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The Fate of Cricket in the United States: Revisited

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Over the past few decades, journalists and cable television reporters have increased their coverage of efforts by immigrants from South Asian and Caribbean nations to re-establish cricket in the United States. Scholars have contrasted its stunning growth and popularity during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in British colonies in South Asia and the West Indies with its failure to become a mainstream sport in the United States. This essay examines recent scholarship on the global diffusion of cricket and its competition with baseball in the nineteenth century and evaluates the sport's growth in the United States since 1990. It also assesses its future prospects in America and throughout the world—especially the impact of the new Twenty/20 version of the game.

KEYWORDS: CRICKET, BASEBALL, ETHNICITY, IMMIGRANTS, NATIONALISM, GLOBALIZATION

Over the past few decades academicians, newspapers, magazines, and cable television networks have expanded their coverage of cricket's history in the United States and immigrants' efforts to re-establish the sport in contemporary American society. Scholars have contrasted its stunning growth and popularity during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in British colonies in South Asia, Australasia, South Africa, and the West Indies

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with its failure to become a mainstream sport in the United States. The media have reviewed cricket's recent revival in America, spearheaded by immigrants from South Asian and Caribbean nations and a few other countries that were formerly part of the British Empire. This essay will examine recent scholarship on the global diffusion of cricket and the spread of baseball into Cuba and Japan in the nineteenth century, evaluate the sport's growth in the United States since 1990, and assess its future prospects in America, especially the impact of Twenty/20 cricket, the new version of the game. It will also briefly consider the impact of globalization on cricket.

In 2002, Ramachandra Guha explained in *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, a social history of Indian cricket, how and why Indians adopted the sport. In 2005, Jason Kaufman and Orlando Patterson examined the cultural diffusion of cricket around the world. One year later, Dominic Malcolm published a more narrow study of cricket's struggle to establish itself as a major sport in the United States. In 2007, Boria Majumdar and Sean Brown compared the growth of baseball in the United States and cricket in the British Empire, especially in India. These scholars critiqued earlier work by Mel Adelman, Tom Melville, and me, on cricket's history in the United States.¹

A key factor that affects the prospects of an immigrant game becoming a mainstream sport in any nation is whether the newcomers' pastime closely resembles a well-established rival indigenous pastime. If the new sport faces competition from a popular comparable game, it will become part of the mainstream athletic culture only if the sporting public views it as distinctly superior to the established native sport. Given the intense allegiance of the sporting fraternity to its favorite games, newcomers have great difficulty winning converts. But the chances of success of an immigrant sport is greatly enhanced if it faces no natural rival. Such was the case with the British games of tennis and golf in the United States and the American sport of basketball throughout the world.

In the United States, the competition among cricket and several early versions of baseball determined which bat-and-ball game would become the American national pastime. The situation was very different in the British colonies in Asia, Australasia, Africa, and the Caribbean, where cricket did not face competition from any native premodern team sport. Gilli-danda and Kabaddi were indigenous games that might have provided Indians with home-grown alternatives to the British import. Gilli-danda resembled cricket in that a player wielded a "danda" (a stick analogous to a cricket bat) to strike a "gilli" (a conical, tapered wooden object analogous to a cricket ball) that was placed in a small circle drawn in the ground. Its small scale, variability of rules, and informal nature explain its popularity on the Indian subcontinent, but it could hardly compete with the grandeur and excitement of a cricket match. Kabbadi is a team contact sport in which players on each side attempt to tag, wrestle, and capture their opponents. Since it was not a ball game, it did not compete directly with either cricket or football.

Elites and entrepreneurs played critical roles in the cross-national cultural diffusion of cricket. Kaufman and Patterson emphasize "the degree to which elites chose either to appropriate the game and deter others from participating or actively to promote it throughout the population for hegemonic purposes." They also stress how cultural entrepreneurs popularized games by "looking to get and keep spectators and athletes interested in the sport."² Their interpretation highlights the importance of social class, especially status hierarchies

and the role of elites and sporting businessmen, as primary factors that determined the “cultural valence” of cricket in North America and throughout the British Empire. They dismiss or minimize nationalism, climate, rules, and “cultural worldview” as major forces.

In the case of the United States, Kaufman and Patterson focus mostly on the passion for cricket among upper-class Philadelphians from the 1850s to the early 1900s and their unwillingness to convert the masses to their favorite pastime. Speculating that “social mobility in Philadelphia might have prompted its ‘old-money’ elite to look for ways to segregate themselves from the city’s nouveau riche and upwardly mobile populations,” they explain that gentlemen cricketers in the City of Brotherly Love created a critical mass of clubs that would sustain elite interest in the sport for decades. They conclude that “[c]ricket became a marker of high social status, and the game was not promoted among the population at large.” In contrast, Kaufman and Patterson note that baseball’s league officials, sporting goods manufacturers, and star players actively promoted that sport, leaving cricket far behind. In their view, the more rigid social caste system in colonies in the British Commonwealth produced the opposite result. They explain:

Colonial elites, comfortable in their place atop the social hierarchy, had little reason to discourage those beneath them from playing a game that paid symbolic homage to British cultural and political hegemony; in fact, elites tended to regard cricket as a good means of “civilizing” natives in their own image.³

For Kaufman and Patterson, social stratification remains the “heart of the matter.” They conclude:

The extent to which an elite cultural practice like cricket was shared with or shielded from the general population was a direct result of the elites’ own sense of their place atop the social hierarchy. Had American elite cricketers felt less anxious about their social position, for example, they might have popularized the sport along the same lines as baseball (or golf or tennis).⁴

In an op-ed piece published in the *New York Times*, they summed up their thesis:

Cricket lost ground in North America because of the egalitarian ethos of its societies. Rich Americans and Canadians had constant anxiety about their elite status, which prompted them to seek ways to differentiate themselves from the masses. One of those ways was cricket, which was cordoned off as an elites-only pastime, a sport for those wealthy enough to belong to expensive cricket clubs committed to Victorian ideals of sportsmanship. . . . Baseball, in contrast, was sold as a rugged, fast-paced masculine game, befitting a rugged, fast-paced economic power.⁵

Kaufman and Patterson overstated the importance of imperialist and social-class factors in the cultural diffusion of cricket in both India and the United States. Ramachandra Guha’s interpretation of cricket’s adoption by Indians is more insightful and convincing. In *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, he argues that “native emulation” was more powerful than “European proselytization” in popularizing cricket among the Indian masses: “Slowly, the rulers convinced themselves that they had actively preached the gospel, that they had taught Indians to play cricket. The British, it was now said, *converted* the Indian to cricket, to thus bind him more firmly, and more happily, to their rule.” According to Guha, the “imitative Natives”—the various Indian ethnic and religious groups (especially the Parsis, Hindus, and

Muslims)—played a much more proactive role in promoting cricket through observation and imitation, especially in their ardent desire to defeat the British at their own national pastime. Thus, Guha concludes, cricket's astounding success in the Asian subcontinent resulted more from mass enthusiasm from the "bottom-up" than from preaching from the "top-down."⁶

In Australia, cricket was first played in Sydney, fifteen years after the settlement of New South Wales. In 1826, army and navy garrisons founded the Military Cricket Club and the Australian Cricket Club. Twelve years later, new clubs were founded in Melbourne and Adelaide. Rivalry among these three clubs promoted the spread of the game throughout New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia. In South Africa, the first Dutch settlers—the Boers—did not play cricket. British settlers played cricket as early as 1808, and Port Elizabeth's first club was founded in 1843. Missionaries created the first African cricket club in 1869. Matches between black and white teams were common in preapartheid South Africa, especially on imperial public holidays.⁷

Kaufman and Patterson ignore the fact that Philadelphia was not the only city in which the native upper class embraced cricket with a passion. In Boston, New York, and a few other East Coast cities, affluent Anglo-Americans and British expatriates patronized the sport, but families of the urban elites of German, French, Irish, and others of European descent did not. Thus, although the "Proper Philadelphia" set preferred to use cricket as a means of social exclusivity, elsewhere the wealthiest of the native-born used yachting, horseracing, golf, or tennis to separate themselves from the masses.

