

The Crisis of Confidence in Australian First-Class Cricket in the 1950s

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

Bob Stewart teaches at Victoria University, and is the manager of the Sport Management and Policy Division, which is located in the School of Human Movement, Recreation and Performance. Bob has a special interest in the commercial development of sport, the evolution of sport management practices, and sport organisation culture. Bob is currently researching sport strategy and policy in Australia.

Introduction

Cricket is a resilient game, having survived many crises through its rich and varied 260-year history as a codified sport. These crises ranged from accusations of racism, illegal bowling actions, drug abuse, and boorish player behaviour, to match fixing, inept management, corporate takeovers, and political boycotts.

During the early 1950s a crisis of confidence infected Australian cricket. This crisis of confidence centred on the way the game was played. In short, it was feared that the game was becoming overwhelmingly dull, and losing its hold over the hearts and minds of sport followers.¹ The antidote for this crisis was seen to be brighter cricket. This paper traces through the sources of this crisis of confidence, the effect it had on the administration of the game, and the extent to which it mirrored a 'real' decline in cricket's popularity and profitability.

Post War Reconstruction

Between 1945 and 1949 the reformist Chifley government reconstructed Australia's post war economy by pursuing a policy of planned development, economic regulation and social support.² Production levels rose sharply, culminating in 1948 with the launch of the 'Holden', Australia's first mass-produced car. For many citizens, this vehicle signified 'Australian progress and independence', despite General Motors Holden being a wholly owned subsidiary of General Motors in the United States.³ Rural exports increased in value, and the level of unemployment fell to just below 3% of the workforce.⁴ Notwithstanding these achievements, the Chifley government was replaced in 1949 by a more socially conservative Liberal-Country Party Government, under the leadership of Robert Menzies. They rejected 'deadly' Socialism in

favour of a climate of 'thrift and self-sacrifice' that enabled people to be independent and industrious.⁵

Unlike England and most of continental Europe, Australia was quick to regain its pre-war living standards.⁶ Australia's Gross Domestic Product per person was 33% above the average for Western Europe.⁷ This was not surprising, since the war had killed 42 million Europeans, and their 'transport system had collapsed'. In Britain, price controls and rationing were 'stiffer than anywhere else',⁸ but Australia's only major rationing problem involved petrol.⁹ The forty hour week had become the industry standard, and most people were not required to work on Saturday afternoons. As a result, there was 'time for a variety of pursuits' and the money to enjoy the cinema, the beach, and the mountains¹⁰

Cricket's Resurgence

Over the same period, Australian cricket's governing body, the Australian Board of Control for International Cricket, reconstructed its interstate and international cricket programs, having discontinued first-class matches during World War II.¹¹ This reconstruction of first-class cricket built upon the strong foundation established during the 1930s, when cricket was Australia's most popular spectator sport, and had positioned itself as the 'national game'.¹² Australian Rules football, which had extensive spectator support in southern and western Australia, was not popular in New South Wales and Queensland, while Rugby League, which drew good crowds in Sydney and Brisbane, was ignored by the rest of Australia. Cricket on the other hand, was played and watched throughout the country.¹³ England-Australia cricket matches were particularly popular with the public, as well as being highly profitable. Previous Australia-England encounters had attracted large crowds, the 1936-37 series being the best attended in Test match history. The aggregate match attendance was just over 900,000, which averaged out at 36,500 per match day.¹⁴

The Australian public had been starved of international matches during the war and a combination of pent up demand and post-war euphoria created widespread enthusiasm for a series of matches against the 'mother country'. Cricket was a powerful symbol of the ambiguous relationship between Australia and England. On one hand, cricket expressed their common political and cultural traditions, and was seen as a vehicle for cementing relationships. On the other hand, cricket expressed a deep-seated rivalry between the two countries. While England used it to reinforce its political and cultural dominance over the 'colonies', Australia used it to establish a sense of national identity and independence. To beat England at cricket was to have both confidence re-established, and be 'restored to the bosom of the mother country'.¹⁵

It was therefore not surprising when England was invited to tour Australia soon after peace had broken out. In the meantime, an Australian team toured New Zealand between February and April, 1946.¹⁶ Although a representative team had toured New Zealand on ten previous occasions, this was the first tour to include an official Test match, which Australia won convincingly.

During the 1946-47 season, Donald Bradman led Australia to victory against the touring England team. The Australian team repeated its winning home performance in England in 1948, and consolidated its position as world cricket champions. While there were many reasons why Australia outplayed England during the early post war period, the major factor was the dominance of Bradman, who continued to score runs in relentless fashion.¹⁷ Although Bradman was not universally liked, particularly by some of his playing colleagues, he was unquestionably the world's best batsman.¹⁸ The relative weakness of England was compounded by the loss of thousands of young soldiers during the war, and the poor state of the British economy immediately afterwards. Material conditions were sufficiently depressed in the mother country for each of the state cricket associations in Australia to send food parcels with Bradman's touring party in 1948. Two hundred cases were handed over to the British Minister of Food for distribution to the British public, which underscored the relatively high living standards that existed in Australia at the time.¹⁹ Australia's cricket successes were also linked to a broad participation base, and school cricket programs which 'reached a very high standard, with hundreds of well coached, talented cricketers being channelled into district clubs from both government and private fee-paying schools'.²⁰

Expanding Profits

In each of the 1946-47 and 1948 international series, attendances and gate receipts were high, and confirmed Test cricket's reputation as Australia's major international sporting event. While the 1946 and 1947 Davis Cup tennis finals against the United States of America captured the public imagination, and attracted an average daily crowd of 14,000 over each of three days of competition, the aggregate attendance for the 1946-47 Test cricket matches was 847,000, just over 31,000 per day.²¹ The gate takings for the Test match played in Melbourne exceeded that for any previous game played between Australia and England.²²

The 1948 tour of England was also hugely popular, and proved to be the most profitable 'away series' in history. The financial return to the Australian Board of Control for International Cricket totalled 75,000 pounds, twice the previous highest profit.²³ Both the second Test at the Lord's ground in London, and the third Test at Old Trafford in Manchester, attracted record crowds of 132,000 and 133,740 respectively. International Test cricket

matches were therefore both well attended and commercially successful during the 1940s, as Table 1 shows.

