union, later called the Rugby League, was already in existence. In Field Hockey, too, this same period was formative. The Middlesex club attempted to formulate rules in 1874 and an association was formed in 1875. It disintegrated, however, to be replaced by the Hockey Association which was formed in 1886 and has organised the game ever since. Internationals were first played in 1895 and an International Rules Board established in 1900.

Lawn Tennis was, of course, also a Victorian invention. A form of the game was played by Major Gem and his Spanish friend Perera in Birmingham in the late 1860's and they established what was, arguably, the world's first Lawn Tennis club in Leamington Spa in 1872.<sup>3</sup> However, Lawn Tennis existed at this time only as a general tendency to modify the ancient game of Real (or Royal) Tennis to a lawn surface and a rubber ball. A precise form, called Sphairistike and played on a court shaped like an hour-glass, was invented by Major Wingfield in 1873 and patented by him in 1874. The Marylebone Cricket Club adopted his rules, but the all-England Croquet Club favoured an oblong playing area and established its championships at Wimbledon in 1877. (Thus Tennis is unusual in being a game developed by the organising body of another sport and yet coming to dominate its parent body completely, like some enormous cuckoo in the nest.) By the early 1880's the modern game was established with its overarm serves and its right of second service, both being connected with the agreement of the present net height and scoring system. Even the shots of modern tennis were developed in this remarkable short period as successive champions won by introducing shots distinctive to lawn tennis and beating those who relied on shots inherited from other activities;

these included Gore (the volley), Hadow (the lob) and the Renshaws (the smash).

Both cricket and golf, though each can claim a much longer continuous history than the games discussed so far, still can be said to have evolved in their modern form in this same period. The invention of the gutta-percha ball in St. Andrews in 1852 was an enormous step towards greater popularity for golf, while the decisions of the Prestwick Club to open their Invitation Tournament to professionals (in 1857) and to play it on a singles basis (1860) together established the modern Open Championship. In the twenty years after 1860 golf became firmly established in the English-speaking world outside Scotland.

Cricket had had its ruling body, the Marylebone Cricket Club, since 1787 and a written code of laws since 1835. But these facts are slightly misleading. The modern game can be said to descend from two developments, both, yet again, taking place in the period after 1860. The first was the removal of the restriction on the height of the bowler's arm in 1864, thus permitting modern, over-arm bowling. That such bowling should be permitted was closely connected with the achievement of something like a modern wicket—a level, closely mowed, playing surface. The intimacy of the connection between true wickets and overarm bowling will be vehemently attested by any cricketer who has had to bat on an inadequate surface. The second development was the emergence of the County Championship as the central and distinctive part of the “first class” game. This began realistically though unofficially in 1873 with the acceptance of rules of registration and was put on an official level in 1890. Fifteen of the seventeen county clubs which now contest the County Championship were founded or re-founded on a competitive basis in the quarter century after 1863, the exceptions being Sussex and Northamptonshire which have had uninterrupted existence since before that time. I think it can be argued that had not county competition emerged as the new foundation of cricket the game, and probably English sport in general, might have developed upon quite different lines.

These were by no means the only games which were developed from a primitive state into their modern form in England in a relatively short part of Victoria's reign; they are merely some of the most important. It was a remarkable concentration of events. What makes it even more remarkable is that there has been very little change, relatively speaking, since. If we were to revive the leader-writer of 1897 he might be surprised and shocked by many things at the outset of the nineteen eighties but he would find the sporting world remarkably familiar. He himself had remarked that football, which was “all but unheard of” in the eighteen fifties, had advanced by the nineties into a universally known and highly organised activity. And yet after another eighty years it has hardly changed. It is still dominated by the same two organisations and

the same two competitions; more than half of the First Division of the Football League when he wrote are still in the First Division, in each case playing on the same ground and generally wearing the same colours. Cricket and Rugby have changed a little more, it is true, but they are still recognisably the same. So are Wimbledon and the Open Golf Championship. The twentieth century has produced no major competitors for the sporting activities and institutions which evolved in the nineteenth.<sup>4</sup>

*From the Vernacular to the Modern*

In the development of sports and games we can usefully distinguish three stages, the vernacular, the adaptive and the modern:

