

## BARRACKERS' CORNER

This section considers barracking in both the Australian supportive and the English critical senses. Essentially we invite comments on articles or reviews in *Sporting Traditions*, but these columns are also open for readers' views on issues in sports history or contemporary sport.

John Hatch, who will be elaborating at the Sporting Traditions Conference upon the views presented here, has responded to this open invitation. The editor would be pleased to hear from others.

"For lovers of cricket, the 1984/85 Australian season has in some ways been a sad one. Most of us would reluctantly admit that we have been reduced to boredom by the surfeit of one-day matches and many of us with longer memories have been saddened by the continued demise of the Sheffield Shield competition. Much has changed in cricket in the past few years and much of this change can be directly or indirectly attributed to the importance of television. Cricket like many other sports has been caught in a cruel dilemma, survive and thrive through television or slowly die without it. There really has been no choice!

Some changes however seem to have been independent of the influence of television. One in particular has "offended" some cricket followers, and yet by mistaken logic and apathy it has been largely accepted. I refer to the almost universal use of helmets for batsmen and at times for fielders. Simplistically one can defend it on the basis that serious injuries do occur and that they are in no sense one of the objectives of the game, and that wearing helmets will reduce their occurrence. This argument would seem to be unexceptionable. Highly intelligent and thoughtful cricketers, like Mike Brearley, have set forth such arguments.

The weakness is that there are several solutions to this problem and the solution adopted, helmets, actually avoids the real issue, and I would claim that it also subtly allows or perhaps even leads to "undesirable" developments in the game. The notion of what is "undesirable" is highly judgemental, but one could certainly claim that the changes have been unplanned and even unanticipated by most of us.

Consider the basic problem. Batsmen get injured for a variety of reasons. We might identify the four apparently most important ingredients, the pitch, the batsman, the bowler and the rules of the game, both the explicit rules and particularly in cricket, the implicit rules or mores of the game. All or any of these factors can contribute to unnecessary and ugly injuries. Clearly pitches should be true, batsmen competent and bowlers allowed to bowl as fast as possible. If we accept these as constraints, what further can we do to solve the problem.

In general, injuries to batsmen do not result from the bowler's pace on a true wicket, but rather from short of a length bowling, which we might note is not really directed at the stumps, in the sense that it would not hit them. Protecting the batsman basically makes such bowling acceptable. Unfashionable as it is to say it, some of the success of the West Indies lies in the very fact that not only do they bowl quickly, but some of them also consistently bowl short of a length. One should immediately add that Lillee and Thomson were early exponents of this method, at least in its recent expression.

One might ask, what harm does the wearing of helmets produce. Allowing that much of the argument is value-laden, one can say that helmets permit and even justify persistent short-pitched bowling. This tends to eliminate some of the more graceful and elegant aspects of batting. It tends to convert cricket from a vertical-swing game into a horizontal-swing game. One cannot prove that one is better than the other, but one should at least be aware of this "cost" of the helmet solution.

There is an alternative, though one which may require more assumption of human (umpire) responsibility and less technology - not fashionable nowadays. Without going into detail, control of short-pitched bowling, without inhibiting genuine pace and variety of fast bowling is not beyond the wit of man or the judgement of first-class umpires. Such a solution would, I believe, largely cure the immediate problem without introducing an unplanned and probably unwanted change in the way that the game is played."

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