

Any Change in the Batting Order? London Cricketers and Social Class 1860-1905

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Since its introduction to Canada in the 1830's, the sport of cricket has assumed an elitist aura and the notion has developed that it was a sport for the upper-class gentility. The game was first played at Upper Canada College, the Canadian equivalent of Eton, and was perpetuated by British military officers stationed across Canada in strategic locations. Many of the subalterns were the sons of aristocratic families which added to the idea that the game was associated with a distinct strata of the social hierarchy.

This paper seeks to verify the conjectural perception of cricket as a sport for the elite, and examines the effect of burgeoning middle-class participation upon the game. It focuses upon the Southwestern Ontario city of London, from the year 1860 to 1905.

London cricketers were listed from newspaper reports of the games during the years on the decade and half decade. The names were then checked in London city directories to determine their occupational status, which for the purposes of the study was deemed the determinate of class. Once occupationally identified the names were subjected to the vertical occupational classification system developed by Michael Katz. The result is a comprehensive design in which occupations are divided into five socio-economic groups-Group I representing the upper-class, Groups II and III the middle-class, and Groups IV and V the lower-class.

The demographic end-product of the research ordinarily supports the hypothesis of the continued participation of the social elite (Group I). Although there is a significant rise in the numbers of middle-class cricketers (Groups II and III) during the years 1875, 1880, 1885 and 1890 there is no evidence that they infiltrated, with any permanence the batting order and ranks of the "gentlemen" cricketers. A comparison between the percentage of cricketers and the percentage of the London workforce from an occupational class found that, in all the years chosen for study Group I was the only group which exceeded the workforce percentage. Of equal importance and of equal consistency is the under-representation, in terms of participation in cricket relative to population proportions, of all other groups.