	<i>Vernacular</i>	<i>Adaptive</i>	<i>Modern</i>
Terrain	Existing, local conditions determine play	Growth of standards	Standardised conditions
Participation	High, but exclusive to particular trades, places, classes	Based on sub-cultures and institutions	'Mass,' socially and regionally diverse, but selective
Skills	Extension of necessary local skills	Changing, developing	Skills and end in themselves. Orthodoxies.
Rules	Traditional	Alternative interpretations, subject to specific agreements.	Written rules, accepted precedents.
Organisation	Spontaneous organisation, generalised authorities.	Administration by agreement among players, captains, rival authorities.	Uniquely accepted and specifically sporting authorities. Bureaucracy.
Financial Basis	Minimal	Collective club finances.	Subscribing amateurs, paying spectators and paid professionals where viable.
Records	Oral tradition: tales and legends.	Sporting media developed by participants.	Mass media

These are, of course, ideal types and it would be foolish to expect every instance to fit the model exactly. The word 'modern' is used in the same way that it is used in political science: there is no implication that the state of modernity is either inevitable or morally superior. Many vernacular sports survive more or less unchanged; Knurr and Spell in the Pennines, for instance, or the Lake District Sports of fell running and Cumberland wrestling which are both highly appropriate activities for men who raise sheep in the mountains. Nor, for that matter, has the tendency to 'modernise' been dominant in recent times. In many ways there has been a return to the vernacular in the post-war period with attendances at Football League games dropping from about million (in the late nineteen forties) to just over half a million and the corresponding growth of participation in a wide variety of sports. Many of these sports are much closer to the vernacular model than the modern and some of them are both new and incapable of modernisation: Orienteering and Hang-Gliding, for instance. However, these contemporary anomalies need not trouble the historian of the Victorian period in which modernisation proceeded rapidly and there were no significant examples of de-modernisation.

The origins of hockey, cricket and (real) tennis are, for instance, quite lost in the vernacular mists. In none of these cases is there even an agreed derivation of the name. That lawn tennis was a specific adaptation of the game of kings and courtiers to the possibilities of the suburban lawn was clearly recognised at the time. The Honourable Alfred Lyttleton pointed out that "every country house and most suburban villas" could provide the facilities for lawn tennis while for real tennis "such a panoply is needed that a royal income must be won to provide it." The early historian of the game said of Major Wingfield: "His merit consists in the fact that he was the first to realise that there was, in what he had seen or heard, a capacity for adaptation to the needs of society."<sup>5</sup>

Although the etymology of 'cricket' is in doubt, there is agreement on the evolution of the game.<sup>6</sup> It developed in the sheep country of South and South East England with shepherds defending the wicket gates of their pens with their crooks from a thrown and tightly-wrapped ball of wool marked with the red die which was primarily used for putting proprietary markings on sheep. The adaptive stage in cricket was a very long one. It lasted approximately from the early eighteenth century until the late nineteenth. Many different institutions played their part in this stage including the professional village sides of the eighteenth century and the touring sides of the mid-nineteenth century (such as the All-England and United England elevens), as well as the public schools and the universities.

By contrast, the adaptive stage of football was remarkably short and took place within a narrow range of institutions.<sup>7</sup> Vernacular football had many varieties; for the most part it was a mass, lawless riot of an event which took place on vast areas of ground on religious holidays with few known rules and

indefinite numbers of participants. At the beginning of Victoria's reign it was all but dead, killed by enclosures, rural decay, stricter law enforcement and a growing puritanism in the Anglican church.<sup>8</sup> (There were exceptions: the famous game between two parishes in Derby struggled on intermittently into the twentieth century despite hard feelings and legal difficulties so that "derby" remains in the language of modern football as a synonym for an encounter between local rivals). In the new industrial cities such as Birmingham and Manchester it was unknown; these places lacked the space, the time and the tradition for such games.

By 1840, vernacular forms of football survived mainly in the public schools. As part of the re-organization of these schools by a new breed of evangelical and earnest schoolmaster—particularly Thomas Arnold at Rugby—football was turned into an organized activity, with rules and a code of ethics. From the public schools the new organized games spread to the universities and then to the Civil Service and the army. During the eighteen-fifties the forms of the game tended to polarise into one which allowed considerable handling of the ball (as played at Rugby) and one which allowed very little (as played, for instance, at Harrow). In 1863 the formation of the Association to further the mutual interests of the anti-handlers established final clarification of the rules and a great schism had occurred. ('Soccer' is just a slang public school abbreviation for 'Association').

