

Why Baseball, Why Cricket? Differing Nationalisms, Differing Challenges

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Why, on the one hand, did cricket flourish in lands like Pakistan and India? And why, on the other hand, is cricket not much played in the United States, with its heritage and 'special relationship' with Britain? For decades, historians have debated this question. This is yet another attempt to explicate how and why cricket and baseball, both with century-old histories, became national passions in two of the world's biggest erstwhile colonies, and were appropriated and subverted by indigenous peoples for purposes of confrontation against the Empire. In both cases, the common reference point remains the Empire. While in the Americas, the desire was to dissociate American sport from British sport, in countries like 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 simply 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 US was to sever all sporting connections with the empire to emphasize an independent American identity. It is this inverse invocation of nationalism, we have argued, that best provides the key to unwinding the old dichotomy, Why Baseball Why Cricket? in differing global contexts.

Cricket, the quintessential English game, is nonetheless one of the most international of sports. It is a dominant game in more countries than any other sport except soccer, in lands as varied as Australia, India, Pakistan, South Africa and the Commonwealth Caribbean. But a glance at the global map of cricket poses a remarkable cultural puzzle.

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The puzzle only deepens when one considers that cricket was once popular in the... United States. It rivaled baseball for most of the 19th century, with as many stories in the sports pages of *The New York Times* until 1880.

So the puzzle is not so much why it was never adopted in North America, but why in the early 20th century it was subsequently rejected *in favor of baseball*. [1]

For decades, historians have debated this question. In fact, its significance is such that publishers have also been drawn into its fold, albeit unknowingly. The best exemplar of such inadvertent participation is the most recent New York Oxford University Press edition of the Thomas Hughes classic *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. On the cover jacket of this title, Tom holds a bat; that it is a baseball bat and not a cricket bat is almost certain. It can be conjectured that this is because Tom is more drawn to baseball in the United States. [2] Contrastingly, editions of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* popular in the Indian subcontinent clearly depict *cricketer* Tom standing to take guard. [3] In other words, the cover jacket of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* unknowingly serves as an entry point to explicate how and why cricket and baseball, both with century-old histories, became national passions in two of the world's biggest erstwhile colonies, and were appropriated and subverted by indigenous peoples for purposes of confrontation against the British Empire. In both cases, the common reference-point remains the empire. 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 simply the opposite of the Indian retort to imperial games. One need only compare the American and Indian responses to cricket to see this great chasm in views towards the game. In doing so, the historian ends up with the same theme – nationalism – asserting itself in completely inverse ways across the globe. 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 US was to sever all sporting connections with the empire to emphasize an independent American identity. It is this inverse invocation of nationalism, we have argued, that best provides the key to unwinding the old dichotomy 'Why baseball, why cricket?' in differing global contexts.

Sport is 'a most pervasive and enduring theme in the history of British imperialism. The central feature of its power is the subconscious influence it has exerted in both colonial and postcolonial conditions'. [4] Despite the obvious influence of British games, few issues are clear when thoughts turn to the origins of baseball in the United States. That the governing body of organized baseball knowingly perpetuated a myth regarding the game's creation further complicates the issue. For the casual fan, the debunking of the Abner Doubleday myth left is less than satisfying, as nothing is likely to have taken its place. [5] Once the invention of baseball is taken from Cooperstown, where is it to go? For the purpose of this essay

and in order to gain a sense of the historical context, it is necessary to construct a rudimentary history of early baseball in the United States. This is more an attempt to synthesize multiple sources into a coherent if incomplete idea of the early structure of what eventually became modern baseball. [6]

First, it is generally accepted that modern baseball owes a debt to the British game of rounders. [7] At the very least, historians place baseball on the same evolutionary chain of stick and ball games that produced rounders in England, as well as townball and variations of 'old cat' in the United States, seen as American versions of rounders. [8] In all these games some common elements existed: a pitcher tossed a ball to a batter, who attempted to hit it and traverse a set of 'bases' before being put out, which usually happened when the batter was struck with a thrown ball while not safely at a base. In fact, the term 'base ball' is itself not peculiar to the United States, being a game known and played in England in the eighteenth century. [9] These games were generally played by children before 1840, and were mostly looked upon with disdain by American peoples who had yet to be exposed to any muscular Christian doctrine.

Most of these games progressed with children playing by more or less similar rules, variations of which were constructed to suit the needs of particular contexts. As industrialization changed the leisure habits of the American people, [10] ball games such as townball experienced a growth among adults: 'As industrial technology and the expansion of commerce forced city people to adjust their work and play habits, mass production and new inventions in transportation and communications facilitated modern forms of sport'. [11] As early as 1831, young adults were regularly meeting for games of townball between Philadelphia and New Jersey. The group eventually merged to form the Olympic Ball Club in 1833. The club in little time drew up a constitution and rules of play for what was soon to become a standardized game. Meanwhile, clubs possessing similar structures but significantly different rules were coming up in Boston and New York. They generally distinguished themselves by their geography, such as the 'Massachusetts game' or the 'New York game'. These regional differences coexisted for some time.