Table One: Test Match Fixtures Involving Australia: 1946-49

Year	Opponent/ Place	Total Attendance	Avr. Daily Attendance	Gate Receipts	Profits to Board of Control
1946	New Zealand/NZ	-	-	-	-
1946-47	England/Australia	847,000	31,400	£124,000	-
1947-48	India/Australia	388,000	18,400	£51,000	-
1948	England/England	-	-	-	£75,000
1948-49	No Tours	-	-	-	-
1949-50	South Africa/SA	-	-	-	-

Source: Cashman, *Australian Cricket Crowds*; Board of Control, *Minutes of Annual General Meeting*, 1946-48.

Although attendances at interstate matches, or the Sheffield Shield, as it was officially known, were lower than anticipated for the 1946-47 season, by the late 1940s, crowds had increased. Whereas the 1946-47 matches attracted only 155,000 spectators, the 1948-49 competition generated a total attendance of 292,000, or nearly 5,000 spectators per day.²⁴ The figures for total attendances, days played and average daily attendances are provided in Table 2.

Table Two: Sheffield Shield Daily Attendances: 1946-49

Season	Attendance	Days Played	Avr. Daily Attendance
1946-7	155,000	43	3,600
1947-8	254,000	59	4,300
1948-9	292,000	61	4,800

Source: Cashman, *Australian Cricket Crowds*.

Crickets Cultural Resonance

As the 1940s unfolded, Australian cricket consolidated its 'national sport' status. Cricket authorities not only gained substantial financial returns from first-class matches, but also obtained nationwide radio exposure. The 1948 tour of England was broadcast by short wave radio, and Test match descriptions captured more than 50% of the Melbourne and Sydney radio audience.²⁵ It confirmed that cricket was an important vehicle for the expression of national sentiment,²⁶ and provided 'a peculiarly intense form of national drama'.²⁷ Winning against the old 'colonial masters', created a

strong feeling of national self esteem, and Australia's ambivalent, but feisty, relationship with England always generated high match-day crowds and large radio audiences for Test matches.

Explaining the Malaise

However, in the 1950s the optimistic mood surrounding Australian cricket quickly evaporated when a number of officials became concerned about the game's capacity to engage the public and attract spectators. The retirement of Bradman in 1949, poor international performances by the Australian Test team, an increase in negative play, and a perceived loss of public interest in cricket, led commentators to conclude that Australian first-class cricket had entered the sporting doldrums. There was a general feeling that fans had drifted away from the game, and gravitated to sports like tennis, surfing and golf.²⁸

Sheffield Shield Finances

An initial cause for concern was the inability of the Sheffield Shield to be self-sustaining. While the Queensland Cricket Association (QCA) broke even on Sheffield Shield games played at its home ground in the 1950-51 season, the interstate, or southern, tour as it was more colloquially called, produced a net loss of 468 pounds.²⁹ The commercial outcome for the Victorian Cricket Association (VGA) Sheffield Shield fixtures was no less dismal. A loss of 254 pounds was incurred on matches played at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), while interstate travel expenses totalled 3,014 pounds, thereby producing an accumulated loss of 3,268 pounds.³⁰

Officials were so concerned about the declining profitability of interstate games that at the end of the 1951-52 season the Board of Control considered a proposal to reduce Sheffield Shield matches from four to three days on the grounds that losses were incurred on the last day of each game. Games played in Perth produced the largest loss, with receipts of 23 pounds and expenses of 123 pounds resulting in a fourth day loss of 100 pounds.³¹ The fourth day losses in the Melbourne and Adelaide games were 52 pounds and 42 pounds respectively.³² This matter was discussed at the 1952 Interstate Conference, the managing committee for the Sheffield Shield, where New South Wales Cricket Association (NSWCA) delegates proposed that Shield matches be reduced from four to three days, which replicated the duration of English County cricket matches.³³ The proposal was defeated,³⁴ but in its wake the Conference resolved to organise a restricted 1954-55 season by having each side play only four matches instead of the usual six.

On-Field Performances

A second cause for concern was the morale-sapping losses by the Australian team, especially against England. After having comprehensively defeated England in the 1950-51 home series it was expected that Australia would easily

defeat the touring South African team in 1952-53, but this was not the case. The South Africans won two Test matches and Australia won two, leaving the series drawn. The 1953 tour of England by Australia, while successful from a financial viewpoint, was a disappointment in every other respect, since England defeated Australia by one game to nil. England had therefore regained the 'Ashes', which Australia had held since 1934.

Australian cricketing standards took a further beating when, in the 1954-55 series at home, the visiting English tourists defeated Australia, three games to one. This was a euphoric result for England which had finally rebuilt its economy, and re-invigorated its cricket system, but was devastating for the Australians. Johnnie Moyes, a leading cricket commentator at the time, commented that the Australian batting was feeble, it had 'no solidity, no technique, no capacity to fight back', and was 'shockingly futile'.³⁵ Overall, there was a 'touch of hopelessness'.³⁶ The morale of Australian cricket collapsed in 1956 when, as the touring team, it suffered another humiliating loss to England. The Australian cricket fleet had touched 'rock bottom'.³⁷

Negative Tactics

A third cause for concern was that cricket had slowed down, and lost its adventurous spirit. Many commentators believed that the fundamental cause of the malaise in Australian first-class cricket during the early 1950s was its negativism, drop in tempo, and consequent dullness. That is, first-class cricketers were adopting negative tactics in their attempts to avoid losing.³⁸ Moyes described the 1950-51 home series against England as 'mediocre' and argued that 'negative field placing' and a 'permanent leg slip' was a 'menace' to bright and exciting cricket.³⁹ He went on to say that the 'time taken to bowl an over was often ridiculously excessive', and that the slow scoring rate that resulted was compounded by the poor mental attitude of the batsman.⁴⁰