Malcolm also views cricket's fortunes in the United States through the lens of social class, but his analysis is more nuanced than that of Kaufman and Patterson. He provides a more detailed examination of the efforts of several social classes to promote the sport during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, he argues that the game of cricket that was diffused in the United States beginning in the 1830s was premodern in that "there were different social groups simultaneously introducing different varieties and styles of cricket to America." He correctly notes that the various ethnic and social-class groups that played cricket during this era included prosperous Anglo-Americans, working-class English immigrants, and native-born workers and elites. Anglo-Americans who founded the St. George Cricket Club in New York looked to the British Isles for standards of culture and sporting models and had very little interest in proselytizing, for actively recruiting native-born citizens would not have enhanced their social standing. Their elitist and exclusionary practices replicated those of the leading cricket clubs back home in England. In contrast, English working-class immigrants enjoyed more success in popularizing cricket among both the American middle and upper classes. But the existence of an Anglo-American cricket-playing elite and the native-born patronage of the game (especially in Philadelphia) marginalized working-class cricket among both English immigrant and native born workers. In addition, conflicts between upper-class Anglo-American and native-born cricketers over the use of professionals in matches and multiclub memberships also retarded the growth of the sport in the United States. Malcolm concludes, "[D]ifferent social groups, between which the balance of power was relatively even, enacted a kind of dual [or multiple] social closure." For him, to understand fully why cricket did not thrive in America, one must examine "the interdependencies between British and Anglo-Americans, between upper

and lower class English immigrants, and between English immigrants and native white Americans.”⁸

After the Civil War, upper-class native-born Philadelphians and New Yorkers showed little interest in promoting cricket among the masses, and working-class English and American cricketers did not have the means or contacts to do so. By that time, baseball had already replaced cricket as the dominant team sport in North America, primarily because of the forces of nationalism and popular response to specific structural characteristics of each sport.

Despite the efforts of Harry Wright, Albert G. Spalding, John McGraw, and Charles Comiskey to promote baseball throughout the world, it was students, businessmen, and missionaries who introduced the game in Japan and Cuba. In 1873, Horace Wilson (an American teacher) taught the sport to his students at what is now known as Tokyo University. Two decades later, Tokyo schoolboys won three out of four international contests against American players. In Cuba, an upper-class Cuban youth studying in the United States introduced baseball in Havana when he returned home in 1864. A decade later, the first recorded contest matched the Habana Base Ball Club and a team from Matanzas. In 1878, Cuba had enough teams for Havana’s Emilio Sabourin to organize the Liga de Beisbol Profesional Cubana, whose first and second annual tournaments were won by El Club de Habana. An 1887 tour by the Philadelphia Athletics also helped popularize the game.⁹

Majumdar and Brown focus on nationalism as central to baseball’s dominance over cricket in the United States and to cricket’s rising popularity in the British Empire. They do not cite the articles by Kaufman and Patterson and Malcolm, and they do not address class issues concerning the rivalry between the two sports in the United States. They acknowledge the role of the Indian upper and middle classes in promoting cricket as a means of asserting nationalist sentiments:

While in the Americas the desire was to dissociate American sport from British sport, in countries such as India, where the empire lasted far longer, the intention was to appropriate and subsequently indigenize British sports for purposes of resistance. In fact, the American reaction to empire sport was the opposite of the Indian retort to imperial games. . . . In India, the nationalist movement from the close of the nineteenth century made it imperative that cricket be taken up as a non-violent means to compete with the ruling British. In the United States, where independence was achieved a century and a half earlier than India, this need was totally irrelevant. Rather, what was important in the U.S. was to sever all sporting connections with the empire to emphasize an independent American identity.¹⁰

Majumdar and Brown’s argument is hardly new, and they do not evaluate the *relative* importance of social class and structural elements of each game. North Americans did not dismiss cricket because it was of English origins; they adopted other British sports—most notably golf, tennis, and rowing (although, in the case of golf, there was a great deal of Americanization). It was highly unlikely that Americans would choose cricket as the national pastime, but that did not mean that they would reject the game completely.

Malcolm and Majumdar and Brown correctly interpret the myth that Abner Doubleday invented baseball in Cooperstown, New York, in 1839 as an expression of American

nationalism, but they fail to cite the earliest attempts to identify baseball as an indigenous pastime. The Doubleday-Cooperstown story—which holds that a Civil War general invented the game—first appeared in a 1907 report of a Major League Baseball commission. Citing the work of Ian Tyrrell, Malcolm argues that “it was not until the 1890s that the American origins of baseball became widely accepted.” He explains: “Indeed, the establishment of the Mills Commission, from which the Abner Doubleday creation myth emerged, rather indicates that a consensus was reached sometime later. It must therefore be recognized that the early claims for baseball as ‘the national game’ were ‘essentially propagandistic exercises’ rather than expressions of popular will.”¹¹ Majumdar and Brown also conclude that “the creation and perpetuation of the Doubleday myth only reinforces the idea that baseball was to be protected from its own origins, that it was to be an American game, and that it was to always have been an American game.”¹²

Malcolm, Tyrrell, and Majumdar and Brown view the American invention of a creation story for baseball as a product of the late 1800s and early 1900s, but the search for a native pastime actually dated from the late 1850s.¹³ Malcolm rejects the argument that American dissatisfaction with cricket’s lengthy matches, slow pace, and long periods of inactivity by players “were at odds with an American national character forged by the experiences of a frontier nation and being moulded in the rapidly industrializing and urbanizing America of the late nineteenth century.”¹⁴ Kaufman and Patterson’s formulation of this topic is that cricket was presumably incompatible with the American “cultural worldview.” All of these sociologists question the validity of generalizing about national character in comparing the histories of cricket and baseball in the United States.