At the beginning of the eighteen seventies, Soccer was still an upper-middle class game, as is clear from the entries to the first Football Association Challenge Cup: they were drawn entirely from clubs consisting of ex-public schoolboys. But already the gospel was spreading: football was being preached to and organized for the working class by the millowners' sons, vicars and schoolteachers who knew the game and who found themselves without opportunities for playing. This conversion began in cotton towns of North Lancashire; Blackburn furnished football with not merely the first but the first and second Northern teams to challenge the Southern public schoolboys.<sup>9</sup> Blackburn Rovers reached the final tie in 1882 and Blackburn Olympic won the competition in 1883, beating Old Etonians by 2-1 with superior teamwork and passing, which compensated for their inferior stature. This was a turning point of immense importance for, though Olympic themselves faded into insignificance, they had blazed the trail. No amateur team has ever again won the Cup and no team from South of Birmingham was to win it again until the twentieth century. When the Football League was founded in 1888 it consisted entirely of teams from Birmingham and points North, so that our leader writer of 1897 had witnessed, almost certainly in his own lifetime, the most complete, rapid and important transformation of football from a range of vernacular activities to a highly organized and massively supported working-class game.

### *A Seed in Fertile Soil*

The central question must be: Why did sport develop so rapidly and completely in the Victorian period? The answer falls into four parts, which I will deal with in order of increasing complexity.

In the first place, it happened simply because it happened. That is, some sports were developed in reaction to and imitation of, others. Cricket and Soccer were the leaders, the others followed. The Rugby Football Union was formed to protect the interests of the handlers from the superior organisation (and therefore convenience and potential for conversion) of the Association. But hockey furnishes an important example; Teddington Cricket Club played a large-part in the game and they did so because they wanted a winter game for members accustomed to playing cricket in summer and they specifically rejected football as an alternative. Thus reaction and imitation both played their part in the development of hockey. Another object of imitation, of at least marginal importance, was the United States. When the Football League was created, the idea came at least partly from the “American Tournament” competition in which each competitor plays every other and the champion is the one with the most wins.<sup>10</sup> Such a tournament had been organized in baseball by the National League of Hulbert and Spalding since 1876, though it was necessary to change the system to two points for a win and one for a draw to accommodate the accepted tradition of drawing matches.

Secondly, possibly most important and certainly most tangible, were the physical conditions created by Victorian inventiveness and what we would now call technology. In some cases technological change provided the equipment which made improvements and developments in sports possible. Perhaps the most important case was the technique of vulcanising rubber which provided tennis balls and the inner tubes of footballs. The improvement of playing surfaces owed a great deal to the engineers of Birmingham who produced the mowers and rollers which allowed fine lawns to be commonly available. This was a necessary condition of the existence of lawn tennis. It was also a necessary condition of the development of cricket into its modern form. Without a good ‘wicket’—a closely mowed and rolled playing surface—it was not possible to have either large scores or overarm bowling, both of which added immeasurably to the glamour and popularity of the game. Any cricketer can attest that the game is neither safe nor fair if genuinely fast, overarm bowling is permitted on an untrue surface. Until overarm bowling was legalised in 1864 it had been generally assumed that it would be unsafe. Once established it remained with little need for further regulation for many years.

Arguably, more important even than this were the improvements in transport and communications. In the first instance these had their main effects on cricket. Cricket became a national sport with a mass following because of the

County Championship, a competition made practicable by the widespread and efficient network of railways. It was popularised in the newspapers through the new form of cricket reporting made possible by new printing techniques, by the telegraph and by the distributive system dependent on the railway, so that followers could read about games the day after they were played. Further glamour was added to cricket by the international dimension, the new 'test' matches against Australia and the patriotism which they evoked. These were facilitated by vastly improved shipping and the telegraph; the team of England cricketers which toured Australia in 1873 was the first to have its results telegraphed back to England.