The Board of Control also referred to the need to 'combat negative cricket',⁴¹ and early in 1952 under the guidance of Donald Bradman, sought to amend the rule covering 'leg before wicket' (LBW).⁴² It was proposed that a batsman could be given out if the ball was likely to hit the wicket if spinning into the stumps from either side of the wicket.⁴³ The existing rule allowed for a dismissal only if the ball was turning from the 'onside', that is, from a position on the same side as the batsman's legs. As well as making things fairer for all players, it was also anticipated that the new rule would 'brighten up cricket' by discouraging batsmen from 'padding up' to the ball rather than playing a stroke. The Bradman amendment was put at the September 1952 meeting of the Board, but was defeated when Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland voted against it because they believed it would put an unfair burden on umpires.⁴⁴

The matter of defensive cricket was also discussed at the September 1952

meeting of the Interstate Conference. New South Wales delegates tabled proposals aimed at improving the standard of cricket,⁴⁵ and a senior delegate, F. M. Cush, urged other States to mount efforts 'to brighten the game'.⁴⁶ Cush indicated that the NSWCA had promoted games in schools and teachers' colleges, and all district clubs had been asked to prepare better practice and match wickets. A scheme for 'youngsters had been put in place', and the country committee had begun to seek out outstanding players of promise and 'develop their abilities'.⁴⁷ Cush finally noted that his association had set up a 'special publicity committee' with the purpose of effecting closer co-operation with representatives of the press. Cush's report was enthusiastically received, and the Conference resolved that copies of the NSWCA proposals should be forwarded to all other State cricket associations for possible adoption.⁴⁸

However, the Cush program did little to allay the concerns of many officials and commentators. The VCA, in its review of the 1953-54 season, agreed with the Board of Control that the 'vexatious question of negative bowling' needed further discussion,⁴⁹ while the Board of Control, when previewing the 1954-55 season, again noted its concern about negative cricket, and resolved to survey 'all interested parties'.⁵⁰ Donald Bradman retorted that the problem existed in 'both Australia and England',⁵¹ thereby implying that the solution was not just to be found in tampering with the domestic competition.

Transmission of the English Disease

A fourth cause for concern was the fear that Australian cricket would adopt the dour and defensive tactics of many English players. Notwithstanding the team's international successes during the early 1950s, Colonel R. S. Rait-Kerr, secretary of the Marylebone Cricket Club, expressed his deep concern at the plight of English cricket. He blamed the dullness of cricket on the increase in the number and duration of Tests with a resultant 'decline in tempo' and technique that was copied in other levels of cricket, and the preoccupation of the batsmen with defence, largely dictated by bowlers.⁵² Rait-Kerr went on to say that the remedies were clear. They included convincing players that their livelihood depended upon making the game attractive to the public, the preparation of faster pitches, and, as Bradman had proposed, an amendment to the LBW rule.⁵³

It was noted that cricket became particularly dull and defensive whenever Australia played England.⁵⁴ According to one English commentator, 'the modern game was gripped to the point of suffocation in an iron band imposed by the gospel of containment'.⁵⁵ From the Australian point of view, the main culprit was Trevor Bailey, the English all-rounder.⁵⁶ During the 1953 series in England, Bailey developed the habit of slowing down play by

deliberately increasing the time to bowl an over. At one point Bailey took eight minutes to bowl a six-ball over.⁵⁷

In England, in 1956, a special committee under the chairmanship of R. A. Altham, President of the Marylebone Cricket Club, was set up to consider the development of the game, with a specific brief to see how the 'tempo' could be improved.⁵⁸ Among its recommendations were limitations on field placements, and the introduction of two day, knockout competitions.⁵⁹ The Bradman proposal on the LBW rule was rejected on the grounds that it would be too difficult to enforce.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, in 1957, the editor of *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack* concluded that a lack of colour in batting was making a good deal of cricket 'so tedious to watch'.⁶¹

The Demise of the Amateur

A fifth cause for concern was the growing professionalism of the game. For many cricket administrators and indeed some players, it was both the enemy of tradition and the source of corruption.⁶² Supporters of amateurism believed that it preserved the fun-loving dimension of cricket,⁶³ whereas professionalism was seen to lead to a defensive, dull approach to the game, where the emphasis was on 'safety first'.⁶⁴ According to this view, only amateurs could play exciting cricket.⁶⁵ It was for this reason that Australian players, who were part-time 'amateurs', were seen as far more adventurous than their dour, and mostly professional, English counterparts. Paradoxically, this view was mostly put by English officials, where the professional player was an integral part of the cricket scene, and where the adventurous and dynamic batting came from two of its best known professionals of the 1940s and 1950s, Len Hutton and Denis Compton.⁶⁶ Australian officials were less critical of the 'professional' approach, but they generally preferred amateur values. Neil Harvey, who was a star batsman during the 1950s, concluded that 'all games must suffer when money comes into the situation',⁶⁷

In other words, the problems of modern cricket lay with the professional cricketer, who had become preoccupied with defence, and was compounded by the gradual disappearance of the amateur.⁶⁸ The 1963 edition of *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack* asserted that by doing away with the amateur, cricket was in danger of losing the 'spirit of freedom and gaiety' which the best amateurs brought to the game.⁶⁹ It was argued that cricket should be made 'less of a career and more of a sporting pastime'.⁷⁰ According to D. Rait-Kerr, the Marylebone Cricket Club archivist at the time:

If the MCC strove to keep the true amateur in first class cricket, it was not for the sake of the old school tie, but was the sincerest desire to regain and preserve the unfettered spirit of high adventure, which since the golden age, had been the amateur's priceless contribution to cricket... Enterprise was now a 'sine que non' for survival.⁷¹

The Changing Social Context

However, the idea that a good dose of amateur values would save the game was not convincing to other cricket commentators. An alternative view was put forward by the West Indian commentator, C. L. R. James. While agreeing that cricket during the Edwardian age was superior in most ways to the cricket being played in the 1950s, he disputed the claim that the game's dullness was due to the post-war dominance of the professional cricketer. He pointed out that amateurs had been no less drab, cautious and defensive than their professional colleagues. James believed that the cause of the negative approach to cricket was the social environment in which modern cricketers lived and played. According to James:

The cricketers of today play the cricket of a specialised stratum, they are functionaries of the welfare state. When many millions of people all over the world demand security and a state that must guarantee it, that's one thing. But when bowlers or batsmen, responsible for an activity essentially artistic and therefore individual, are dominated by the same principles, then the result is what we have.⁷²