The “national character” of the British and American peoples did not determine the fate of cricket and baseball in mid-nineteenth-century America. A better explanation may be found in traditions of ball playing, availability of proper playing fields, and reactions to the structural characteristics and particular rules and features of each game. First, in the mid-1800s, American boys were much more familiar with early forms of baseball such as “rounders,” “old cat,” or “base” than they were with “wicket,” which was a premodern form of cricket popular only in New England.¹⁵ Their childhood pastime gave baseball an important (but not insurmountable) advantage over its rival. Second, access to proper grounds also provided baseball with a critical edge. Baseball diamonds did not have to be as well manicured as cricket surfaces, which had to be rolled frequently to keep them level. (Since the bowler bounced the ball to the batsman in cricket, a smooth field was essential to assist the former and protect the latter.) Clubs in both sports had trouble acquiring or renting appropriate space in the exploding cities of mid-nineteenth-century America, but cricketers faced the more daunting difficulty.¹⁶

More important than time-honored traditions of playing premodern versions of baseball and the availability of good grounds were structural characteristics of both sports. American sportsmen preferred baseball because of time considerations and because its faster pace afforded them a greater chance to join in the action. Baseball games typically lasted between two or three hours, whereas cricket matches often required one or two long afternoons to complete.¹⁷

Moreover, athletes of this era were eager to get as much exercise as possible within their allotted play time. Here the structure of baseball held a major advantage over cricket. In

the former game, a batter either reached base safely or was put out within a few minutes; three outs ended a half-inning, and players switched from batters to fielders after about ten to fifteen minutes. But, in cricket, a batsman could stand at the wicket for many minutes, and ten had to be put out before the sides changed from offense to defense. Thus, it was common for a cricketer to be inactive for long stretches of time.¹⁸

William R. Wheaton, a pioneering ball player, member of the Knickerbocker Base Ball Club and a major contributor to the modernization of baseball during the 1840s, tried both sports as a youth. In a reminiscence published in 1877, he recalled why he chose baseball over cricket:

Myself and intimates, young merchants, lawyers and physicians, found cricket to[o] slow and lazy a game. We couldn't get enough exercise out of it. Only the bowler and the batter had anything to do, and the rest of the players might stand around all the afternoon without getting a chance to stretch their legs. . . . The difference between cricket and baseball illustrates the difference between our lively people and the phlegmatic English. Before the new game was made we all played cricket, and I was so proficient as to win the prize bat and ball with a score of 60 in a match cricket game in New York of 1848. . . . But I never liked cricket as well as our game.¹⁹

Spectators and sportswriters of this era also found baseball to be more entertaining than cricket for both players and spectators because it provided more drama, excitement, and action. In 1859, *The New York Herald* listed two reasons for the limited popularity of cricket: “first, because baseball—an American national game—was in possession, and was too like cricket to be superseded [*sic*] by it, and secondly, in the points on which it differs from cricket it is more suited to the genius of the people.” It further explained: “It is rapid and simple. Even if there were no baseball in existence cricket could never become a national sport in America—it is too slow, intricate, and plodding a game for our go ahead people.” It concluded that baseball “is more lively and animated, gives more exercise, and is more rapidly concluded. Cricket seems very tame and dull after looking at a game of baseball.” That newspaper did acknowledge that “the game of cricket is one of great merit and skill” and assessed that “both games seem suited to the national temperament and character of the people among whom they respectively prevail.”²⁰ George Wright, who excelled in both sports (and was later inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame), believed that cricket was “*the* game wherein a bat and ball are used,” but he also recognized that “the American people . . . condemn this as an ‘old man’s’ game and not worthy of notice compared with our national game, base ball.” He concluded that cricket “is not altogether a spectators’ game.”²¹

A final edge that baseball enjoyed over cricket was its adaptability. During the Civil War era, baseball was still in the early stages of its transition from a folk recreation into a modern sport. In 1857, one of the goals of the National Association of Base Ball Players’ first convention was to codify and standardize the rules of the sport. Subsequent gatherings of the baseball fraternity experimented with them, especially in fielding and batting. By contrast, cricket was much further along in its development. By 1850, it had time-honored laws and traditions, as well as a governing body in England (the Marylebone Club) whose members were indifferent to the special needs and conditions of American cricket. In sport, as in most other areas of culture, it is far easier to try innovations at the beginning than

it is to impose reforms during latter periods. Attempts to promote an American style of cricket failed because of indifference or resistance by the Englishmen who dominated the sport in the United States. They dismissed all radical innovations as simply “not cricket.” The upper-class proper Philadelphians who patronized the sport before and after the Civil War viewed it as superior to baseball and did not wish to change its rules to democratize the game. Jones Wister, one of the best American cricketers from the City of Brotherly Love, summed up this philosophy in 1893 when he explained that he viewed cricket as morally superior to baseball. For him, what cricket needed the most was not rule changes but rather “good fielding, good bowling, and . . . good wicket keeping.”²²

* * *

What is the relevance of the early history of cricket in the United States for its revival over the past few decades? Are the factors that inhibited the growth of cricket in the United States still in force today? Since the sporting landscape is much more crowded today than it was in the nineteenth century, cricket’s chances for gaining widespread popularity now appear to be very slim—especially with baseball so solidly established as the dominant game and, despite the claims of football, still recognized as the national pastime.

What is the fastest growing sport in the United States? Surprisingly, with the possible exception of lacrosse, the answer is cricket. In 2008, Michael Bamberger, writing in *Sports Illustrated*, reported that cricket “was growing in the U.S. at a faster pace than baseball, table tennis, hang gliding or most any other sport you could name.”²³ The United States of America Cricket Association (USACA), the organization that governs American cricket, founded in 1965 by John Marder, has its headquarters in Miami Beach. In 2004, it regulated twenty-nine leagues and more than ten thousand players in the nation. About two hundred thousand people played some version of recreational cricket on weekends. By 2008, there were 750 registered cricket clubs. In January 2010, Don Lockerbie, the USACA’s chief executive, reported that cricket had about fifteen million fans, thirty thousand registered players, 950 clubs, and forty-eight leagues in the United States. In the spring of 2013, the numbers had increased to eleven hundred registered clubs in forty-nine leagues and approximately 35,000 active cricketers. “It’s a sport that is on the rise and will continue to grow in popularity,” said Shelton Glasgow, the Atlantic region representative of the USACA. He added, “In the last five years it’s been more of an explosion.” Glasgow said that, when he emigrated from Guyana to New Jersey in the 1960s, the state had only one cricket team. By the 1980s, it had expanded to one league. In late 2014, New Jersey had 211 cricket teams playing several versions of the sport in four leagues.²⁴

Cricket has reasserted itself in the United States over the past three decades, as immigrants, passionate about cricket, use their love of the sport to preserve their ethnic identity. Newcomers from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the West Indies, Australia, and other former British colonies, as well as native-born cricketers, have pitched their wickets across the United States, founding teams and leagues in Boston, New York City, Newark, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Winston-Salem, Dallas, Houston, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle, and other smaller communities. Large business corporations have sponsored amateur sports leagues in recreational programs offered as part of employee

benefits packages. In Detroit, beginning in 2000, Chrysler, Ford, General Motors, and other manufacturing companies sponsored cricket teams composed mainly of South Asian immigrant workers in the Michigan Cricket Association (MCA), until their financial woes compelled them to cut back their subsidies. In August of 2009, the MCA organized the United States Corporate Cricket Championship at Lyons Oaks Park in Rochester Hills, Michigan. In other cities Microsoft, General Electric, Caterpillar, and Sprint also fielded teams.²⁵