Eventually, it was the New York version of the game that was accepted as modern American baseball, an acceptance engineered by the most prominent club in New York, the Knickerbockers. [12] The Knickerbockers' chief organizer was Alexander Cartwright, a fireman and bookstore proprietor. In 1845, it was Cartwright who was responsible for the codification of the Knickerbocker rules, and if credit is due to any one person for the version of baseball that nearly everyone today would recognize, it is Cartwright. New York's peerless standing among American cities helped ensure that the Knickerbocker style of baseball would spread much more quickly and efficiently than the versions played in Philadelphia or Boston. As Melvin Adelman notes, 'sporting practices in New York City were more likely to shape sporting practices throughout the country'. [13] When the National Association of Base Ball Players (NABBP) was formed, it adopted almost verbatim the Knickerbocker rules. [14] With the wide acceptance of the New York game, modern baseball was born.

Though claims of baseball as the ‘national’ game of the United States originated as far back as 1856 with the *New York Mercury*’s coining of the phrase ‘national pastime’, [15] it was not until after the Civil War that baseball’s supremacy was assured. Before 1860 (and to a limited extent afterwards), cricket enjoyed its own popularity in the US, and the question as to whether cricket or baseball would ultimately capture the American sporting heart was still unanswered.

The earliest record of cricket in the Americas was found in the ‘secret diary’ of William Byrd II of Virginia and the date, believe it or not, is 25 April 1709. [16] Subsequent references to cricket date back to Georgia in 1737 and an advertisement in a New York paper for players in 1739. The first recorded American cricket match was in New York in 1751 on the site of what is today the Fulton Fish Market in Manhattan.

Cricket, records indicate, remained popular in the Americas until the 1860s and the first recognized international match between Canada and USA was attended by over 10,000 spectators at Bloomingdale Park in New York in 1844. [17] Tours to and from the US were common until the 1880s, and the best moment for US cricket came when a United States side defeated the West Indies in an international match in British Guyana in 1880. Though matches between Americans and British residents were played on the American West Coast right through the 1880s and 1890s, [18] cricket, by the turn of the century, had given way to baseball. By the end of the Civil War, baseball’s ascendance to the top of the American sporting pantheon was inevitable, if not already complete. Though cricket would experience a revival in the 1870s, [19] it would never again compete with baseball as either a participatory or a spectator sport in the United States. The most compelling question to emerge from this development is simply ‘Why?’ What were the factors that allowed baseball to prevail over cricket, despite the latter’s longer history both inside and outside the United States? It is to this question that we now turn.

In the existing historiography that attempts to reconcile the cricket vs. baseball conundrum, two interrelated themes emerge: the structure of the games themselves and the pervading cultural values of the United States and other countries. Structurally, issues have tended to revolve around the time differential between baseball and cricket, the pace of play and the spectator- and player-friendliness of the two sports. Temporally, it has been explained that baseball offered a distinct advantage over cricket because it could be completed in a matter of hours instead of days. [20] The difference in the pace of action between the two sports has also been emphasized.

However, these barriers are not necessarily insurmountable or even valid. Melvin Adelman has in fact challenged both of these arguments in pure empirical terms. Temporally, he cites the fact that baseball teams met during two afternoons a week for practice as well as the fact that in England and the United States, artisans had found the time to play the game. In effect, it seems that at least from a participation standpoint time was not a crucial element. Rather, it is baseball’s ability to allow for a more intimate involvement of fans that is seen to stimulate its appeal. While this argument may possess a certain amount of merit in that it is factually correct, it does

not help explain the popularity of cricket in other parts of the world, especially the Indian subcontinent. [21] Is the American sporting fan so unique as to require a more intimate view of the action? Additionally, these arguments fail to explain the enormous popularity of American football, which, when viewed live at the stadium, is notoriously 'fan-unfriendly'. The large field and the distant stands that characterize professional American football stadiums in the United States have in no way hurt the sport's popularity, and attendance for the National Football League is healthy. [22]

Culturally, the supposed advantages of baseball over cricket become more diffuse. Cited reasons that baseball is culturally suited for the United States rest on (among other things) its association with the season cycle, its trend towards extreme quantification, rural nostalgia, its ability to produce folk heroes and as 'a compensatory mechanism for the travails of industrial life', [23] all of which are seen as something intrinsic to the American character. In trying to contend with these arguments, Jules Tygiel begins to scratch the surface of what seems to be the most compelling advantage of baseball over cricket. In labelling the preceding arguments as ahistorical, he states: 'They describe values and attributes that Americans have grafted onto baseball after it became embedded in our culture'. [24] In essence, because baseball was not established the way cricket was, it was shaped by the people that began to standardize it. It was natural that baseball would reflect the values of nineteenth-century America, because it was forged during that era by people who held those values. Its destiny as a 'national' game rested on its relative formlessness during that era compared to cricket, with its long (and foreign) history. Baseball's malleability during this time period inevitably led to it taking on 'national' characteristics, a flexibility seen at the time as notable. In 1868, the *American Chronicle of Sports and Pastimes* claimed that baseball had changed more in ten years than cricket had in the last 400. It also noted that this change had allowed baseball to reflect American values. [25]

