Cricket

Ex·cres·cence
Of the Season

How to Play, Watch and Avoid.

By Robot Wireless
How to play, watch and avoid.

Gryllus assimilis by Snodgrass. This is the sort of gratuitous, cliched visual pun which will not be appearing in this book.
FOREWORD…¹

Cricket… is a “very enjoyable” game… both for the player and the spectator.

But it has one great menace: to wit², the cricketer who would rather be playing golf.³⁴

¹ Not to be confused with a Four Wood, a golfing implement.
² Bliss unparalleled!
³ A four letter word.
⁴ Golf is the only known pastime considered more inane, absurd, asinine, daft, empty, fatuous, foolish, frivolous, futile, harebrained, idiotic, illogical, imbecilic, laughable, meaningless, mindless, pointless, puerile, ridiculous, sappy, senseless, silly, trifling, vacuous, vain, rapid, weak, wishy-washy and worthless a pursuit than cricket itself.

FOUR GENTLEMEN GOLFERS ON THE TEE OF A GOLF COURSE BY LLYFRGELL GENEDLAETHOL CYMRU
THE SMALL MATTER OF REFRESHMENTS

Yes of course we stop for drinks! What do you think we are? Amateurs?

DRINKS ARE SERVED IN A POISON CHALICE, SIMILAR TO THE GRAIL DEPICTED ABOVE KNOWN AS “CRICKET-ABDOMINAL-GUARD” BY RALMIN, CC BY-SA 3.0

THE ART AND ORDER OF BATTING

The following sequence of events takes place every time a wicket falls.

One button one’s moustache\(^5\) well back, stands up, tucks one’s beard into one’s trousers, checks to see one has two pints of brown ale in each pocket, and one’s boots tightly laced with painkillers. All ready? Right.

Settle back, turn the volume up. Empty the ashtrays and any vessels containing herbal remedies. Now, look at the field. Study the play carefully.

Even from this distance you may learn some of the more subtle features of the play like who is bowling, who is batting, and even where the game is being played.

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5 One doesn’t have a props department?
This is known as studying the “lie of the land” and there can be no doubt, it does.

In this respect cricket is more like fishing. Than what? I hear you ask.

A very good question, but before we go into such trifling matters, please allow me to enumerate some of the more troublesome features of the game from the player’s point of view, indeed from my own experience⁶.

They are, as I am sure you'll agree, revelations so integral and evocative of (unimagined) reality, you will soon feel the sharp pain in your forehead as willow hits leather, knocking you unconscious…

Let us begin.

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⁶ Look under “Denis Bradman” in Wisden.
NERVES

These are the electrical pathways we have to remind us we still have our limbs attached\(^7\).

They transmit signals such as sweaty palms, fingernail chewing, pacing up and down, lifting both feet off the ground while standing, wearing a puzzled expression, running away, and refusing to follow on.

Nerves are funny. They are responsible for the funny bone, for one thing, which is attached to the humerus. (Get it? Humerus? Humorus?)

All right, next…

\(^7\) If thinking about pathological details like this upsets you, get up, move around a bit, chew your nails and stare at a blood-soaked handkerchief. It really helps.
THE BIG CREASE
This is a mythical place in the sky where the spirit of a great player goes after death, or when dropped from the team.

A FEW QUICK RUNS
- abdominal bloating, cramps and pain
- nausea
- urgency to go to the toilet
- loose, watery stools (faeces or poo) passed frequently
- mild temperature
- general malaise (weakness or discomfort)

8 The notorious Bali-belly. This is another of those weak puns we thought best excised. We’ll be having a word with our publisher about this.

VICTOR TRUMPER WAS SCORNFUL OF HIS CREASE. HIS METHOD OF BATTING WAS TO DASH TO THE SHOPS FOR A CREAM BUN AND A GINGER ALE DURING THE BOWLER’S RUN UP, AND BE BACK IN TIME TO SCORE A QUICK CENTURION AND ENJOY A CUDDLE BEFORE TEA.
PHYSICS
(AND ITS APPLICATION TO CRICKET)

Newton’s theory of fast bowling tells us a projectile launched at very high velocity tends towards infinite mass when it approaches the speed of light, even in the early evening.