Immigrants realized that their love of the game (implanted in childhood and nurtured through their youth) enabled them to maintain their ties and affection for lands left behind. In 1983, Patrick Kirkland, president of the New York Cricket League (with grounds at Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx, New York), told a *New York Times* reporter, "It gives us an opportunity to continue an old-country sporting tradition we grew up with. Cricket also gives us a chance to socialize with other West Indians." Horace Howe, a Jamaican, joined the league after watching cricket teams compete, using the game to help him assimilate into American culture. "Coming to the park and playing cricket with other West Indians helped me adjust to life this country," he recalled. "It made me feel more at home."²⁶ In Boston in 1992, Everton Tull, an electronics transfer technician from the West Indies, explained his reasons for playing: "You come to America, the land of opportunity. But you don't want to lose your roots. This is what we look forward to every Sunday."²⁷ In 2004, Joseph Buffong, an immigrant from Montserrat who was president of the Massachusetts State Cricket League, told a *Boston Globe* reporter, "Cricket is in my blood. The very first week I got to Boston I started playing here. It means everything to me."²⁸ In December 2007, Errol Eccles, a senior gas and oil refinery consultant who played on a West Indies cricket team on his days off in Houston, Texas, explained that, by participating, he and his teammates "were trying to leave a legacy of who we are in Houston."²⁹ In 2008, a reporter from the *Christian Science Monitor* described cricket as "a way of life in immigrant neighborhoods, for the homesick, for the athletes, for the would-be warriors, for the doting parents on the sidelines."³⁰

The sport also enabled players from rival nations (especially India and Pakistan) to compete as teammates or as opponents and to socialize after matches. Arnold Arnajallum, born in Guyana and president of the United Cricket Club in Hartford, Connecticut, stated, "We get to interact with people having that something in common from all parts of the world. The beauty of it is how people from different nationalities, different backgrounds have this one game uniting people together." For Vimal Verma, president of the New Jersey Cricket League and a member of a club that was half Indian and half Pakistani, cricket was also "a microcosm of world peace": "All our preconceived notions of each other were shattered when we started playing with each other. We are there for each other like brothers."³¹

Immigrant cricketers also used their favorite sport for social networking, a means of connecting with fellow countrymen who had relocated thousands of miles from their native lands. In 2009, Raja Ananda, a financial administrator who emigrated from India to Waltham, Massachusetts, in 2003, joined the MIT club in the Massachusetts State Cricket League. He explained: "When I arrived here, I had only a few acquaintances. But I Googled cricket in Boston and found the league. Now I have many friends, all of whom have come from cricket." Most of his teammates were from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. He added, "We have our political problems back home, but here everyone gets along."³²

Many of these newcomers were not content with gaining respect for cricket as a niche sport patronized by foreigners (such as bocce, curling, and hurling). They dreamed of the day when their game would once against be a serious rival to baseball. In Joseph O'Neill's novel *Netherland*, Chuck Ramkisson, a Trinidadian of Indian descent who is determined to make cricket a mainstream sport in the United States, hopes to persuade the New York City government to construct "Bald Eagle Park" in Brooklyn as a first-class cricket stadium. Serving as an umpire at a match in Walker Park in Staten Island, he reminds players that the sport values civility and that a brawl might cost them the right to play in Walker Park:

Is there one good cricket facility in this city? No. Not one. It doesn't matter that we have more than one hundred and fifty clubs playing in the New York area. It doesn't matter that cricket is the biggest, fastest-growing bat-and-ball game in the world. . . . In this country, we're nowhere. We're a joke. Cricket? How funny. So we play as a matter of indulgence. And if we step out of line, believe me, this indulgence disappears.³³

Chuck gets angry whenever the media refer to cricket as an "immigrant sport." In an email message to cricketers, he declares,

Cricket was the first modern team sport in America. It came before baseball and football. . . . So it is wrong to see cricket in America as most people see it, i.e., an immigrant sport. It is a bona fide American pastime and should be regarded as such. All those who have attempted to "introduce" cricket to the American public have failed to understand this. Cricket is already in the American DNA. With proper promotion, marketing, government support, etc. awareness of the game could easily be reawakened. American kids could once again play their country's oldest sport!³⁴

* * *

Was cricket destined to become a mainstream sport in the United States or just another niche pastime for the latest newcomers to American shores? In July 2008, Rob Nixon of the *Atlantic Monthly* pondered this question as he watched cricket matches at Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx in New York City: "Before me, competing fiercely, were two very different visions of American cricket: the one expansive, a global sport's embrace of cosmopolitan possibility; the other an act of immigrant nostalgia, an attempt to re-create within the chaos of America the ancestral village, through cricket and self-enclosure."³⁵

Today, when many Americans see the word "cricket," they think of an insect. Or, more tellingly, as Simon Worrall stated in the *Smithsonian* in 2006, they "dismiss cricket as an elitist game played by girlie-men." He explained:

That may be because the game is superficially slow. Or because the players still tend to dress in traditional whites and during four-day international matches break for tea. Or maybe it's because in a sporting world that seems to have turned increasingly nasty, the game's code of sportsmanship remains rectitudinously strict.³⁶

In July 2000, the *Atlantic's* Nixon visited the cricket grounds at Seattle's Fort Dent Park to interview Deb K. Das, whom he described as "U.S. cricket's most erudite, indefatigable campaigner." Das was optimistic about cricket's prospects to attain the level of popularity of soccer, or even tennis, in the United States. He aimed to get it on television,

into schools, and to promote cricket camps for American kids. He thought that adoption of new, shortened versions of cricket that limited matches to one day or less would enhance its chances for widespread acceptance by Americans. In 2013, USACA chief executive Darren Beazley said, “My goal is to make cricket a game for all Americans. The challenge is to move from amateurism to professionalism.” He then added, “With a professional and strategic approach we can become a very stable and competitive cricketing nation.” His goals include introducing cricket in public schools, sponsoring national teams to provide role models for youth, and staging international matches in the United States to showcase cricket for the masses.³⁷

The USACA has struggled mightily over the past few decades to make cricket more visible to the nation’s sports fans, even as it has fought to retain its standing at home and abroad. It was admitted as an associate member of the International Cricket Council (ICC) in 1965. The ICC organizes the World Cricket Cup—one of the world’s most prestigious and popular international sporting events, trailing only the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) (football/soccer) World Cup and the Summer Olympics in television viewers. All ten full (that is, “Test”) members of the ICC automatically qualify for the final rounds of the World Cricket Cup. The United States was eligible to compete in the ICC Trophy tournament, which was established in 1979 to select teams that were not full members of the ICC to compete in the World Cricket Cup tournament.

The United States national cricket team has competed in every ICC Trophy tournament, but internal political strife and poor administration limited the USACA’s effectiveness. It reached the final round in 1994 but did not participate due to prior travel plans. During the early 2000s, the ICC suspended the USACA from all ICC-sponsored tournaments due to its failure to meet deadlines to adopt a constitution and hold elections. The decision was a vote of “no confidence” in the USACA and its president, Gladstone Dainty. “The success of this project relies on having an effective governing body for cricket in the United States,” said Ehsan Mani, president of the ICC. Mani and Malcolm Speed, the ICC’s chief executive, chastised Dainty in a ferocious invective letter: “We have never seen a sporting organization that combines such great potential and such poor administration as the USACA. We question whether the current administration of the USACA can play any constructive role in taking the game forward in the United States.” They added,

Our experience in dealing with the USACA and the current controversy over the governance of the game in this country has convinced the board that it cannot support investing ICC members’ funds in this project, and it has been terminated. From our observations, much of the blame for this lies with the current office bearers of USACA, including yourself.³⁸

The dispute within the USACA was resolved in early 2008, and the suspension was lifted on April 1.