Various technological changes helped cause, and were complemented by, a vaguer set of conditions, the social changes which allowed members of every class below the aristocracy to increase the refinement of their lives. Middle-class sport was encouraged by the spaciousness of the new suburbs and by the training which boys received at the rapidly expanding public schools. (It must be remembered that the number of these schools went up from about a dozen in 1850 to over two hundred by the turn of the century.) The working class potential was increased by the public parks and by the growing facilities for public education especially, but not only, after the Education Act of 1870. A great deal has been made of the shortening of the working hours and this undoubtedly helped, but Lancashire Cricket Club had large crowds of spectators in Manchester in the late 1860's, before any perceptible reductions in working time. By the nineties, the 'slums' of Manchester and Salford were still slums to many outside observers. Yet they were places where it was possible to follow games and to play them; places which were enriched by the culture of sport.<sup>12</sup> In this they differed markedly from their condition in the forties.

The final set of conditions—and the most difficult to assess—can be characterised as 'ideological.' Games were regarded by many, including vicars and schoolmasters and army officers, as the best training for youth. In extreme accounts, the virtues which players learn seem comprehensive and limitless: courage, loyalty, discipline, obedience. The dangers which the games playing youth avoids seem terrifying: stunted growth, drinking, gambling, masturbation. These are extreme versions, but something very close to them was the normal assumption of the fiction read by youths of all classes in the late nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Partly for these reasons (which can be summarised as the view that games were the foundation of Empire) games were taught to schoolboys, then to workers and then to the natives of far-off lands. The greatest statement of this view of games, indeed, one of the greatest clichés of the age, was Sir Henry Newbolt's *Vitai Lampada*:

There's a breathless hush in the Close to-night—  
Ten to make and the match to win—  
A bumping pitch and a blinding light,

An hour to play and the last man in.  
And it's not for the sake of a ribboned coat  
Or the selfish hope of a season's fame,  
But his Captain's hand on his shoulder smote—  
"Play up! play up! and play the game!"

The sand of the desert is sodden red,—  
Red with the wreck of the square that broke;—  
The Gatling's jammed and the Colonel dead,  
And the regiment blind with dust and smoke.  
The river of death has brimmed his banks,  
And England's far, and Honour a name,  
But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks:  
"Play up! play up! and play the game!"

This is the word that year by year,  
While in her place the School is set,  
Everyone of her sons must hear,  
And none that hears it dare forget.  
This they all with a joyful mind,  
Bear through life like a torch in flame  
And falling, fling to the host behind—  
"Play up! play up! and play the game."<sup>14</sup>

And yet, it is as well to remember the old saw that you can take a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. Those who earnestly argued for the moral worth of playing games were by no means as effective in insuring their popularity as those who played and glamourised them. Ideology may have had a part in taking games to the schools and the factories, but in taking to them so enthusiastically schoolboys and workers were responding to ancient and common traditions enhanced by a new glamour. Neither schoolboys nor workers have ever taken so spontaneously to the kind of activities which were intended to improve their moral stature which did not have the glamour and the folk mystique of sport and games. I include such organisations as cadet forces, boys brigades, youth clubs and scouting organisations which have survived only as long as they have been organised from above.

### *Gentleman and Players*

Playing games may be fun, but winning is a great deal more fun than losing. People who watch games and regularly "support" one team find it easier to sustain their enthusiasm (and hence their attendance) if the team wins. For these reasons as crowds began to grow at organised games the temptation to hire 'mercenaries' or professionals became irresistible. It was particularly acute in the soccer teams of the North where the professionals were invariably working class and very often Scottish. The working-class Scots brought the new skills of passing and positional play to bear, skills which had developed very rapidly North of the border, so that when the Football League began in 1888 only one of its member clubs, West Bromwich Albion, did not include Scots professionals. The Blackburn Rovers team which won the F.A. Cup in

1883-84 included three such men, Suter, McIntyre and Douglas, despite a formal ban on professionalism.<sup>15</sup> Suter was a stone mason who was said to have come to Lancashire to practice his trade. But he found the millstone grit of Lancashire too hard to work; even so, he survived and prospered without visible means of support.