It is this question about the foreign nature of cricket that leads to the most compelling of arguments surrounding cricket and baseball. There exists a body of evidence that points to emergent American nationalism as a critical component of the battle for American sporting loyalty. American nationalism in the mid-nineteenth century was still somewhat a novel concept. Carl Degler has argued that the American nation emerged in part due to the Civil War, before which American nationalism was lacking. The threat of southern secession and the potential for the United States to break up less than a century after independence provided an arena where the nation was truly formed. It is therefore no surprise that an American sporting nationalism would assert itself at this time as well. Thus, the 1850s became the critical moment in this battle for sporting supremacy. As American nationalism emerged and strengthened, baseball, continually forged and moulded to suit the needs of Americans, began to assert a stronger hold on the American public, eventually pushing cricket forever into the margins of American sporting life. It was during this decade that calls for a national game were heard, and it was this decade that saw the term 'national pastime' first written. The need to create a national game grew out of the American desire to 'emancipate their games from foreign patterns'. [26] Additionally, *Porter's*

Spirit of the Times, a prominent sporting periodical of the time, demanded a game peculiar to the citizens of the United States, one distinctive from the games of the British or the Germans. The *New York Times* also pined for the independence of American sports. [27] Once baseball had become the unequivocal American sport, great pains were undertaken to protect its American heritage. It was this desperate need to divest baseball of its British origins that led to the creation and perpetuation of the Abner Doubleday myth surrounding baseball's creation. It began with a speech by Abraham G. Mills in 1889, [28] given in New York upon the conclusion of a baseball tour led by sporting goods magnate Albert Spalding. [29] During the speech Mills, who was president of the National League at the time, claimed to have found definitive proof of the American origins of baseball, stating that 'patriotism and research alike vindicate the claim that [baseball] is America in its origin'. [30] This claim was met quite enthusiastically by the crowd with shouts of 'No rounders!' [31] This speech and the subsequent media support led sportswriter Henry Chadwick to defend the rounders theory, which had enjoyed popular support up until that point. Chadwick's 1903 article reasserting the English origin of the American game riled Spalding, a vehement defender of the American origins of baseball. Upon reading the article, Spalding set out to settle the issue once and for all. At his request, a special committee was formed to ascertain the true origins of the game. It included men of 'high repute and undoubted knowledge of Base Ball' as well as two United States senators and A.G. Mills. According to Seymour, 'While the committee supplied the window dressing, A.G. Mills did what actual work was done'. [32]

After gathering evidence from a variety of sources, the committee issued its final report, the Mills Report, three years later. The report, dated 30 December 1907, affirmed the American origin of the game, and officially ordained the myth of Abner Doubleday. The committee based its final report largely on the letter written by Abner Graves, who had claimed to have played baseball with Doubleday in Cooperstown. Graves claimed that Doubleday had spontaneously invented baseball in 1839. However, three central problems cropped up immediately: the Graves letter was written based on memories well over half a century old; Doubleday had never mentioned any exploits on the ball field and certainly hadn't made any claim to have invented a new game; and the fact that in 1839 Abner Doubleday was enrolled at the West Point Military Academy and did not take leave that year. It is possible that Doubleday had never even been to Cooperstown. However, the commission had spoken, and the myth was set into motion.

In 1939, organized baseball used the Mills Report to justify the celebration of its 'centenary'. As part of these celebrations, the formation of the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown was announced. The United States government even issued a postage stamp to commemorate the event.

It is almost certain then that the adoption of baseball over cricket, even if structural arguments are given credence, had much to do with nationalism. The establishment of an 'American' game was an extremely popular topic of the sporting media of the time. [33]

It was also very prominent in the minds of the keepers of the game from the 1850s onwards. 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. Baseball had truly invented its own tradition, having 'actually invented, constructed, and formally instituted' its own creation story. [34]

What is most interesting about this desire to separate American sport from British games is that it was aberrant. As emphasized at the start, the American reaction to the sport of the empire was simply the opposite of the colonial reaction to imperial sport. Despite American independence, English influence was still prevalent in the United States and cricket had a much longer history in the United States than baseball did. This made it imperative for Americans to appropriate/indigenize baseball to the extent that its British roots would be totally forgotten. On the other hand, in India, as the next section will demonstrate, conditions of colonialism made it imperative for the nationalists to take up cricket as a way to compete with the British.

Cricket in India owed much to the patronage of the educated, well-to-do classes, the Parsees in the west, the Bengali *bhadralok* in the east and the affluent upper caste/class Brahmins in the south. [35] Desire to attain recognition in British eyes, together with the longing to defeat the British at their own game, were, among other reasons, at the root of this initiative and, to that extent, Indian cricket was a nationalist enterprise. The Indian middle classes, products of the public-school system the English had imported into India, though openly advocating the 'games ethic', [36] often employed sport as a tool of subversion. It was a well-thought-out strategy. On the surface, it demonstrated to the colonial masters the success of the 'games ethic' as an imperial tool. Accordingly, British administrators hardly ever thought of suspending empire sports promotion in the colonies. Rather, the ruling British, on many occasions, took the lead in providing equipment, necessary infrastructure and funding so that sporting activities could flourish. [37] That the 'games ethic' was actually subverted makes the story of Indian cricket all the more intriguing.