Beginning in 2000, the USACA faced rival organizations that aimed to promote professional cricket in the United States: Major League Cricket (MLC), American Pro Cricket (APC), and the American Premier League (APL). The MLC was founded in New Jersey but established its headquarters in New York City. Its goal was to promote cricket throughout North America by developing a youth cricket program and by operating a

professional cricket league. Together they would eventually enable the United States to field a skilled cricket eleven that would be competitive in international matches, including the World Cricket Cup.

In 2004, the APC formed Pro Cricket, a professional league in the United States. Kalpesh Patel served as its chairman and commissioner. It adopted a speedy action-packed format similar to Twenty/20 cricket. The Twenty/20 format is similar to traditional cricket, except that the teams play a single inning, and each side bats for a maximum of twenty overs. Moreover, each bowler may bowl a maximum of one-fifth of the total overs per inning. For a full match, this is four overs. An over is a set of six balls bowled consecutively from one end of a cricket pitch. In a normal over, a single bowler delivers six balls in succession from one end of the pitch to the batsman at the other end. After six deliveries, the umpire calls “over”; the fielding team switches ends, and a different bowler is selected to bowl an over from the opposite end of the pitch, while the batsmen do not change ends. The captain of the fielding team decides which bowler will bowl any given over, and no bowler may bowl two overs in succession. Moreover, players wait for their turn at bat in baseball-style dugouts and jog to their positions rather than hang out in nearby cricket pavilions. Twenty/20 cricket results in a more athletic and “explosive” form of cricket, a postmodern game in which a match is normally competed in less than three hours. Its rules are designed to generate excitement and attract new and younger audiences.

The Pro Cricket version added a “designated hitter” rule, in which each team included twelve players, eleven of whom would field and bat.³⁹ Each side would be allowed to hire a few international stars. However, the ICC ruled that, because Pro Cricket was not organized by the USACA, contracted players from ICC Test nations could not be released from their contracts to play in Pro Cricket matches. Pro Cricket lasted only one season due to poor attendance and its inability to reach an agreement with the Dish Network on a television deal. Its one and only champion was the San Francisco Freedom, which defeated the New Jersey Fire.

After the demise of the APC, in July 2005 the MLC announced an ambitious ten-year program to establish National Cricket Centers, a National Cricket Academy, a world-class cricket stadium, and certification of cricket coaches and umpires. Two months later, it announced plans to launch a professional eight-team Twenty/20 league to begin in 2007. In 2006, the MLC tried to capitalize on the turmoil in the USACA by applying for recognition by the ICC as the official governing body of cricket in the United States, replacing USA Cricket. But despite such initiatives as the National Interstate Cricket Cup Tournament, a proposed professional eight-team Twenty/20 League, and its youth development program, the MLC fared little better than the APC. It failed to gain recognition from the ICC.

In the spring of 2009, Jay Mir announced plans to found the APL, claiming that cricket’s time had finally arrived in the United States. He boldly predicted that, within five years, thousands of American youngsters would be wielding willow cricket bats. But skeptics pointed to the previous failure of the APC and doubted that the APL could succeed. Mir approached officials of the USACA but did not formally apply for its endorsement. The ICC issued a memo to its members declaring that it would not recognize the APL and that players should not participate in APL matches. In July, the USACA countered with plans

to found a USA Premier League in 2010 to compete with the APL. It would also use the Twenty/20 format. The APL's inaugural event never occurred, and the APL expired.

Over the past few years, the USACA has launched several initiatives designed to promote cricket in the United States and enhance the nation's standing within the world cricket community. In December 2010, it signed a \$10 million deal with New Zealand Cricket and several strategic investors as stakeholders to create Cricket Holdings America to manage all commercial rights for cricket in the United States. In January 2011, the USACA was awarded the top prize in the Junior Participation Initiative category by the ICC America's region in the 2010 Pepsi ICC Development Program Awards for the United States Youth Cricket Association's Schools Program.

Professional cricket in the United States remained nearly invisible, ranking well behind Major League Lacrosse. In 2008, *Sports Illustrated's* Bamberger estimated that there were three hundred professional cricketers in the United States; virtually all of them were natives of former British colonies. Skilled batsmen and bowlers could earn \$1,000 or more over a weekend, with extra pay for a three-day holiday. Many players claimed that they played for the love of the game, but, in fact, paychecks provided a major incentive. For some, like Saudhaun Baxi, a native of India who had a university degree in accounting but who worked as a cashier in a service station, the money he earned from playing cricket for a Virginia club was unimportant: "I'm a single guy living with my aunt. I don't eat out and I don't believe in sex before marriage. I love cricket. I'd play for free."⁴⁰

But where were the revenues to pay professional cricketers' stipends plus other expenses of the matches? Team managers of a few dozen cricket teams in several not-for-profit leagues paid players without ticket sales, concession fees, or parking charges to cover costs. For owners, cricket was an expensive hobby—"a labor of love." Bamberger featured Barrington Bartley, an immigrant from Jamaica who was employed as a bank customer-service manager. In his free time, he was captain of the Kensington Sports Club, perennial champions of the Washington, D.C., Cricket League. The Kensington Club was owned and operated by Sheldon Ellis, another Jamaican who was a personal-injury lawyer. Ellis was prosperous and had no qualms about hiring "ringers" like Bartley to maintain the dominance of his team in the league. Bartley also competed for a few other teams in other leagues, driving in his aging Ford Windstar with his teammates from his home in Brooklyn to games in suburban Washington, D.C., or flying to destinations as far away as south Florida. Besides their passion for cricket and the extra cash, Bartley, his Brooklyn buddies, and his West Indian and South Asian teammates and opponents told Bamberger that they played to prolong their childhoods, experience the thrill of being a hero, escape the time restrictions of American sports (they loved the eight-plus hours of cricket matches), recall memories of their homelands, and enjoy the festivities that followed their games.⁴¹

The most celebrated West Indian cricketer in the United States is Jermaine Lawson, a renowned Jamaican player exiled from his native country because he was accused of bowling illegally, a charge referred to as "suspect action" and known colloquially as "chucking" or "throwing." When the *New York Times* reporter Alex Vadukul interviewed him in September of 2014, he described himself as a "freelance cricketer, playing for American teams that fly him around the country to locales with lively immigrant cricketing communities." He has been a professional cricketer for several years. In October of 2014, Lawson returned

to international cricket competition in Malaysia as a player for the United States national team. He competed against countries including Nepal, Singapore, Bermuda, and Uganda. His team won two out of six contests.⁴²

* * *

Over the past few decades, native born-Americans have shown very little interest in cricket, with the exception of a few old-timers in the Philadelphia region who support the Christopher C. Morris Cricket Library and Collection at Haverford College. One major exception is Allen Stanford, a wealth-management billionaire from Mexia, Texas, who, in November 2008, invested \$20 million in prize money for a match in Antigua between the English national team and the Stanford Superstars (an all-star squad of West Indian cricketers), who defeated the Englishmen by ten wickets. He aimed to revive interest in cricket in the Caribbean, generate excitement for the game in the United States, earn around \$10 million from the sale of broadcast rights, and exploit the sport as an international branding tool for his company, Stanford Financial Group. Stanford also endorsed the shortened Twenty/20 version of the game. But, in February 2009, the Securities and Exchange Commission filed civil charges against him and two of his associates, accusing them of engaging in a fraudulent sale of \$8 billion of certificates of deposit. In June, FBI agents arrested him.⁴³ Even before his financial empire collapsed, Stanford's dream of converting American sportsmen and audiences to cricket fans had little chance of success.