Generally speaking, the ex-public schoolboys and local notables who ran the major football teams of Lancashire welcomed both working-class involvement and professionalism as natural and inevitable. The objections came from the purely middle- and upper-class clubs of the South. It is important to realise the strength of their conviction. They were brought up to a "classical" view of man. Men should have many activities and should not exclusively emphasize any one skill; a professional games player was just a "trained seal."<sup>16</sup> There was also a tradition that the involvement of money in games inevitably led to cheating and dishonesty, a tradition well-evidenced by the histories of boxing and horse racing. In any case the whole culture of the public school sportsman favoured the eccentric genius over the rigorously competent. Many of the ideological arguments which favoured the *playing* of games took quite the opposite view of vast numbers of youths watching professionals play; R.S. Baden Powell was particularly emphatic about this distinction.<sup>17</sup>

Apart from these principles, it is clear that many Southern amateurs fervently disliked the idea of being on the same field as working-class professional 'cads.' Some of this dislike was pure snobbery, an attitude which could be sustained far more easily in the London area than in the intimacy of a Northern cotton town. There was also the fear of unfair competition; one could hardly be expected to beat a man who made a trade out of his game. This provided peculiar problems for rowing, where the sport always had been the trade of a class of men, the watermen, many of whom had inherited it from their fathers.

In any case, professionalism was (and is) extremely difficult to define. Sportsmen can accrue material benefits from their sport in a hundred and one ways without actually signing a contract or being given a wage packet. They can be given collections from the crowd or have testimonials organised for them. They can be given sinecures by their clubs or be employed in ways related to the game or use their prestige from the game to earn money. In the Victorian period, the issue and the definition of professionalism arose in many ways and in all the major sports. Central was the questions about "broken time" payments for wage earners who played Rugby, but it also came up in disputes about expenses for touring sides and testimonials for Welsh Rugby players. In tennis and golf it was often a question of sponsorship, of advertising and of employment by firms making equipment. Farcically, the issue arose over the penalty kick in both Soccer and Rugby as gentleman amateurs claimed that penalties were an insult to their integrity. Exactly how the different sporting

authorities dealt with the problem is not merely an interesting reflection; it was of vital importance to the development of English sport and the part it was to play in society.

Some authorities retreated into a complete middle-class isolationism. Hockey was one of these, but the extreme case was the Amateur Rowing Association which ruled that no man who had ever held “manual or menial” employment could compete under their auspices.<sup>18</sup> There is, at least, a kind of extremist logic to this position. The most bitter dispute was in Rugby.<sup>19</sup> The game became a popular working-class institution in parts of the North, especially in South Lancashire and West Yorkshire and was subject to the same pressures as Soccer. This inevitably led to tension with the socially exclusive amateur clubs of the South. In 1893 matters came to a head when the Union passed a counter-amendment “declining to sanction” the amendment that players be offered “compensation for *bona fide* loss of time.” Two years later the defeated clubs established the Northern Rugby football Union in Huddersfield. It was to develop into the Rugby League. From 1895 Rugby has provided the spectre of a sport totally divided along class and regional lines, a division that remains to date. That the schism had fatal consequences for the popularity of the game in England and for the competitiveness of English teams internationally seems indisputable; any doubters should consider the case of Wales, a country where the game did put down roots in the mass of society, where the Union did not split on the issue of professionalism and where the national team has been vastly more successful than that of England. But the speculation which must fascinate the historian of sport is this: what would have happened if sport as a whole had split on the same lines as Rugby? There would surely have been dramatic consequences for class relations and social stability.

Soccer threatened a similar schism, particularly in the early eighteen eighties when the Association banned a number of the Lancashire clubs from the Cup. The real crime of these clubs lay in being too honest about professionalism; the more moderate (or hypocritical) Blackburn Rovers were able to win the cup in 1884, 1885 and 1886 despite coming off consistently worse in games with Preston and Bolton. The Association faced an appalling dilemma. One alternative was to open the floodgate to the odious professionalism. But the other choice would alienate not merely a mass of supporters but some powerful commercial interests and would ultimately deprive them of all control over a section of their game. After a series of hung and compromised decisions the Association finally recognised the legitimacy of professionalism “under stringent conditions” at a Special General Meeting in July 1885. These conditions involved strict rules of registration and upperlimits on both wages and dividends. They represented a compromise which has been maintained and which has worked with reasonable efficiency ever since.