James contended that tinkering with the rules would not change the character of modern first-class cricket. Cricket could only regain its former glory if it was removed from the specialised first-class player and 'returned to the community'. Under these conditions it could once more become an artistic expression of life where cricketers play 'for the fun of it'.⁷³ English cricket writer, Neville Cardus, shared James' concern, and lamented that cricket had changed from a sport and 'aesthetic spectacle' to a 'competitive materialistic encounter'.⁷⁴

James concluded that the curse of modern cricket was not professionalism, but rather the adoption of mechanistic work practices. The fundamental problem was the techno-bureaucratic society in which players conducted their daily lives.⁷⁵ Coincidentally, James could have been referring to Bradman, since R. C. Robertson-Glasgow, the English cricket writer, concluded that:

... above all Bradman was a business-cricketer. About his batting there was to be no style for style's sake. If there was to be any charm, that was for the spectator to find or miss. His aim was the making of runs. He seemed to have eliminated error, to have perfected the mechanism of stroke. No other batsman, surely, has ever been able to score so fast while at the same time avoiding risk. He was, as near as a man batting may be, the flawless engine.⁷⁶

However, not even James would claim that Bradman's techno-bureaucratic technique could not draw crowds. Indeed, the opposite was the case. Dull cricket was more than a function of the 'nanny' state.

Changing Patterns of Leisure and Spending

Other explanations of cricket's malaise focused on the changes taking place in society rather than the changes taking place in cricket. For example, Benny Green, an editor of *Wisden Cricket Anthologies*, suggested that changing social conditions meant that 'cricket could no longer claim a captive audience'.⁷⁷ In other words, cricket had to compete with an expanding number of leisure options in an increasingly 'mass consumption' society.⁷⁸ In Australia, these options included not only sporting activities like golf, squash, tennis and ten-pin bowling, but also consumer products like kitchenware, record-players, television and drive-in cinemas.⁷⁹ The independence that Robert Menzies talked about in 1949 was strongly reflected in people's spending patterns in the 1950s. Summer time activities were increasingly centred on the family outing, the beach holiday, and television, which was introduced to Australia in 1956. Television in particular gained a strong foothold in a short space of time. Whereas only 74,000 households held television licences in 1957, by 1959 it has grown to 995,000.⁸⁰

The Lure of the Motor Vehicle

This increasing tempo and independence of modern life was exemplified in the explosive growth in motor vehicle ownership. It provided a degree of mobility that had never been experienced before, and became a 'decisive influence on the Australian way of life'.⁸¹ Weekends could now be spent outside the city, either in the 'bush' or at the beach. Touring to more remote destinations became a popular pastime for more people as the number of licensed motor vehicles increased from 700,000 to 2.5 million between 1946 and 1958. By the end of the 1950s the motor car had 'become both the symbol of prosperity and the assurance of mobility'.⁸² Jack Fingleton, ex-Test cricketer, and sports journalist, suggested that the lure of the motor car in combination with the 'keen interest' that young men took in the opposite sex 'worked against an interest in cricket'.⁸³ Keith Miller, another ex-Test cricketer, agreed, noting that the motor car, the beach and modern roads had taken young people away from cricket. He concluded that it was 'hard for an Aussie to convince his wife or even himself, that a day at the cricket match would be more fun'.⁸⁴

The Accelerating Pace of Modern Life

For other commentators, cricket's major structural weakness was its inability to guarantee constant drama in a world that increasingly demanded excitement and 'quick' results. Team captains could easily drop the tempo of a game by making a defensive team placement here, and ensuring a slow over rate there. Unlike other team games like Australian Rules football and Rugby League, which involved the concentrated expenditure of energy in a compressed time frame, cricket evolved as a 'rural entertainment contrived

to fill a long summer's day'.⁸⁵ Cricket was a game conceived to occupy rather than defeat time.⁸⁶ While, on one hand, cricket's aristocratic and rural traditions created a romantic attachment to the game, it also eliminated the need to get a speedy outcome.⁸⁷ According to Fingleton, cricket's great charm was its capacity to provide a soothing antidote to an 'uneasy and hysterical world'.⁸⁸ This point was more critically addressed by the Marylebone Cricket Club president, R. A. Altham. He noted that when ranked against the increased tempo of modern life, cricket was 'a rather slow moving activity'.⁸⁹

As far as Moyes was concerned, Australian cricket needed a 'shake-up', not just because it would attract enterprising play, but also because the cricket public wanted entertainment as well as skill. Moyes concluded that if players continually 'bored the public', their patronage would be lost, and international cricket would 'fade out of existence'.⁹⁰

The Responses

By the middle of the 1950s many cricket officials believed that first-class cricket was losing its appeal, and changes had to be made to ensure its standing as the national game. In the light of the Australian team's poor performance in England in 1956, concern about the slow tempo of first-class cricket, and the Sheffield Shield's chronic financial problems, Australian cricket officials again reviewed the state of local cricket. Particular attention was given to time-wasting, bowlers with suspicious actions, the duration of Test matches, and defensive field placements.⁹¹ The proposed rule which restricted the number of leg-side fieldsmen behind the 'popping crease' (that is, positioned behind the batsman) to two, was given considerable attention,⁹² since it was seen as a way of encouraging more attractive batting. And, batting was, for most commentators, the way to brighter cricket.⁹³

The home series against England during the summer of 1958-59 was surrounded by controversy over the issue of illegal bowling actions.⁹⁴ Despite the hyperbole and hostility, many commentators judged these Test matches as dull affairs, and concluded that cricket was still 'caught in a tide' of tedious negativism. An English journalist reporting the first Test at Brisbane, described it as 'one of the dullest cricket matches ever played'.⁹⁵ Roy McLean, a South African journalist, responded in the same way to the 1957-58 Australian tour of South Africa. He trusted that cricket followers, would in the future, 'have forgiven the players, and more still, will have forgotten how slow it all was and how utterly boring much of it proved to be'.⁹⁶ Ian Johnson, former captain of the Australian team, also complained about the dullness of Test cricket in general, and slow over rates in particular. He noted that whereas more than 120 balls per hour were bowled during the 1920s, no more than 100 balls were bowled per hour during the 1958-59 Tests against England. Neil Harvey, who also played in the Australian Test team during the

1950s, concluded that throughout this period, cricket, 'especially in the Test sphere, got duller and less imaginative each season'.⁹⁷

In 1959 the NSWCA once more proposed the elimination of the fourth and final day of Shield matches on the grounds that 'it was frequently devoid of interest, and also involved expenses which were seldom recouped by the day's gate takings'.⁹⁸ While the proposal was not approved, there were further complaints about negative play, and concern that the recent introduction of television might lead to a fall in first-class match attendances.