During the 1990s, the crime-ridden Compton neighborhood in Los Angeles witnessed the most bizarre attempt to popularize cricket among the American urban masses. Ted Hayes, a social reformer, recruited street boys and homeless men and founded the L.A. Crickets in 1994, then took the group on a tour of England in 1995. His goals were to utilize cricket to build character, instill discipline, and keep youngsters out of prison. A few years later, his Compton Cricket Club fielded another team, the "Homies & the POPz" (short for "people of power"). Proclaiming that "cricket is a civilizing force in the local community, even an ennobling one," he launched a triumphant return trip to England in 1997 highlighted by a match at Buckingham Palace and greetings and good wishes from royalty. Two years later, another jaunt across the Atlantic brought the group to Windsor Castle. As a journalist from the *Utne Reader* explained, perhaps "you had to be a bit mad to live on the streets by choice . . . and then come up with cricket as a solution for L.A.'s social problems. But there is something inspiring about Hayes's audacity." Hayes's creative use of cricket to help alleviate social problems in poor neighborhoods achieved some modest short-term success in Los Angeles, but his project did little to advance the game in the United States.⁴⁴

The growing number of college cricket clubs is much more promising for the future prospects of American cricket than the efforts of Stanford and Hayes. Haverford College, which fields the only varsity cricket eleven in the United States, began play in 1864. In 1987, a *Chronicle of Higher Education* survey of American collegiate cricket estimated that there were about fifty colleges that sponsored cricket teams or clubs, with nearly all of them affiliated with intramural campus recreational programs. Typically, these squads enrolled a mix of undergraduates, graduate students, and a few professors. While Haverford's roster

included a majority of players who were born in the United States, the others recruited players from a variety of nationalities—Englishmen, Australians, Indians, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, New Zealanders, and West Indians, among others. By their very nature, college cricket clubs stressed institutional loyalty over ethnic identity. Zeeshan Khan, president of the Georgia Tech Cricket Club, from Pakistan, played cricket alongside Indians, Sri Lankans, and Bangladeshis.⁴⁵

In 2009, Lloyd Jodah, an immigrant from Guyana, employed as a salesman for health club memberships, founded American College Cricket, based in New York City.⁴⁶ He organized the first American college spring break championship in March 2009 on the grounds of the Central Broward Regional Park in Florida. Teams from Montgomery College (Maryland), Boston University, Carnegie Mellon, the University of South Florida, and the University of Miami competed in the event, played under the Twenty/20 rules. Jodah's goal was to persuade the National Collegiate Athletic Association to officially recognize cricket. The Montgomery team won the inaugural championship easily.⁴⁷ Sumanro Das, a junior at Boston University who learned the game as a child in India, told a *New York Times* reporter that the spring break tournament gave college cricketers an opportunity "to show athletic directors at a Division I level that cricket matters, cricket is a big sport and cricket has a marketing capacity in this country."⁴⁸ By the fall of 2013, there were seventy college cricket clubs in the United States, mostly comprised of players from India, Pakistan, and Caribbean countries. Recently the game has witnessed impressive growth in New England colleges, including Northeastern, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard, Bryant University, and Worcester Polytechnic. Across the nation, collegians also founded cricket clubs at Cleveland State, Virginia Tech, West Texas A&M, Indiana, California State, and the University of Southern California.⁴⁹

As the number of immigrants from South Asia and the Caribbean increased dramatically in the United States over the past few decades, enthusiasts lobbied for youth, community, and public school cricket programs. In Stamford, Connecticut, parents organized a children's Stamford Islamic Center Cricket League in 2009. The founding families were natives of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. They dreamed of a time when their offspring would compete on an American national team in world tournaments.⁵⁰

Youth and school instruction and competition in cricket began in the Los Angeles region during the late 1990s in the San Francisco and Los Angeles regions. Malcolm Nash, a former professional cricketer, taught cricket at ten schools in Los Angeles from Monday to Wednesday and then flew to the Bay areas for the remainder of the week as the Northern California Cricket Association's roving school coach. In 2000, the Amateur Athletic Union awarded a \$30,000 grant to the Southern California Cricket Association to introduce the game in seven Los Angeles Unified School Districts. In August of 2001, the Northern California branch of the United States Junior Cricket Association held a fund-raising tournament to promote youth cricket teams in the nation's schools.⁵¹

The recruitment of youngsters whose families have been in the United States for generations is more likely to occur in schools and colleges. Children of immigrants from cricket-loving lands are prime candidates. In 1999, Adrian Arnajallum of Waterbury, Connecticut, told William A. Davis of the *Boston Globe*, "I play baseball and basketball. But I really prefer cricket. There's so much strategy and technique in it." He conceded, "Maybe

cricket is in my blood,” because his parents are from Guyana, where cricket is the national sport. But Arnajallum had little success converting his schoolmates into cricketers, partly because only the wicket-keeper wore a glove and they were not used to catching balls with their bare hands.⁵² Nandu Vaid, a member of the Atlanta Cricket Club, learned to play the game as a four-year-old in his hometown of Cuddalore, India. He is annoyed by wisecracks concerning the length of cricket matches. He told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, “Golf is played over four days, and no one seems to complain about it, . . . [s]o what’s wrong with cricket?” Yet he admits the sport will have to adapt to appeal to Americans. Vaid’s own three-year-old son, Preetham, has not begun to learn the game, leaning instead toward swimming and soccer. “If he’s interested, I’ll teach him,” To gain American acceptance, Vaid said, “Cricket will have to become a little Americanized.”⁵³

In 2008, about 20 percent of New York City’s population hailed from South Asia, the British West Indies, or other cricket-loving parts of the world. In 2006, Eric Goldstein, chief executive for school support services (including sports programs) of the New York City Department of Education, observed cricket’s popularity in the city’s parks and proposed that the city sponsor a high school cricket league. Two years later, school administrators inaugurated the nation’s first high school varsity cricket league. About six hundred students on fifteen teams completed a twelve-game season. Among the high schools that fielded varsity elevens were Medgar Evans Prep (Brooklyn), Newcomers (Queens), Lehman, and Dewitt Clinton (both Bronx). Teachers who coached these teams reported that high school cricket was good for both the schools and the student-athletes. Carwen Dublin, a native of St. Vincent in the Caribbean and a Medgar Evers Prep math teacher, stated that establishing cricket as a high school varsity sport recognized “the diversity of our population.” He added that playing for the team instilled “camaraderie and discipline, and I see it transferred to their academic work.” Nigel Thompson, a native of the Caribbean island of St. Kitts and Lehman High School’s cricket coach, observed that his players were already good students, but that “being on a team, they have to keep an eye on their eligibility.”⁵⁴