This so-called infinite mass, in anybody’s book, would have to be pretty big. In fact, even the skeptics would surely agree the term “infinite mass” might be applied to something hugely enormous.

As we all know, the bigger a thing is the easier it is to hit.

That’s the theory, anyway.
BATTLING:  
THE ESSENTIALS

It’s all quite simple, really.

When going out to bat, one is considered in. One take one’s place on the field and once there one tries very hard not to go out. If one does go out, one goes back in and sits with the other players, while the next player to go in goes out.

Are we clear on this?

(You would think these batting interludes out on the field would be called outings, but no, they are called innings, for reasons explained above.)

Enough theory. As this is a practical book, it now behooves one⁹ to pass on a few rudimentary batting skills.

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⁹ The whole purpose of this book (secret until now) is to seamlessly use the word “behoove”.

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AN EXAMPLE OF SOMETHING OUT WHICH IS NORMALLY IN AND BETTER LEFT THAT WAY. 
MOUTH ILLUSTRATION BY DUNCAN KENNETH WINTER. CC BY 2.0
Batting skills (called *style* in better players) will help one build the innings one’s team is relying on, as long as one can avoid getting out.

Bear in mind though, several factors (often referred to as the *other team*) have been provided to make one’s job as difficult as possible.

It’s nearly always better to attack the bowler well before the delivery of the ball, with a sharp clout across the back of the head as one is approaching the wicket on one’s way out to bat.

Unfortunately, after being dispatched to the emergency department two or three times with severe concussion, bowlers soon become alive to this tactic and tend to maintain a safe distance. This is why they say the best part of attack is defence.
Unable to eliminate one’s antagonist, one is just going to have to face the music, and don’t expect Brahms. Shostakovich would be more like it, with overtones of Bartok and the Divinyls. Not to mention the Sex Pistols!

OK. On with the show. Let’s just imagine you are out there, beginning your innings.

Look around. Memorize the gaps. Play forcing shots through the field. Score a couple of boundaries through mid-off. How about a six over the bowler’s head? Not bad at all. A couple of singles just to tire the fielders. A late cut off the back foot. Lovely.

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10 Note we are now referring to “you”, the second person pronoun, the real you, rather than “one”, the third person singular pronoun, who might be you but might as well be me or any bugger off the street, in other words a complete stranger, who happens to be reading your book, the thieving bastard!
Now try it when the players come back onto the field.

Not so easy as you first thought, eh? Don’t worry, it’s all in the mind, even when it’s actually happening.

**GOING OUT**

Eventually, the umpire is going to put the finger up. Once the finger is up, there is nothing you can do about it, so you may as well take it gracefully.

If the phone rings, don’t answer it. The slightest flaw in your concentration will spell disaster.

Oh, before we forget: technique.

When it comes to actually batting, it is necessary to get the head, the ball and the eyes in one straight line (see diagram A). In order to do this, the front foot...
must be on the ball, not metaphorically, but physically.

When playing shots with the back foot (see diagram B) the bat has to be moved quickly out of the way.

Most players throw it (the bat) straight up in the air, grab the back foot (see diagram C) and move towards the stumps (see diagram D) or across towards the flight of the bowler (see diagram E) and then back towards themselves (see diagram F).

\[\text{Diagram B}\]

\[\text{Diagram C}\]

\[\text{Diagram D}\]

\[\text{Diagram E}\]

\[\text{Diagram F}\]

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Do all these diagrams confuse you? How could they? Because they don’t exist? But we had them here, really we did, and they were illuminating, to say the least, but they were somehow covered in cheerios and irresistible to the dachshund next door who takes a fancy to anything pre-chewed in tomato sauce. (We rest our case.)

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\[\text{Diagram F}\]

**Contrast Swing**

High Bowling Speed (> 70 mph)

Despite this diagram being clearly credited Rabi Mehta, in Wikipedia Commons it is under the user “PiyushMech01” with the statement “I, the copyright holder of this work, hereby publish it under the following license: Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International.” It goes on to say: “You are free: to share (to copy, distribute and transmit the work), to remix (to adapt the work), under the following conditions: attribution – You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor, but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work and if you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under the same or similar license to this one.” (What he said.)
BOWLING
That’s enough batting. It’s so boring! Bowling is much more interesting (yawns).