In south India, Indian patrons of cricket such as Buchi Babu Naidu, designated the father of Madras cricket, looked on the annual Presidency match with the British as an opportunity to meet and defeat European cricket sides. As V. Ramnarayan asserts, 'angered by the apartheid practised by the Madras Cricket Club, which required Indian players to sit under the tree and eat their lunch in the shade, while the Europeans enjoyed the comfort of the club's pavilion', [38] Buchi Babu conceived the idea of the Presidency match. Commenting on his father's move, C. Ramaswamy has declared:

My father's main idea in launching this series stemmed from his desire to uplift the Indians who suffered step-motherly treatment at the hands of the British. In the pre-independence days, the British players enjoyed the privilege of using the Chepauk pavilion, while the Indians had to sit outside, beneath the trees. Hurt by the treatment meted out, my father felt that the Indians deserved better treatment

and mooted the idea of the Presidency matches so that at least on the cricket field they were recognized better. [39]

Cricket in Bombay, on the other hand, propped up by the Parsee business classes, was initially rooted in an urge for social mobility within the colonial framework. [40] However, even within this context of upward mobility, 'nationalism' was not altogether absent. As both Mihir Bose and Ramachandra Guha have shown, [41] the cricket field in Bombay did become a site for indigenous assertion against the colonizers in the late 1870s and early 1880s. To quote Guha:

The agents of disruption were the European polo players....The coming of the polo players [to that area of the maidan where the natives played cricket] led to a bitter protest by the native cricketers. Their struggle to evict polo from the maidan provides a fascinating window on the cultural life of Empire, and demonstrates how quickly and how energetically Indians had made cricket their game. [42]

This contest is described in detail in Shapoorjee Sorabjee's *A Chronicle of Cricket among Parsees and the Struggle: European Polo versus Native Cricket* published in 1897. [43] The struggle began in 1879 when a native cricketer first described how the polo players enclosed their playing area with black flags, prohibiting native cricketers from playing within its boundaries. He suggested that 'nearly two thirds of the parade ground is occupied by Europeans to the great inconvenience of the school boys wishing to play cricket'. [44] Two years after this report, Shapoorjee Sorabjee wrote a letter of protest to the Bombay gymkhana [45] on behalf of the Persian Cricket Club. However, the polo secretary of the gymkhana dismissed his complaint, asserting their determination to play polo as before. The contest continued until the mid-1880s and though the natives won a temporary victory in 1882 (an order was passed in April 1882 allowing the Parsees exclusive use of the Esplanade Parade ground), this decree was revoked in 1883 permitting the European polo players' use of the native cricket ground. [46] In this fight, which ended in a defeat for the natives, the Asian game of polo became the emblem of patrician power, and the English sport indulged in by the natives the mark of plebeian resistance. [47]

Interestingly, the struggle between polo and cricket is not the only occasion when the cricket-playing natives of Bombay clashed with their European masters. [48] The final episode of the struggle was fought out in 1929–30, when native cricket administrators made common cause with the Gandhian call for civil disobedience and the British were on the receiving end.

This final chapter of the struggle started when the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) was invited to tour India in November–December 1931. [49] This tour received full support from the Viceroy, as also from most cricket associations of the country. The MCC too was very keen to undertake the tour and passed a series of motions supporting the visit. Even the County Cricket Advisory Committee expressed keenness about the tour with a view to encouraging cricket in India. [50]

However, when everything seemed to be going right, the Bombay Hindu Gymkhana announced its decision not to support the tour. Commenting on the move by the Hindu Gymkhana, the *Times of India* declared:

The Hindu Gymkhana has, however, refused to cooperate with the Bombay Cricket Association. At a recent meeting of the Association when the proposed tour was discussed, a letter from the Hindu Gymkhana was read in which they stated that they were unable to participate in any of the matches with the MCC. [51]

In another report entitled 'What is the truth about the proposed boycott of the MCC cricketers by the Hindus and Parsees of Bombay?' the newspaper suggested:

It will be remembered that last year the intended visit of the English team was cancelled on account of the political troubles of the country. It was hoped, however, that this year when another invitation was sent to London, all would be plain sailing but alas, all is not plain sailing and rumours have been current in Bombay for some time now that all was not well. [52]

The reason assigned by the Hindu Gymkhana for its refusal to cooperate was that the country was facing an uncertain political situation and that Gandhi had given a clarion call for civil disobedience against the British. Also, because the participation of the Congress in the Second Round Table Conference was still uncertain, it was unwilling to play cricket against a touring British side. The continuing opposition from the Hindu Gymkhana eventually forced the MCC to cancel its visit to India.

Soon after the news of postponement was made public, the Hindu Gymkhana withdrew the ban on the tour, lending strength to the conjecture that the earlier policy of the gymkhana was a clear-cut 'strategy', adopted to thwart the visit.

In contrast to Bombay, nationalist intentions were much more pronounced in the Bengali patronage of cricket. Bengali middle-class promotion of cricket, it may be argued, was rooted in the urge to negate the British charge of effeminacy levelled against the Bengali male.