As a result, a 'brighter cricket' campaign was mounted. A number of rule changes were discussed and initiated in an attempt to make cricket more attractive to the public. At its September 1959 meeting, the Board of Control was concerned that in many first-class matches players were deliberately wasting time in order to secure a tactical advantage over their opponents. Law 46 (Note 4) was consequently amended to read 'bowlers taking excessively long time to bowl will be disciplined by being taken off'.⁹⁹

State associations were also concerned about the slowness of play, and in 1960 the QCA, at its June gathering, held a lengthy meeting on the issue and produced a discussion paper entitled 'Stimulating the Public Interest in Cricket'.¹⁰⁰ V. Shaefer, a member of the QCA Board, claimed that cricket was 'not offering the entertainment value it must have to bring people along in numbers to view it'. Apart from the general recommendation that cricket had to become 'brighter', the QCA also proposed the establishment of a supporters' club, more junior coaching programs, the introduction of an advertising and public relations campaign, and the importing of overseas players to add some 'dash and excitement'.¹⁰¹

A Question of Tempo

In short, for most commentators, cricket's problems at this time centred on the growing gap between the tempo of cricket and the tempo of modern life. It was universally agreed that Australian cricket had been infected by the disease of negativity and slow play. At the same time, Australian society was becoming more complex, affluent and mobile. This meant that traditional and time-absorbing games like cricket had to compete with many more leisure activities.

The solutions to the problem of negative cricket also revolved around the widening gap between the tempo of cricket and the tempo of modern life. Critics like D. Rait-Kerr and Cardus believed that the solution centred on the elimination of negativity. Cricket would be better off if it discarded its modern, restrictive, and increasingly professional pretensions. It could then return to its pre-modern and 'gentleman-amateur' antecedents where playing for its own sake was dominant, and where the need for external reward was irrelevant. In other words, that there was nothing wrong with first-class cricket that a good dose of character, adventurous spirit, and enterprise could not fix. Other commentators, like Green, Shaefer and Altham, believed

that the changing conditions of modern society were making traditional, and more particularly, negative cricket, increasingly unattractive to many people. Therefore cricket would have to change its structure, playing time, and playing culture if it was to maintain its status as Australia's national game.

The Consequences

At first glance there was evidence that cricket was losing its grip over the hearts and minds of Australian sport fans during the 1950s. In other words, it seemed that the crisis of confidence that had infected Australians had indeed been associated with a real decline in the game's popularity and profitability. For example, there was a gradual fall in Sheffield Shield attendances during the early 1950s. In the 1948-49 season, sixty-one days of Shield Cricket attracted 296,000 spectators, but by the 1951-52 season, only 178,000 fans watched the sixty days of play. For the first time since the turn of the century the average daily attendance had fallen below 3,000. The changing attendance patterns are summarised in Table 3.

Table Three: Sheffield Shield Attendances: 1949-56

Period	Total Attendances	Average Daily Attendance	Days Played
1949-50	296,000	4,852	61
1950-51	222,000	3,524	63
1951-52	178,000	2,967	60
1952-53	216,000	3,661	59
1953-54	269,000	4,638	58
1954-55	144,000	4,966	29
1955-56	285,000	5,182	55
1956-57	265,000	3,397	78

Source: Cashman, *Australian Cricket Crowds*.

However, there are two points to be made about Sheffield Shield attendance during the 1950s. First, the falling attendance in the early 1950s can be partly explained by an increasing number of international cricket tours into Australia during this period. At the completion of the 1951-52 season the Victorian Cricket Association noted that 'interest' in the Sheffield Shield has diminished during the past two seasons due to the relegation of these matches to secondary importance through visits of international teams.¹⁰² Between 1946 and 1952, England toured twice, and India, the West Indies, and South Africa once each, a total of five tours in six years. By contrast, in the five years between 1933 and 1938, only one overseas team toured Australia. Second, the fall in Sheffield Shield attendance was not sustained, and by 1956

average match attendance increased to 5182, the highest since the 1930s.

Attendance patterns for Test matches displayed similar anomalies. On one hand, a number of Test attendances were disappointing. For example, the 1952-53 tour of Australia by South Africa attracted average daily crowds of only 15,500, while the 1951-52 West Indies tour attracted a marginally higher average daily crowd of 18,000. On the other hand, the 1950-51 tour of Australia by England generated a daily match attendance of just under 30,000 that was, by any measure; impressive. Moreover, even when Australia lost to England in the 1953 and 1954-55 cricket seasons, these Test matches were commercial successes. The first Test match of the 1953 away series against England at the Lord's ground generated the highest level of gate receipts ever taken at a cricket match. Total receipts for the Test series also set a record. Although the tour of England in 1953 resulted in a defeat for the Australian team, it provided substantial profits for the state cricket associations. The QCA and VCA recorded profits of 9,600 pounds and 4,820 pounds respectively.¹⁰³ The 1954-55 tour of Australia by England was also a commercial success. The third Test, which was played at the MCG, was even more profitable than the 1953 Lord's Test match, and produced gate receipts of 48,000 pounds from an attendance of 300,270.¹⁰⁴ Test match figures of the 1950-56 period are listed in Table 4.