In 2008, the New York City Police Department sponsored a community summer cricket program. It hoped to use the sport to keep youth out of trouble during the summer and promote better relations with the city’s Muslim community. Deputy Inspector Amin Kosseim explained that putting the rosters together, recruiting coaches and managers, providing transportation, supplying equipment and uniforms, and obtaining permits were a lot of work, but “when you see the look on the kids’ faces, it’s all worth it.” The following year the program expanded from six to ten teams, recruiting 170 players.⁵⁵

* * *

As was the case in the mid-1800s, during the late 1900s and early 2000s, a lack of suitable grounds plagued cricketers, especially as they competed with softball and baseball leagues for access to grass fields in public parks. In 2004 in White Plains, New York, several dozen Indians and Pakistanis searched for a proper field. “It’s difficult,” said Ata Rehman, adding, “There aren’t even any dedicated grounds for cricket here.” Often they had to relocate when youth soccer and baseball teams arrived.⁵⁶ In New York City, even when cricketers managed to secure precious space to pitch their wickets, proper maintenance

required herculean efforts by club officials. For example, in June 2004 members of Brooklyn's Stars United cricket club needed five hours of heavy labor to rake, water, and roll the dirt between the wickets to make their assigned playground in a corner of the borough's Marine Park smooth enough for safe play.⁵⁷ The cricket grounds in Randolph Walker Park in Staten Island were also in poor condition. The playing area was half the size of a regulation cricket field; the outfield was not level; the grass (even when cut) was too long. The pitch was composed of clay, not turf, which meant that bowlers, batsmen, and fielders could not expect true bounces from balls in play.⁵⁸ In 2010, the *New York Times* described a contest between the Staten Island Cricket Club and a visiting team from Merion, Pennsylvania, played on a field that was "not exactly up to test standards. A baseball diamond violated one end; overhanging branches intruded on another. Near the deep square leg position ran the ugly metal links of city fencing. The grass was mottled like a skin rash."⁵⁹

The prospects for better facilities were much brighter in 2013 in the Bronx, when city officials opened ten new cricket fields in Van Cortlandt Park. City officials claimed that the new complex was the largest cricket facility in the United States. The renovated fields increased the total number of grounds dedicated exclusively to cricket in the Bronx to eighteen, surpassing Brooklyn (sixteen) and Queens (thirteen). Players and league officials praised the Van Cortlandt fields; Milfred Lewis, president of the New York Cricket League, described the new facility as "bigger, wider, greener and more luscious . . . a far cry from where it was before." Perhaps the best news was that the cricket fields would finally be off limits to soccer, rugby, and football players, who previously had ruined the grass and left holes everywhere.⁶⁰

Building modern cricket stadiums and hosting major tournaments have been two strategies applied by local and national groups to generate more excitement about cricket in the United States. In July of 2003, the government of Lauderhill, Florida, a small suburb of Fort Lauderdale located thirty miles north of Miami, announced plans to build the first championship-quality cricket stadium in the United States, with seating for up to 35,000 spectators, skyboxes, and a round field of Bermuda grass. The city's mayor, Richard Kaplan, boldly predicted, "Cricket is going to put us on the map. Someday Lauderhill is going to be the cricket capital of the United States." The project's promoters hoped to persuade the ICC to schedule at least one match of the 2007 Cricket World Cup in the new stadium.⁶¹ But over the next few years, the stadium's proponents scaled down the project. In 2007, residents of Broward County, Florida, funded a \$10 million, five-thousand-seat facility in Lauderhill at the Central Broward Regional Park. The sport's only permanent North American venue, it was built with the expectations that it would attract international competitions and fans from all over the region, if not the nation. Two years later, the venue hosted games of local leagues, but its managers had not been able to lure world-class cricket elevens to the new arena. Critics complained that they were not doing enough to promote the arena, but the three-year suspension of the USACA by the ICC severely diminished their chances of booking marquee matches. Two ICC-sanctioned Twenty/20 matches between Sri Lanka and New Zealand in 2010 and two more between New Zealand and the West Indies in 2012 drew sizeable crowds and generated significant returns on the county government's investment in the Broward County stadium.⁶²

In the Midwest, Minneapolis and Indianapolis also planned to build stadiums with grounds suitable for world-class cricket contests. In July 2009, the United States Cricket Association scheduled its Western Conference Championship at Bryn Mawr Meadows Park in Minneapolis, with the hope that the event would boost the popularity of the sport in the Middle West.⁶³ Indianapolis made a major investment in a new World Sports Park, which consists of five multipurpose fields designed for cricket, soccer, hurling, rugby, lacrosse, Australian Rules football, and Gaelic football. In 2013, city officials negotiated a contract with the USACA to host the national men's cricket championships from 2014 through 2015. But some City Council members were skeptical about spending taxpayers' money on a niche sport like cricket, when the infrastructure needed repair.⁶⁴

In 2007, Secaucus, New Jersey, Hudson County, freeholders budgeted \$2.2 million to build a new regulation-size cricket pitch in Laurel Hill County Park. It would include temporary, moveable seating that could accommodate spectators for league matches, tournaments between first-division international teams, or cultural festivals featuring cricket contests. The freeholders' spokesman, Jim Kennelly, announced that officials expected the new facility to be ready by the spring of 2008. "This is our first-ever purely cricket facility," Kennelly said. "Just like sandlot baseball, cricketers find empty lots to play in all over, so we wanted to give them a quality, dedicated space." They often practiced on strips of dirt or shared fields with soccer players, whose cleats tore up the surface of sand and ground clay required for a smooth cricket pitch. Kennelly added, "Sometimes we can't play because of baseball and football, or schedules that have to be worked out with parks commissioners. There's definitely not enough facilities." Colin Edwards, a member of Paterson's Wanderers, agreed that finding space was a constant battle. He explained, "Practice is the worst. Football, baseball and all the other dominant American sports get precedent." Shelton Glasgow, the Atlantic region representative of the USACA, thought that the money would be well spent, adding that "with the fervor with which the sport is played, they will certainly be successful." Adrian Rahim, a founding member of the Jersey City Cricket Club, said his team had been lobbying the county for decades to build a dedicated cricket pitch. Rahim said he had emphasized to the freeholders the enormous financial contributions of the growing South Asian and Caribbean populations and that all they asked in return was a place to practice their national sport. "We have so many businessmen who contribute taxes," he said. "Why should I watch others enjoying their games each weekend on facilities my taxes pay for, when I can't play mine?"⁶⁵

As was the case a century and a half ago, time considerations and cricket's structural aspects generated resistance and even ridicule among the sporting public of the United States. While cricket leagues and teams in the United States have generally shortened matches so that they are completed in one day, that is still too long for most Americans. In July of 2009, Murali Chandra, an associate professor at Washington State University's (WSU) College of Veterinary Medicine and player-coach of the WSU team in the Northwest Cricket League, was disappointed that more Americans did not attend cricket matches or learn the sport. But he understood that Americans prefer games "which usually only last a couple of hours. The shortest form of cricket we play, your whole day is gone. Americans aren't used to that. They think it is a very slow game."⁶⁶ In January 2010, sports historian David Brooks told *BBC News Magazine* that historically "cricket, with its need for a lot

of time and good facilities, was not well suited to a country dominated by low-income immigrants, many of them from European non-cricketing nations.” He explained:

I’m not sure what it is in the American psyche that makes long attention spans rare, but it is a fact that none of the US sports lasts more than three hours. They’ve found a formula that works, and cricket—with the possible exception of Twenty/20—does not fit into it.⁶⁷

Over the past decades, many proponents of cricket in the United States believe that, to join the triumvirate of baseball, football, and basketball, cricketers must adopt the Twenty/20 rules. Enthusiasts for the shorter game coined the motto: “Twice the action; half the time!” While Twenty/20 cricket was originally created to revive interest in the longer form of the sport, it has become very popular worldwide, especially in India. Traditionalists in England viewed the new rules as a desecration of a hallowed, time-honored pastime, but supporters of the Twenty/20 format believe that Americans are much more likely to prefer abbreviated cricket.⁶⁸ In January 2010, Don Lockerbie, chief executive of USACA, told *BBC News Magazine*: “If Twenty/20 cricket is marketed properly and fans, television and sponsors embrace it, we could see . . . cricket becoming the next great sport in the US.”⁶⁹

Cricket’s chances to grow as a mainstream sport in the United States heavily depend on its availability to the public via cable or satellite television. In March 2003, cricket fanatics in the United States pooled their money to share Dish Network packages or paid admission to restaurants or businesses to watch the World Cricket Cup final, broadcast from Johannesburg, South Africa. Justin Biggs, who moved to Atlanta from Australia in 2001, called the unavailability of cricket games on network and sports channels “pathetic.” He told *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, “This is the biggest sporting event in the world at present. Unfortunately, no American network took it on. It’s tragic.”⁷⁰ But, today, major cricket contests are available to American audiences. ESPN has purchased the rights to show the ICC world championships (including the World Cricket Cup) and other major events through 2015. Todd Myers, ESPN’s director of programming and acquisitions, told IIP Digital that, in the past, major cricket matches were sold only as pay-per-view broadcasts, but now they are available to eighty-five million households with cable and satellite subscriptions. Viewer response has been strong, and audiences are likely to grow. Myers had only a minimal knowledge of cricket before he was hired by ESPN, but he has become a fan and has started to play the sport.⁷¹

In September, 2012, ESPN began televising the T20 World Cup live online for viewers in the United States. ESPN promised cricket fans more than 1,500 hours of cricket programming from 2012 to 2015. For cricket followers in the United States, this was welcome news. Anand Atre, age thirty-seven, a New Yorker who works in financial services, stated, “When I first moved to the U.S. in the ’90s, watching cricket was difficult because you needed a satellite dish or turn to pay-per-view, which only showed final matches. Me and all my friends who love cricket always hoped that the game would be more accessible, and now it finally has.” “Cricket’s appeal in the United States is strong and growing,” said Damon Phillips, vice president of ESPN3, adding,

Cricket is one of the top sports in the world, and we want to introduce American audiences to it on a wider scale. Plus there is already a very passionate fan base in

the country, and we want to drop the barriers to access and the expense that these fans had to deal with for years now. The new T20 format, where matches last just three hours, will make the game more appealing.

In the past, matches could go on all day for one-day international contests or five days for Test matches.⁷²

College clubs have had more success than immigrant-based local, state, regional, and national cricket associations in recruiting native-born players. Dan Yetman, the batsman who was the hero of Harvard's victory over Princeton in 2013, grew up playing baseball and street hockey in Lynn, Massachusetts, but he preferred cricket.⁷³ In October 2000, the *New York Times* recounted Peter DeMarco's first appearance in a cricket match in the Calypso Night Cricket League. When the Simply Paradise team was pummeling his Brooklyn's Putnam club, 118 to 36, Putnam's captain sent DeMarco to bat. He scored four runs. After he was put out, his teammates "praised his hustle while noting that I was good entertainment for the crowd." As he walked back to the subway, a few spectators asked him whether he had enjoyed the game. He replied, "Cricket, for all of its bizarre terminology and rules, is at its core an innocent game of hit the ball, catch the ball, throw the ball. It requires skill, hustle, strategy and most of all, teamwork—just like baseball."⁷⁴ In February 2013, Ben Cohen of the *Wall Street Journal* reported that immigrants constituted most of the patrons at a new indoor cricket facility in Morristown, New Jersey. Angelo Gonzalez, a native of the United States who made the baseball varsity at Rowan University, converted to cricket after he married a woman from Trinidad. He told Cohen that, when he arrives at his office dressed in cricket whites several times a week for matches after work, "my bosses look at me like I have two heads."⁷⁵

Many factors have had an impact on the globalization of sports: the migration of populations around the world; the media (especially the internet, cable television, print journalism); multinational corporations (especially Nike); and international sports organizations (such as the ICC). The revival of cricket in the United States over the past few decades exemplifies these trends. The growing population of immigrants from South Asia and the Caribbean islands and the adoption of the Twenty/20 version of the sport have boosted its standing and have attracted participants among native-born Americans. Better administration and more effective marketing by the USACA and American College Cricket could enhance its prospects to become a major sport in the United States.

It appears that the same factors that inhibited the growth of the sport in the United States 150 years ago remain powerful today. Baseball became more popular than cricket in the United States not because Americans viewed it as an indigenous national sport, or because some of the native-born upper classes chose to monopolize cricket to strengthen their own social class standing, or because working-class English immigrants played cricket to preserve their ethnic pride. Cricket remains marginal in America because the majority of sporting enthusiasts believe that its matches are too long, that it lacks sufficient action for players and excitement for spectators. Cricket-loving immigrants from South Asia and the West Indies have asked American sports fans (mainly through Twenty/20 matches) to give their favorite pastime another chance. They lament the indifference of native-born

citizens, often reverting back to old arguments. In 1995, in a “Lives” column in the *New York Times* magazine, Tunku Varadarajan remarked,

Cricket, with its languor, is unsuited to the American temperament. Some would say that baseball, too, is languid. But slow that game down by a factor of a hundred-plus and you have cricket. . . . Cricket can never be a part of the American psyche. It is however, a part of mine. . . . Even in America—particularly in America—there can be no other game for me.⁷⁶

In an op-ed piece written for the *New York Times* during the 2007 Cricket World Cup, Shashi Tharoor told readers that Americans simply did not appreciate what they were missing: “[N]othing about cricket seems suited to the American national character: its rich complexity, the infinite possibilities that could occur with each delivery of the ball, the dozen different ways of getting out, are all pattern for a society of endless forms and varieties, not of a homogenized McWorld.”⁷⁷ But while it may be impossible to define the meaning of “national character” for American sportsmen, in the mid-1800s and again today, those who were not nurtured at a young age in the subtle points and nuances of cricket remain indifferent to the sport, especially those who were raised in the culture of baseball. That game, the national pastime, defeated cricket in the mid-1800s, and it continues to do so today for a very simple reason—most Americans believe it is a more enjoyable and entertaining sport for both players and spectators.



Notes

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