Often the writings and utterings of those who took the “Southern gentleman” view of games seem to imply that the idea of a professional sportsman was a moral outrage and that the collection together of masses of spectators opened untold possibilities of social danger. A typically passionate comment on professional soccer was that:

Association has touched pitch and has been shockingly defiled . . . the effect of League matches and cup ties is thoroughly evil . . . the system is bad for the players, worse for the spectators. The former learn improvident habits, become vastly conceited, whilst failing to see that they are treated like chattels, and cannot help but be brutalised. The latter are injured physically and morally. . .<sup>20</sup>

And yet there was nothing new about these conditions and they ought not to have been so shocking, for they had existed in cricket for decades. In cricket, upper class amateurs and working class professionals played together on a commercial basis. And cricket was *the* national game, its status and following being on a different plane from those of other games.<sup>21</sup> Since cricket presented the image of the professional games player as a necessary and admirable, if rather humble, part of the game, it enabled professional and partly-professional sport to develop rapidly and relatively harmoniously in England. But cricket was in many ways a unique phenomenon—a game where, at the highest level, professional and amateur players played side by side and on equal terms.<sup>22</sup>

There were a number of reasons why this strange situation had developed. It was sanctioned by time; there had been professionals in cricket since the first half of the eighteenth century and the annual game between the amateurs and the professionals (Gentlemen versus Players) had begun in 1806. It was made easier by the division of skills in the game into bowling and batting. The Victorians saw batting as a graceful art form through which a gentleman could express himself. They saw bowling as skilled manual labour, requiring hard work and diligent practice. Thus batting was a suitable occupation for gentlemen, while bowling was a trade fit for professionals.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, you could learn to be a good bowler anywhere such as in the street or on the common. But good batting could only develop with access to a carefully prepared wicket and good coaching. So there was no ‘unfair’ competition in cricket, but a feudal symbiosis on and off the field. To take the most famous example, Lord Hawke as Captain of Yorkshire not only personally rewarded his professionals for good play, but managed their money for them. They, of course, cleaned his boots and bowled to give him batting practice whenever he required it. Amateur hegemony had been established over much of cricket in the early part of the century when influential public school amateurs had succeeded in stamping out bribery and the worst excesses of gambling. Cricket was at least as much dependent on the support of their successors as it was on the existence of the professionals. A schism within cricket like that within rugby would have been a severance of the head from the shoulders.

Even so, there were two further conditions which helped to the course of harmony in English cricket which were not present in 1864. The first was the emergence of the county championship. The second was Dr. W.G. Grace. Apart from the county championship (and village cricket in the rural areas) cricket was as divided by class as any other Victorian pastime. The classes had their country house cricket weekends and their touring teams (such as the I. Zingari and the Free Foresters which survive to this day). The masses of Birmingham and the North were developing the tradition of serious, one-day, club cricket which became, by the end of the century, League Cricket. County cricket alone brought these two worlds together; it was soon established as the uniquely top class form of cricket.

Its popularity owed something to W.G. Grace who dominated the Gloucestershire side. To say that W.G. was “in a class of his own” is true in three quite distinct senses. On the field, he was an immensely good player for a very long time. His status as the best known and most loved of Victoria’s subjects was unrivalled. His biographer says of him, “Had they so desired it, W.G. and his wife could have been feted to their hearts’ content. As it was, something of royalty hedged them round. If W.G. were talking to a friend on the platform at Paddington, the train would wait respectfully for him to take his seat before it started westward, and great crowds would come to meet it at Bristol station . . . .”<sup>24</sup> Finally, W.G.’s personal style and background transcended social class. He was formally an ‘amateur’ but he twice accepted testimonials of over eight thousand pounds and when he played for the United South Eleven in 1872, “there was no pretence that he was not paid for playing in it. He collected the team, paid the players, and received a stated amount for each match under a legal agreement, with a penalty clause.”<sup>25</sup>

He was born in 1848, made his debut in 1865 and rose to prominence with a score of 224 (not out) for England against Surrey in 1866. This was the first score of over two hundred in first class cricket. “W.G.” was still playing cricket forty years later. During that time, he made 54,896 runs, took 2876 wickets and held 871 catches for Gloucestershire, England and the Gentlemen. These figures would be meaningless in themselves, except for the sheer longevity of his career. He made his first century in 1865 and his last in 1904. He rated 1871 as his best year, but in many ways 1895 was his greatest: it was then that he scored a thousand runs in May and made his hundredth hundred. This means, in effect, that he played and succeeded against generation after generation of cricketers.