In existing works of Indian sport, cricket patronage in Bengal has been confined to the initiatives of the royal families of Natore and Cooch Behar. While acknowledging that the royal families of Natore and Cooch Behar played key roles in promoting cricket, it needs to be asserted that such initiatives were part of a broader interest in the game among the educated Bengali middle class. [53] Princely patronage was a later development, which made an appreciable difference from the early twentieth century:

Sports in Bengal in the early years of the nineteenth century present a peculiar incongruity. While games like cricket and football were looked upon as exclusive European preserves, indigenous sports like wrestling were confined to the lower classes. The educated middle class remained aloof from all kinds of sporting activity. In the years 1800–60, the *bhadralok* patronized indigenous sports like

wrestling, though they did not themselves participate in such activity. They organized competitions in which their servants fought against each other amidst great excitement and enthusiasm. [54]

This picture underwent a transformation from the second half of the nineteenth century, a transition that may be dated from the 1870s and 1880s. From this period onwards, the educated Bengali middle classes attempted to integrate sporting activity, rooted in physical culture, into their everyday lives. This transition may be located in the changed political conditions of Bengal in the aftermath of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. In the post-mutiny period, the educated Bengali middle class found it imperative to devise an effective strategy to counter the colonial charge of inferiority. As argued by Mrinalini Sinha,

In the second half of the century, middle class Bengalis made several efforts to combat the problem of the emasculation of the Bengali male. Prominent nineteenth century Bengali intellectuals were indeed concerned about the consequences of effeminacy. In the 1860s the famous Tagores of Jorasanko and the organisation with which they mostly associated, the *Adi Brahma Samaj*, launched a concerted drive for the physical regeneration of Bengalis. Bankimchandra Chatterjee, one of the most famous Bengali writers, oscillated between mocking the modern babu and attempting to answer the charge of Bengali effeminacy which he called *Bharat Kalanka* or Indian Stigma. [55]

Barred from staging violent demonstrations or other acts, which would be symbolic of 'physically challenging' British superiority, educated Indians thus looked upon 'leisure' pursuits with new eyes. Colonialism and the realities of being a subject population were the conditions that informed Bengali middle-class investment in sport. Drawing on real-life encounters between colonizer and colonized, leisure settings provided an exciting imaginary, minus the attendant risks that would otherwise characterize such situations. That a new breed of Bengali intellectuals extolled the virtues of physical prowess is evident from the following account of an interaction at a gathering in the Sovabazar Palace involving Nagendraprasad Sarbadhikary, leading Bengali sports patron of the time:

A young family member ridiculed Nagendraprasad's powerful stature and stamina saying that a man needed only that much strength that would enable him to drink a glass of water by himself! Surrounded by armed retainers the babus present broke into laughter at the comment. Not amused in the least, Nagendraprasad stunned everyone present by lifting the young man off the ground and asking 'now that I shall fling you down, what do you imagine you will require to escape that fate?' It was only after the man apologised that Nagendraprasad set him down. He declared in disgust, 'those who speak like this – they are the ones who are afraid to step out on the streets with their wives and daughters; and when they do [they] are unable to safeguard their honour. Bengalis are effete, let them gain in physical strength – with the return of masculine splendour, will come respect from others. [56]

This investment in physical culture reached a climax with the organization of the World Wrestling Championship under the patronage of the Maharaja of Cooch Behar in 1892.

It was as part of the new vision outlined above that the *bhadralok* began their tryst with European sports such as cricket; one which intensified in the 1880s. Noting that the charge of effeminacy continued to be levelled against them, evident during the Ilbert Bill controversy, the *bhadralok* realized that an investment in physical culture was not enough. The Ilbert Bill controversy, as Sinha argues, ‘rearticulated the broader shifts in colonial economic, political and administrative imperatives in the politics of colonial masculinity: it substituted for a straightforward defence of racial exclusivity a supposedly more natural gender hierarchy between “manly” and “unmanly” men’. [57] From this time onwards, the *bhadralok* realized that prowess in European sport was essential to infuse in the Bengali a sense of pride and purpose. Even Swami Vivekananda, the famous Bengali religious and social reformer, imbibed this view. He argued that ‘you will be nearer to god through football than through the Bhagwad Gita’. [58] Children also imbibed the feeling of satisfaction that came from victories in competitions against the British. A passage from the contemporary journal *Sakha* is redolent with these sentiments. The editor recalls a conversation he had one evening with a ‘young friend’ who reported with glee that he had successfully beaten the *sahib* in a game of ‘bat-ball’. ‘I wondered’, he writes:

What is so great about defeating the sahibs? Boys of all nations indulge in play. So what is it that has marked out English boys as superior to their young counterparts especially the Bengalis? The answer lies in the fact that while the *sahibs* play these manly games almost regularly Bengalis are averse to any form of physical exhaustion. Since the sahibs practice athletics, cricket etc. their bodies are strong and they acquire skills, which cannot be matched by the natives. Manly sports are therefore an exclusive English preserve. It was the act of defeating the coloniser on his own turf that filled his young friend with such glee. [59]

This interaction indicates that the ‘significance’ of defeating the *sahibs* at their own game had already filtered down to young Bengali/Indian boys by the middle of the 1880s. [60]

Interestingly, even princely patronage of cricket was at times rooted in ideas of nationalism. Existing studies of princely patronage have assumed that all princes saw cricket as a means of associating with the ruling British. This view ignores evidence of native princes’ determination to set up cricket teams comprising of Indians only, an initiative deriving from the belief that this was the only means of challenging the British. The Maharaja of Natore was an ardent nationalist, having been an active member of the Indian National Congress for some years. Soon after turning 18, he became president of the Natore Political Association at the request of Surendranath Banerjee. In 1894, he joined Banerjee and Anandamohan Bose as member of the Rajshahi municipality. After the partition of Bengal in 1905, he was a key figure in the anti-partition movement, delivering a famous speech against the partition at the

Calcutta Town Hall. That his nationalist credentials were well-known is evident from the following testimony by Charuchandra Mitra:

Prior to him, no other member of the royal family, either in Natore or in other families of the state, had actively supported the nationalist agenda. This was because they wished to be close to the ruling classes. It was to break this tradition that the Maharaja of Natore had joined the National Congress and had actively advocated the demands raised by the nationalists. This was best evident during his speech at the Town Hall in protest against the partition of Bengal. [61]

However, he differed from the nationalists in his modes of resistance. Until 1914, he used the cricket field to challenge the English; after this time he invested in the evolution of the vernacular press. That he was to a large extent successful in rousing nationalist sensibilities among his subjects is evident from contemporary accounts:

Whenever the Natore XI defeated the European teams of Calcutta, our chests swelled with pride. Before the formation of the Natore XI, we, Indians, were losers on most occasions. But with the formation of the Natore XI, Maharaj Jagadindranarayan turned the tables on the English. Whether it is a fault of ours or not, we do not regard games as something simple, rather we are affected by the results of these encounters. This is because this is the only arena where we are allowed to compete on even terms with the English. The English have always ridiculed us as 'effete'. It is on the sporting field that we may counter such false allegations. This is why we justifiably perceive a victory on the sporting field as a 'national victory' against the British. Though the English mock us for our perceptions, it is evident that whenever they lose to us, they are filled with rage and humiliation. Thus, whatever is said on this count, that the Natore XI stimulated nationalist instincts among the youth is doubtless. This is a great achievement and has given the Maharaja immortality. [62]

Indian cricket thus was not simply an act of mimicry, [63] but was conceived of as a tool for remedying deeper, more serious allegations that underplayed native abilities. The roots of cricket in India went deep – to help ideas of self-respect, manliness and self worth to permeate among the natives. Educated men from middle-class backgrounds promoted cricket, trying to legitimize physical activity in society and win respect for the players. The sport had emerged as the mirror wherein an Indian identity started to reassess itself, and in that sense was certainly part of a nationalist enterprise.

What do the above sporting myths, played out in contexts grossly dissimilar, say about the divergent expressions of nationalism? Why did American and Indian nationalisms necessitate the promotion of separate sports? Why baseball and not cricket in the United States? Why cricket and not wrestling/hockey in India? Answers lie in the George Orwell axiom 'Serious sport . . . is war minus the shooting'. [64] If sport is in fact a metaphor (and in some cases a metonym) for war, then cricket simply was not necessary in the United States, as it was in India. The United States, having prevailed militarily already against the British (twice) had no need for 'war

minus the shooting'. The early date of American independence, coupled with the arrival of American nationalism in the 1850s and beyond, meant that cricket was inevitably the game that had to lose in the battle with baseball. [65] In India considerations were exactly the reverse. Prowess in sport wasn't enough. Accomplishments had to be demonstrated in empire sport, which would mark a symbolic victory against the ruling colonial state. To substantiate the point: even when India won gold medals in field hockey in the Olympic Games in the years 1928–56, hockey could never rival cricket in colonial India. This is because Britain refused to participate in Olympic hockey contests in the years 1928–36 knowing that the Indians were favourites to win the gold. This is especially interesting because Britain had won the Olympic gold in field hockey in 1904 and 1920, the only years when hockey was played before 1928 and years when India did not participate. [66] Absence of competitions against the colonizer, it can be argued, relegated hockey in the Indian sporting hierarchy. In contrast, in America there was a need to move away from British sport in order to produce an American identity. The newer stick and ball game, even before concerted efforts had commenced to make it 'American', had already efficiently separated itself from any of its British forebears. In 1860, Henry Chadwick eloquently made this point noting that baseball, though 'of English origin, has been so modified and improved of late... in this country, as almost to deprive it of any of its original features beyond the mere groundwork of the game'. [67]

This American sporting nationalism has manifested itself almost continually since that time. American sports fans still prefer sports that they can identify as 'American'; the internationalization of professional basketball and baseball in recent years may actually be hurting their domestic popularity. Meanwhile, the least integrated of the major sports in the United States – the National Football League and NASCAR – have not seen concomitant declines in viewership. [68] The need to assert Americanness in the sporting field still remains a vigorous part of the culture of spectatorship in the United States. This need to separate predates the rise of the United States to its own imperial status. It first began in the rejection of a decidedly British sport for one that was more 'American'. The actual origin of the game was simply not as important to the popularity of the sport as the perception of the *essence* of the game. Almost from the beginning, the essence of baseball was American. It was only later that its origin became American as well.

Notes

- [1] Orlando Patterson and Jason Kauffman, *New York Times*, 1 May 2005 (emphasis added).
- [2] Though the cover illustration is stated to have been taken from '*The Cricketer*, 1850', anyone who has played and watched cricket would know that the illustration does not depict an accepted cricketing posture.
- [3] Some editions, though, depict the playing of rugby, equally popular in Britain towards the close of the nineteenth century.
- [4] Stoddart, 'Sport, Cultural Imperialism and Colonial Response', 673.