Table Four: Test Match Fixtures Involving Australia: 1950-56

Season	Opponent/ Place	Total Attendance	Avr. Daily Attendance	Gate Receipts	Profits to Board of Control
1950-51	England/Aust	612,000	29,200	£100,000	-
1951-52	W. Indies/Aust	396,000	18,800	£66,000	-
1952-53	S. Africa/Aust	388,000	15,500	£56,000	-
1953	England/England	-	-	-	£85,000
1954-55	England/Aust	703,000	30,600	£127,000	-
1956	England/Aust	-	-	-	£52,000

Source: Cashman, *Australian Cricket Crowds*; Board of Control, *Minutes of Annual General Meeting*, 1950-56.

Australia also regained its cricketing pride during the 1957-58 and 1958-59 seasons when it defeated South Africa and England respectively. Even though the home series against England was accused of being exceedingly dull, it gained significant public attention, with 766,000 people paying 185,000 pounds to watch the matches.¹⁰⁵ The aggregate attendance was the highest for a Test series since 1946-47, while the gate takings exceeded all previous figures. Australia cemented its position as the world's most powerful cricketing nation by defeating the popular 'happy-go-lucky' West Indian team in 1960-61.¹⁰⁶

While the West Indies tour was one of the most exciting and evenly contested in the history of Australian first-class cricket, crowds were actually smaller than that for the 'exceedingly dull' 1958-59 tour by England.¹⁰⁷ The gate receipts of 174,000 pounds for the West Indies tour exceeded expectations, but was still below the record 1958-59 gate receipt figure. Test match details for the 1957-60 period are contained in Table 5.

Table Five: Test Match Fixtures Involving Australia, 1957-60

Season	Opponent/ Place	Total Attendance	Avr. Daily Attendance	Gate Receipts	Profits to Board of Control
1957-58	S. Africa/S. Africa	-	-	-	-
1958-59	England/Aust	766,000	28,400	£185,000	-
1959-60	India & Pakistan/ India & Pakistan	-	-	-	£49,000
1960-61	W. Indies/Aust	735,000	30,600	£174,000	-

Source: Cashman, *Australian Cricket Crowds*; Board of Control, *Minutes of Annual General Meeting*, 1956-60.

Conclusion

The crisis of confidence that infected Australian cricket during the 1950s reveals a number of interesting features about the development of the game over this period. It was clear that cricket had become caught in a web of collective anxiety resulting from a number of factors that originated from both the game itself and the wider society. The game-related factors included the retirement of Donald Bradman, a fall in Sheffield Shield financial returns, a bevy of negative tactics, a general slowing down of play, the demise of the amateur, and the loss of the Ashes to England in 1953. The wider society-related factors included more leisure and sporting options, the seductive attraction of television and cinema, the lure of the motor vehicle, and the increasing speed of modern life. The view that cricket had become dull was exemplified in the Trevor Bailey incident in which he took eight minutes to bowl a six ball over. By the late 1950s there was general agreement that the game was dour, tedious, and less imaginative.

However, despite this collective anxiety, concern about the game's fall in tempo, and the speeding up of society, there was no serious loss of public support for first-class cricket during the 1950s. While there were claims that other sports had taken away much of its supporter base, the financial position of cricket was still sound. There was no dispute that the Australian team had frequent international failures during the mid-1950s, and that the South African and West Indies and teams did not attract large crowds. However, there was no firm evidence to support the view that cricket had 'declined

tremendously',¹⁰⁸ suffered a 'sharp decline' in popular support,¹⁰⁹ or reached the stage where crowds had dwindled alarmingly.¹¹⁰ While the standard of play at the international level was often disappointing to commentators and spectators, the increasing negativity had only a marginal impact on the commercial development of the game during this period. As early as 1952 the president of the QCA reported that the season 'was quite a good' one, indeed, 'one of the best we have had'.¹¹¹ Moreover, the 1954-55 daily Test match attendance of 30,600 was only 800 below the massively supported 1946-47 tour. Finally, the 1958-59 series generated more match day receipts than any other post WWII-domestic tour. The view that cricket had 'entered a period of stagnation'¹¹² was more myth than fact.

The ability of Australian cricket to insulate itself against the growing gap between the tempo of the game, and the tempo of daily life, can be explained by its cultural resonance. Specifically, the passionate rivalry between Australian and England meant that every Ashes series continued to attract large crowds during the 1950s, with average daily attendance oscillating between 28,000 and 30,000. Even when it was seen to be dull and dour, it was still able to engender strong national sentiment.

On those occasional cases where attendance and gate receipts did fall, they resulted from weak cultural resonance as much as in a fall in Test match tempo. The poor crowds for the 1951-52 and 1952-53 seasons can be explained by the fact that England was not participating. And, even when the West Indies tour of 1960-61 produced some of the most exciting cricket in Australian first-class cricket history, total gate receipts could not match that of the 1958-59 tour by England.

Throughout the 1950s the prospect of dour and dull games against England was outweighed by the prospect of a win against the old colonial masters. Neither the use of negative tactics, nor the growing complexity of Australian society, failed to quash the cultural resonance of Anglo-Australian Test matches. The drawing power of the 'Ashes' ensured cricket's status as Australia's national sport.¹¹³ In short, while the crisis of confidence in Australian cricket during the 1950s was real, there was no firm evidence that the game had become either significantly less popular or less profitable.

Endnotes

- 1 This problem is succinctly reviewed in R. Cashman, *'Ave a Go Yer Mug': Cricket Crowds from Larrikin to Ocker*, Collins, Sydney, 1984, pp. 104-109. See also G. Haigh, *The Summer Game*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 1997, pp. 59-61.
- 2 G. Bolton, *The Oxford History of Australia: Volume 5, 1942-1988*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1990, pp. 27-32.
- 3 J. Moloney, *The Penguin History of Australia*, Penguin Books, Melbourne, 1988, p. 298.