Although he played for the ‘Gentlemen’ (and, indeed, reserved many of his most devastating performances for them) he was not *of* them because he had attended neither public school nor University. (His doctorate was achieved at the age of thirty after many years of private and intermittent medical study). His private life was lived amongst what was, in effect, a clan, the Graces and

their cousins (the Gilberts, Reeses and Pococks) many of whom were Gloucestershire doctors. He even married a cousin. On the field, he behaved in ways which were considered by those who had attended public schools to be simply “not cricket” such as unfair appeals and “bustling” opposing batsmen by talking to them and otherwise distracting them. Yet the ex-public schoolboys loved him for it. He spoke with a Gloucestershire accent. In short, he was and appeared to be a man who was from neither the classes nor the masses. He appeared to be from a mysterious and eternal rustic world, a bucolic Merrie England which lay outside and above the tensions of urban England. Cricket, as the national totem, was moulded to his image.

Historians of sport—as of anything else—should always resist the temptation of deterministic explanations. That English sports, on the whole, become forces for stability and national unity was not inevitable. It is proper and plausible to imagine a course of events in which sport became a vehicle for increased social tension and division and we have, in the history of Rugby, an important example of a game as a divisive institution. It is not good enough to assume that cultural determinism, an English genius for compromise, made what happened more generally, inevitable.

If W.G. had not existed, it would have been very difficult to invent him. Yet if he had not existed, the County Championship and the whole of cricket might have been considerably retarded in its development. And if that had happened, cricket would not have been established as the paradigm or example of what a game should be. In that event, soccer, sport in general and English society might have developed in directions crucially different from those which they actually took.

Were we to revive the man who wrote that *Times* leader in 1897, it would be interesting to tell him of the history of the twentieth century, a time of enormous stress for his country, a time of two wars fought on a scale that he could scarcely have imagined. As a general and personal judgement—it can be no more than that—I would put it to him that the ethics and institutions of Victorian sport had served his country well, whether as recruiters of troops (as the football clubs were on a massive scale in 1914-15) or as diversion of attention away from social and economic problems. Perhaps he could be persuaded that a society in which cricketers were better known than Prime Ministers was not so unfortunate nor unstable a society as he implied.

## Notes

1. *The Times*, September 2, 1897, p. 7.

2. I have used that invaluable reference book, John Arlott (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to World Sports and Games* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) in compiling this section, particularly in relation to the ‘minor’ sports. *Wisden Cricketers’ Almanac*, published annually since 1864, is a comprehensive source of information

on cricket. Its equivalent and imitator in soccer, *Rothmans Football Yearbook*, has been published only since 1970 and the earlier editions are much more informative than the later about the history of the game.

3. A plaque commemorating this achievement stands outside what is now Learnington Police Station.

4. Of course, some sports have emerged in the twentieth century. These include all the motor sports and (for instance) greyhound racing and squash which, though their vernacular forms were very old, were only formalised in England in the nineteen twenties. Even so, I do not think there can be any argument that the twentieth century has produced no real rivals to those games modernised in the Victorian period, in the emotions they arouse as well as in the numbers of people interested.

5. J. M. and C. G. Heathcote, E. O. P. Bouverie and A. C. Ainger, *Tennis, Lawn Tennis, Badminton, Rackets and Fives* (The Badminton Library, 1894), p. 77.

6. Cricket is extremely well served in the quality of writing about it, including fiction, biography, autobiography and history. The most notable histories are H. S. Altham and E. W. Swanton, *A History of Cricket*, with an Introduction by Sir Pelham Warner, (2 vols., London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948) and Rowland Bowen, *Cricket; a history of its growth and development throughout the world*, introduced by C. L. R. James, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode), 1970. The works of Sir Neville Cardus provide an invaluable insight into the atmosphere and mythology of its late Victorian and Edwardian cricket, the so-called 'golden age' of the game. However they cannot be treated as strictly reliable on matters of fact. They include: *Cricket* (London: Longmans Green and Co.), 1930. *English Cricket* (London: Collins, 1945), *Autobiography* (London: Collins, 1947) and *Second Innings* (London: Collins, 1950).