- [5] Doubleday, according to sanctioned myth, was said to have invented baseball during a sudden brainstorm in Cooperstown, NY, in 1839. Though the story came into almost immediate question and has since been conclusively delegitimized, the story still holds a place in the popular imaginings of casual baseball fans.
- [6] For several competing secondary histories of the game, see: Adelman, *A Sporting Time*; Alexander, *Our Game*; Block, *Baseball Before We Knew It*; Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps*; Kirsch, *The Creation of American Team Sports*; Rossi, *The National Game*; Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years*; and Tygiel, *Past Time*. For a look at the history of early baseball through primary sources, see Sullivan, *Early Innings*.
- [7] For a recent attempt to liberate baseball from rounders, see Block, *Baseball Before We Knew It*. However, even Block places baseball in a stick-and-ball matrix, but from a variety of sources, not all of them English.
- [8] Seymour, *Baseball*, 7.
- [9] Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps*, 10.
- [10] For a succinct description of the impacts of industrialization on American leisure, see Kirsch, *The Creation of American Team Sports*, 5–8. In this description, Kirsch derides the simple ‘industrialization equals more free time’ trope as oversimplified. Instead, he argues that industrialization obliterated traditional forms of play, which tended towards sporadic periods of play during the work day and season. Industrialization, with its emphasis on routine and homogeneity of experience, eliminated sporadic play. It had to be replaced by specifically scheduled times that workers could set aside for play activities.
- [11] *Ibid.*, 8.
- [12] The Knickerbocker Base Ball Club of New York began as a group of men who met regularly to play baseball, beginning in 1842. Upon the suggestion of Alexander Cartwright, the men formed a club, and secured the rights to play at the Elysian Fields in Hoboken, NJ. Originally more a social club than a baseball team, the Knickerbocker Club incorporated baseball into a fraternal structure, which emphasized gentlemanly conduct on and off the playing field. The original codification of their rules in 1845 is the basis on which modern baseball now rests. For more on the Knickerbockers, see Seymour, *Baseball*, 15–23.
- [13] Adelman, *A Sporting Time*, 112.
- [14] The term ‘National’ is largely hyperbolic here, as the association initially consisted of clubs from New York and Brooklyn only.
- [15] *New York Mercury*, 5 Dec. 1856; During this time, other publications, including *Porter’s Spirit of the Times* and *The New York Clipper*, had begun calling baseball the national game.
- [16] Singh, *A History of Cricket in America*, 1.
- [17] Deb Das, ‘A History of Cricket in the USA’, available online at <http://content.cricinfo.com/usa/content/story/141158.html>, accessed 26 May 2006.
- [18] For details see; <http://www.cricinfo.com/db/ARCHIVE>, accessed 26 May 2006.
- [19] According to Adelman (*A Sporting Time*, 116), the number of cricket clubs in the United States increased during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Adelman credits the wealthy segments of American society as well as several elite educational institutions for this growth. Additionally, Kirsch (*The Creation of American Team Sports*, 214) credits the continued ‘migration of British officials, businessmen, and skilled craftsmen’ as well as continued media support for the brief and modest cricket revival after the Civil War.
- [20] It would be interesting to know how modern limited-overs cricket and more recent innovations such as Twenty20 cricket, which finishes in a little over two hours would have influenced this argument.
- [21] For a detailed analysis of Indian cricket and its social, cultural and political moorings, see Majumdar, *Twenty-Two Yards to Freedom*.

- [22] Since 1990, National Football League stadiums have been quite full. Overall, the league has averaged almost 91 per cent of its possible attendance, based on stadium capacities and actual attendance from 1990 to 2003. Statistics compiled by authors.
- [23] Tygiel, *Past Time*, 4.
- [24] *Ibid.*, 4.
- [25] Rossi, *The National Game*, 5.
- [26] Adelman, *A Sporting Time*, 136.
- [27] Tygiel, *Past Time*, 6.
- [28] Abraham G. Mills was the fourth president of the National League, and a pivotal figure in baseball's history. He brokered the National Agreement, which brought the American Association and the National League together and extended the reserve clause to all three leagues, which kept players from 'jumping' from one league to another.
- [29] Spalding, also president of the Chicago Club, had just led a professional team of players on a worldwide tour. The dinner was given in honour of this team. Spalding was also a fierce defender of the American origins of baseball.
- [30] Block, *Baseball Before We Knew It*, 8–9.
- [31] *Ibid.* This cry was in obvious response to the popular notion that baseball was an extension and Americanization of the British game rounders.
- [32] Seymour, *Baseball*, 9.
- [33] See, for example, *Porter's Spirit of the Times*, *The New York Clipper* or *The New York Mercury* for baseball writing of the time.
- [34] Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*.
- [35] *Bhadralok* is a generic term used in Bengal since the second half of the nineteenth century to denote the upper and middle classes of Bengali society, who are distinguished by their access to a liberal education and the English language.
- [36] For an in-depth discussion on the impact of the 'games ethic' in the colonies, see Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism*. Also see Stoddart, 'Sport, Cultural Imperialism and Colonial Response'.
- [37] In Presidency College, Calcutta, one of the foremost educational institution of the country, efforts to promote European sports reached their apogee under Henry Rosher James, principal of the college during the years 1906–16. James tried to make Presidency a self-sufficient civilized academic community, a world dedicated to excellence in the English language with friendly relations between European members of staff cemented through involvement/participation on the sports field. For details on Presidency College sport see Majumdar, 'Nationalist Tool for Imperial Resistance'.
- [38] Ramnarayan, *Mosquitoes and other Jolly Rovers*, 24.
- [39] Commenting on Buchi Babu's efforts, Rayan Amal Raj states: 'He wanted a club for the locals, a club that would rival a white man's club, like the MCC... where even ordinary Indians could enter, play and mix freely with others'. Quoted in Muthiah, *The Spirit of Chepauk*, 118.
- [40] Most published works on Indian cricket have portrayed the game in these terms: Docker, *History of Indian Cricket*; Cashman, *Patrons, Players and the Crowd*; Bamzai, *Guts and Glory*.
- [41] For details, see Bose, *History of Indian Cricket*, 22; Guha, 'Searching for Space', in *A Corner of a Foreign Field*.
- [42] Guha, *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, 20.
- [43] Sorabjee, *A Chronicle of Cricket*. While focusing on important events that shaped the nation's early cricket history, Sorabjee has also left his readers a chronological narrative on the development of cricket in colonial India. A must-read for cricket scholars, *A Chronicle of Cricket* does a great job in detailing the landmarks in the course of the game's early development. One thing that Sorabjee makes clear – which may well be his fundamental contribution – is that in India cricket is often politics and politics is often cricket.