- 4 B. Dyster and D. Meredith, *Australia in the World Economy*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1990, pp. 185-86.
- 5 R. G. Menzies, *Afternoon Light: Some Memories of Men and Events*, Cassell, Melbourne, p. 296.
- 6 H. Van Der Wee, *Prosperity and Upheaval: The World Economy, 1945-1980*, Pelican, London, 1987, p. 25.
- 7 G. Whitwell, *Making the Market: The Rise of Consumer Society* McPhee Gribble, 1989, p. 20.
- 8 Van Der Wee, *Prosperity and Upheaval*, p. 28.
- 9 Petrol rationing was still in force when the first Holden motor vehicle came off the assembly line in 1948.
- 10 Moloney, *Penguin History of Australia*, p. 229.
- 11 The only games played that might have been called first-class were 'inter-service' competitions, that is, games played between the armed services.
- 12 Australian Broadcasting Commission, *Annual Report*, 1932.
- 13 There were, in practice, few rivals for the title of the 'national game'. Australian Rules football was confined to the southern states, while Rugby Union and League were played and watched mainly in the east and north. Soccer was played in all states, but was a relatively minor sport. The only significant rival was tennis, but it did not have a broad spectator base.
- 14 Cashman, 'Ave a Go', pp. 28, 140.
- 15 W. Mandle, 'Cricket and Australian Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society*, April 1973, p. 62.
- 16 Detailed in M. Ronayne, *Test Cricket Tours: Australia*, self published, Sydney, 1987, pp. 48-50.
- 17 J. Pollard, *The Bradman Years: Australian Cricket, 1918-1948*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1988, p. 397.
- 18 See C. Cary, *Cricket Controversy: Test Matches in Australia, 1946-1947*, Werner Laurie, London, 1947, pp. 143-51.
- 19 For the most part, the food parcels were basic. One consignment consisted of beef dripping. See Australian Board of Control for International Cricket (hereafter known as the 'Board of Control'), *Minutes of Annual General Meeting (AGM)*, 15 September 1948, p. 8.
- 20 Pollard, *The Bradman Years*, p. 397.
- 21 R. Cashman, *Australian Cricket Crowds: The Attendance Cycle*, History Project Incorporated, Sydney, 1985, p. 45.
- 22 Victorian Cricket Association (VCA), *Annual Report*, 1948, p. 9.
- 23 New South Wales Cricket Association (NSWCA), *Year Book*, 1949, p. 10.
- 24 Cashman, *Cricket Crowds*. This represented a marginal, but not dramatic fall from the 'golden years' of the 1930s.
- 25 Anderson Analysis of Broadcasting, *Ratings Report*, Sydney, 1948, p. 44.
- 26 Mandle, 'Cricket and Australian Nationalism', p. 62.
- 27 G. Caldwell, 'International Sport and National Identity', *International Social Science Journal*, no. 34, 1982, p. 173.
- 28 See for example Cashman, 'Ave a Go', pp. 104-109; R. Cashman, 'Cricket' in W. Vamplew *et al.* (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 1997, p. 118; and Pollard, *From Bradman to*

- Border*, pp. 79, 106.
- 29 Queensland Cricket Association (QCA), *Annual Report*, 1951.
- 30 VCA, *Annual Report*, 1951.
- 31 QCA, *Ordinary General Meeting (OGM) Minutes*, 11 March 1952.
- 32 QCA, *OGM Minutes*, 11 March 1952.
- 33 Reported in Board of Control, *OGM Minutes*, December 1951, p. 3.
- 34 It was noted that the VCA had, from the beginning, defended four-day Shield matches. See QCA, *Minutes of Executive Committee*, 24 July 1951.
- 35 A. G. Moyes, *The Fight for the Ashes 1954-1955: A Critical Account of the English Tour in Australia*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1955, p. 216.'
- 36 Moyes, *The Fight for the Ashes*, p. 216.
- 37 C. Fortune, *The Australians in England*, Robert Hale, London, 1961, p. ix.
- 38 Cashman, in 'Ave a Go, pp. 105-107, documents some of the concerns about dull cricket during this period. See also W. J. O'Reilly, *Cricket Task Force: The Story of the 1950-51 Australian Tour*, Werner Laurie, London, 1951, p. 170.
- 39 Moyes, *The Fight for the Ashes*, p. 244.
- 40 Moyes, *The Fight for the Ashes*, p. 255.
- 41 Board of Control, *OGM Minutes*, March 1952, p. 4.
- 42 QCA, *OGM Minutes*, March 1952.
- 43 Board of Control, *OGM Minutes*, March 1952, p. 4.
- 44 Board of Control, *AGM Minutes*, September 1952, p. 5.
- 45 NSWCA, *Yearbook*, 1953, p. 53. The proposals embraced such items as the methods of play, coaching, wicket preparation, school cricket and selection of players.
- 46 Interstate Conference, *OGM Minutes*, September 1952, pp. 5-6.
- 47 Interstate Conference, *OGM Minutes*, September 1952, pp. 5-6.
- 48 Interstate Conference, *OGM Minutes*, September 1952, pp. 5-6.
- 49 VCA, *Annual Report*, 1954, p. 12.
- 50 Board of Control, *OGM Minutes*, December 1954, p. 4.
- 51 Board of Control, *OGM Minutes*, December 1954, p. 4.
- 52 Cited in D. Rait-Kerr and I. Peebles, *Lord's: 1946-1970*, George C. Harrop, London, 1971, pp. 73-74.
- 53 Rait-Kerr and Peebles, *Lord's*, p. 120.
- 54 Board of Control, *AGM Minutes*, December 1954, p. 4.
- 55 Rait-Kerr and Peebles, *Lord's*, p. 120.
- 56 Interview with Ian Johnson, former Australian Test cricket captain, November 1993. See also I. Johnson, *Cricket at the Crossroads*, Cassell and Co., London, pp.44, 108.
- 57 Johnson, *Cricket at the Crossroads*, p. 108.
- 58 The report is reproduced in full in the 1957 edition of *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack*, pp. 73-78.
- 59 This was clearly a precursor to the limited over, one-day game which came to dominate international cricket in the 1980s.
- 60 *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack*, 1957, pp. 77-78.
- 61 *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack*, 1957, p. 69.