7. This section is a precis of the author's earlier essay, "Association Football and the Urban Ethos," *Stanford Journal of International Studies*, 13 (Spring, 1978), reprinted in John D. Wirth and Robert L. Jones (eds.) *Manchester and Sao Paulo, Problems of Rapid Urban Growth* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1978). Histories of soccer are less impressive than those of cricket. A contemporary account is G. O. Smith, *Football* (Badminton Library, 1899). Two of the most interesting modern accounts are James Walvin, *The People's Game* (London: Allen Lane, 1975) and Brian Glanville, *Soccer: a Panorama* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1969).

8. A scholarly account of the context of the decline of traditional sports and games is given in Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700-1850* (London and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1973).

9. See Harry Berry, *A Century of Soccer, 1875-1975* (Burnley: Blackburn Rovers Football Club, 1975), pp. 9-32.

10. G. O. Smith says of the idea of a League simply that: "The League was formed chiefly for the purpose of insuring a series of first-class games." (Smith, op. cit., p. 171) but *Whitaker's Almanack, 1889*, says "a Football League has been formed, including twelve of the leading North and Midland clubs. . . . These clubs play a sort of American tournament for the League Championship."

11. See Bernard Darwin, *W. G. Grace* (London: Duckworth, 1934), *W. G. Grace, Cricket* (Bristol; J. W. Arrowsmith, 1891), and *W. G. Grace, "W. G.", cricketing reminiscences and personal recollections* (London: J. Bowden, 1899).

12. Cardus, op. cit. (*Autobiography*), waxes nostalgic about the games played by working class boys in the Manchester of the eighteen nineties.

13. *Captain* magazine being the most prestigious and best-written of the genre.

14. Sir Henry Newbolt, *Collected Poems 1897-1907* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1907), pp. 131- 134. I quote it in full because although phrases in it have become favourite clichés, it is rarely read or printed in full, is frequently mis-attributed (usually to W. E. Henley), and often mis-quoted (e.g. 'The Colonel's dead and the Gatling's jammed').

15. Berry, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

16. This is one of numerous derogatory phrases about professional games players; it was the particular favourite of Avery Brundage, President of the International Olympic Committee, 1952-72.

17. See R. S. Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys, a handbook for instruction in good citizenship* (London: Horace Cox, 1908).

18. So extreme was the A.R.A.'s attitude that in the nineteen twenties they banned J. B. Kelly of the United States from competing as a sculler at Henley Regatta, despite the fact that he held the 1920 Olympic title, on the grounds that *he had once been a bricklayer*. It is interesting (and quite irrelevant) to note that his daughter went on to become Princess Grace of Monaco.

19. For a history of Rugby from the Rugby Union's point of view see U. A. Titley and Ross McWhirter, *Centenary History of the Rugby Football Union* (Twickenham: Rugby Football Union, 1970).

20. Earnest Ensor, "The Football Madness," *Contemporary Review*, (November 1898). Quoted in Brian Dobbs, *Edwardians at Play, Sport 1890-1924* (London: Pelham, 1973), p. 47.

21. If one relied on the printed word it would be possible to get the impression that cricket was the *only* game. Even at the turn of the century *The Times* was still reporting Football League games with one line while cricket was given long and eloquent coverage. In those stories in *Captain* which were set in an English public school (about half, the remainder being set on one or other of the colonial frontiers) the hero is almost invariably called upon to play cricket at some stage whereas football (of any code) rates only an occasional mention.

22. At the end of the 1902 season, in the middle of cricket's "golden age," counties were taking the field with, on average, six professionals and five amateurs. The proportion varied considerably, however. Surrey and Warwickshire were fielding nine professionals whereas Middlesex had only two. The more professional sides were the more successful. Surrey won the championship eight times between 1887 and 1914 but it was won by the mainly amateur Middlesex side in 1903.

23. These figures, chosen at random, make the division of labour fairly clear. They represent the number of professionals in the top ten in the season's averages:

	Batting	Bowling
1892	2	9
1897	1	8
1902	4	7

It is worth noting that the three amateurs in the top ten bowlers for 1902 did a great deal less bowling than the seven professionals.

24. Darwin, op. cit., pp. 135-136.

25. Darwin, op. cit., p. 55.