- [44] For details see Sorabjee, *A Chronicle of Cricket*, 20.
- [45] An Indian term for a sporting club.
- [46] On 9 February 1883, Shapoorjee Sorabjee and others addressed another petition to Sir James Fergusson, Governor of Bombay. This petition asserted: 'We, therefore, on behalf of the cricketers, humbly pray to your Excellency to direct that proper effect be given to the resolution of 17 April 1882, so that polo may not be played on the ground in question, and the plot of cricket ground kept enclosed by the Gymkhana may be open for cricketers'. Responding to their petition, W.A. Baker, under-secretary to the government wrote: 'It was never intended to deprive the cricketers of the Gymkhana of the reserved ground they at present occupy without occasion and due notice and that their request in this respect cannot be acceded to'. Subsequently, Mr Cecil Gray, polo secretary of the Gymkhana submitted a petition to the government on 30 May 1883, 'praying that, as the only open space of sufficient size and in other respects suitable for polo is the Parade ground, His Excellency in Council will be pleased to cancel the Government Resolution No. 139E 620, dated 13 April 1882'. In response, the government passed the following resolution: 'In modification of the orders contained in Government Resolution No. 139E 620 dated 13 April 1882, Government are now pleased to rule that the Esplanade Parade ground may be used for Polo on one evening of the week and also in the morning of the Brigade Holiday'.
- [47] Guha, *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, 28.
- [48] The struggle over polo was in fact the second phase of this struggle. The first was fought out in the years 1868–69 over whether native cricket playing was dangerous for European inhabitants of the city. For details of this struggle, see Majumdar, *Once Upon a Furore*, 1–9.
- [49] *Times of India*, 15 April 1931.
- [50] *Times of India*, 18 April 1931.
- [51] *Times of India*, 16 May 1931.
- [52] *Ibid.*
- [53] This fact hardly finds mention in existing works on Indian cricket, which equate the early phase of Indian cricket with a phase of princely patronage. It is erroneously asserted that 'cricket, as an elite sport, required the sort of time and money not available to the bourgeois elites of colonial India' (Appadurai, 'Playing with Modernity', 29; Mannathukaren, 'Subalterns, Cricket and the "Nation"').
- [54] Ghosh, *Byame Bangali*, 100.
- [55] Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, 21; For a discussion on the Bengali efforts at emasculation, also see Roselli, 'The Self Image of Effeteness'.
- [56] Ghosh, *Krida Samrat Nagendra Prasad Sarbadhikary*, 180–1.
- [57] Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, 5.
- [58] Football and cricket, both European manly sports, were given equal importance in late-nineteenth-century India. Accordingly players who played football also excelled in cricket and vice-versa.
- [59] *Sakha* 12 (Dec. 1883). Also see *Sakha*, Feb. 1891.
- [60] Bengalis took similar pride in the achievements of their Parsee counterparts. Commenting on the Parsee victory against the touring English side led by G.F. Vernon, the Bengali journal *Sakha* urged the Bengalis to take pride from the Parsee victory and motivate themselves to achieve similar feats on the sporting field. The notion that defeating the English at their game was no mean achievement was not unique to Bengal. For similar parallels in Australia see Mandle, 'Cricket and Australian Nationalism'.
- [61] *Manasi o Marmabani*, 1925–26, 552–4 (Bengali literary magazine, published in Calcutta).
- [62] *Ibid.*
- [63] For an entirely different understanding of mimicry, see Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

- [64] Orwell wrote this in an essay entitled 'The Sporting Spirit' in 1945, in the wake of a visit to Britain by the Russian football club Moscow Dynamo. The essay concludes: 'There are quite enough real causes of trouble already, and we need not to add to them by encouraging young men to kick each other on the shins amid the roars of infuriated spectators'.
- [65] Jules Tygiel has asserted that baseball and cricket were not actually in competition with each other, as cricket never gained a foothold with native-born Americans. It seems from consulting other sources that Americans would likely have ultimately taken up the game had an alternative not existed. For more on his position, see Tygiel, *Past Time*, 7–8.
- [66] See India files at the International Olympic Museum, Lausanne: IDD CHEMISE 9404 CIO CNO INDE CORR, 1924–63.
- [67] Chadwick, *Beadle's Dime Baseball Player*, 5.
- [68] Brown, 'Exceptionalist America'.

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