- 62 This theme runs through a large amount of sporting literature. It was first promulgated by the classics scholar, E. N. Gardiner. Gardiner, in writing about ancient Greek athletics concluded that 'the very popularity of athletics was their undoing' and that 'the nemesis of excess in athletics is professionalism, which is the death of all true sport'. See E. N. Gardiner, *Athletics of the Ancient World*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1932, p. 99. However, according to David Young, who reviewed the research of Gardiner and others who shared Gardiner's views, the evidence to support the classical view was fabricated. There was never a golden age of aristocratic amateurism, or indeed, any significant form of amateurism in ancient Greek athletics. The concept of amateurism was unknown to them. See D. Young, *The Olympic Myth of Greek Amateur Athletics*, Ares, Chicago, 1984.
- 63 In sport, to either play or officiate 'for the love of the game' immediately puts one in high regard. It implies that one has the 'best interests of the game at heart'. It implies a purity of spirit and motive. To 'do it for the money' denotes a loss of principles, and a 'cynical disregard' for the traditions of the game.
- 64 Rait-Kerr and Peebles, *Lord's*, p. 120.
- 65 See R. Bowen, *Cricket: A History of its Growth and Development throughout the World*, Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1970, pp. 240-42; and Rait-Kerr and Peebles, *Lord's*, pp. 120, 303.
- 66 Some cricket commentators had similar views. A. G. (Johnnie) Moyes and Jack Fingleton thought that 'over-commercialisation' would threaten the game's progress. Fingleton thought the game would lose a certain something if the English Eleven was monopolised by 'county and professional players'. J. Fingleton, *The Tour in Australia*, Collins, London, 1951, p. 243.
- 67 K. Butler, *Howzat: Sixteen Australian Cricketers Talk to Keith Butler*, Collins, Sydney, 1979, p. 230.
- 68 Bowen, *Cricket: A History*, p. 240; and Rait-Kerr and Peebles, *Lord's*, p. 120.
- 69 *Wisden*, 1963, p. 138.
- 70 J. Kay, *England Down Under: The MCC Tour of Australia, 1958-59*, Sporting Handbooks, London, 1959, p. 24.
- 71 Rait-Kerr and Peebles, *Lord's*, p. 120.
- 72 C. L. R. James, *Beyond A Boundary*, Hutchison, London, 1963, p. 211.
- 73 James, *Beyond A Boundary*, p. 212.
- 74 Cited in G. Wright, *Betrayal: The Struggle for Cricket's Soul*, Witherby, London, 1992, p. 30.
- 75 While James was a Marxist scholar, he did not recommend a socialist state as a cure for the problems of modern cricket.
- 76 R.C. Robertson-Glasgow, 'Bradman', in D. Green, (ed.), *The Wisden Papers: 1947-68*, 1988, pp. 26-27.
- 77 B. Green, *A History of Cricket*, Barrie Jenkins, London, 1988, p. 253.
- 78 Whitwell, *Making the Market*, p. 5.
- 79 See Haigh, *The Summer Game*, p. 6; and Whitwell, *Making the Market*, pp. 31-32.
- 80 Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, *Annual Report*, 1965.
- 81 Whitwell, *Making the Market*, p. 46.
- 82 Moloney, *Penguin History*, p. 321.
- 83 J. Fingleton, *Four Chuckkas in Australia*, Heinemann, London, 1959, preface.
- 84 Miller, *From the Grandstand*, p. 30.

- 85 Miller, *From the Grandstand*, p. 30.
- 86 M. Manley, *A History of West Indies Cricket*, Guild Publishing, London, 1988, p. 2.
- 87 B. Green, *History of Cricket*, p. 253.
- 88 Fingleton, *The Tour in Australia*.
- 89 Rait-Kerr and Peebles, *Lord's*, p. 143.
- 90 Moyes, *Fight for the Ashes*, p. 246.
- 91 Interstate Conference, *OGM Minutes*, September 1954.
- 92 See QCA, *Special General Meeting*, October 1957.
- 93 See, for example, N. Harvey, *My World of Cricket*, Hodder and Staughton, London, 1962, p. 146; and Rait-Kerr and Peebles, *Lord's*, p. 120.
- 94 The English press decided that Gordon Rorke and Ian Meckiff, two of Australia's best fast bowlers, had suspicious actions; that is they were 'chuckers'. In fact, some English cricket officials and commentators talked about an epidemic of chucking in Australia. The manager of the MCC touring party, Freddie Brown, noted that of the fifteen Australian schools he visited, four or five players in each of the school teams had 'suspicious actions'. Cited in Board of Control, *OGM Minutes*, January 1959, p. 16. Ian Peebles, an English journalist, concluded that Meckiff and Rorke 'threw the greater number of balls they delivered'. I. Peebles, *The Fight for the Ashes: 1958-59*, G. G. Harrop, London, 1959, p. 210.
- 95 Peebles, *Fight For The Ashes*, p. 200.
- 96 R. McLean, *Sackcloth Without Ashes*, Howard Timms, Cape Town, 1958, p. 7.
- 97 Harvey, *My World*, p. 146.
- 98 Interstate Conference, *OGM Minutes*, September 1957, p. 5.
- 99 Board of Control, *AGM Minutes*, September 1959, p. 15.
- 100 QCA, *Minutes of Special Meeting*, June 1960.
- 101 QCA, *Minutes of Special Meeting*, June 1960.
- 102 VCA, *Annual Report*, 1952, p. 12.
- 103 QCA, *Annual Report*, 1954; VCA *Annual Report*, 1954.
- 104 Cashman, *Cricket Crowds*, p. 50.
- 105 Cashman, *Cricket Crowds*, p. 51.
- 106 The term 'happy go-lucky' was used to contrast the West Indies approach to the game with that of the cautious and defensive methods of England.
See R. Coleman, *Seasons in the Sun: The Story of the Victorian Cricket Association*, Hargreen Publishing, Melbourne, 1993, p. 593.
- 107 NSWCA, *Yearbook*, 1961, p. 9.
- 108 J. Fingleton, *The Ashes Crown the Year: A Coronation Cricket Diary*, Collins, London, 1954, p. 19.
- 109 S. Quick, 'World Series Cricket, Television, and Australian Culture', Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Ohio State University, 1990, p. 74.
- 110 Harvey, *My World*, p. 146.
- 111 QCA, *AGM Minutes*, August 1952.
- 112 Pollard, *Bradman to Border*, p. 79.
- 113 See M. Bhattacharya and R. Smyth, The Game is Not the Same: The Demand for Test Match Cricket in Australia, *Australian Economic Papers*, March 2003, P. 88.