OK, big effort now. Let’s get straight into it.

Bowlers\textsuperscript{12}, to achieve success (or failure) just follow these simple rules:

- take wickets\textsuperscript{13}.

That’s about it, I’m afraid. It’s a simple game for simpletons. Not that there’s anything wrong with that. And I’m sorry for what I said about \textit{Pumping Iron} in 1978. It’s a great film.

And while we’re on the subject of \textit{Pumping Iron} – an excreable\textsuperscript{14}, risible,

\textsuperscript{12} This means you.
\textsuperscript{13} Sometimes you have to “buy wickets” so take your cheque book with you.
\textsuperscript{14} Literally meaning “capable of being discharged by spitting.”
quasi-documentary of steroid abuse and questionable nutritional advice (Arnold Schwarzenegger: “Milk is for babies. When you grow up you have to drink beer”) – it sucks.

Oh yes, it’s a slice of life, but is it one we would rather not have dissected from life’s body?

Rotten Tomatoes says it is 96 per cent rotten and gives it 5 stars.

I quote from Rotten Tomatoes critics: “In addition to offering an enlightening early look into the world of future star/politician Arnold Schwarzenegger, Pumping Iron provides a witty and insightful overview of competitive bodybuilding.”

Oh come on! Is it any wonder punks are smoking plutonium and getting high on uncut radium with this sort of guidance?
FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Right, let’s see if we can send one down.

Use everything you can to increase your advantage. Stretch to the utmost limit of your full height, and when that won’t do… climb on the umpire’s shoulders.

Take the ball out of your mouth and get out your iron. Not that one, the flat iron! This isn’t time for a wedge. That’s the trouble with people like you. Always want to hit your way out of trouble.

Get out your flat iron. Put a crease in your pants. Have you taken the ball out of your mouth yet?

Lean back. This is the moment prior to letting the ball go. Develop the correct facial expression, however you can. Yes, even do that.
Let the ball go.

See to it that your hand does what you tell it to, when you tell it to.

Do not brook any argument or disobedience of any kind. There’s such a thing as authority, you know.

**SEAM BOWLING**

The position of the seam along the inside of the leg will of course affect the way in which the trousers swing in the air, and probably the way you walk as well. And if this joke had been told before, we wouldn’t need to wear a corset.

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15 “Brook” is another one, from the secret list of words “you’ll never get this word in a book, ever, at least not this meaning (to tolerate)”. Oh yes, it’s easy enough to use “brook” for “stream” as in sections of *Manacles* by Robert Whyte are less “stream of consciousness” and more “stream of rubbish”. That’s a doddl. But “brook” in this sense? Bliss.
The batter knows, of course, that you always wear your wallet in your back pocket. Therefore your trousers are likely to swing to the left. This batter is therefore likely to get out of the way, with plenty of room to spare and you’re left, 22 yards away, with your knees grinning.

Never mind, we may as well go ahead, now we’ve got this far. This is how you do it:

(a) grip the fly with three fingers

(b) hold the trousers so the seam bisecting the buttocks is upright

(c) run down towards the wicket without wobbling

(d) increase the shine on one buttock (do this however you can) and

(e) let go.
Many bowlers throw down the trousers with their body still in them. My technique advises you to take them off first.

You often hear of bowlers and fielders having “a good arm” and occasionally, just “an arm”, and sometimes (rarely) “a head”.

The reason for this is the ease with which the arms fly off when the bowler forgets to let go of the ball.

The arms whirl around, and sometimes, even the bowlers who are good at letting the ball go get into trouble, because they can’t keep their head out of the way they often knock it clean off.

This doesn’t mean you can forget your head, you know. You have to keep it in mind, or you’ll lose it, if it wasn’t screwed on.
**CUTTERS**

We’re really getting to the nitty gritty now.

Cutting the ball works on the following theory: if the batter can’t discern a mangled, chopped-about ball, it has a fairly good chance of getting past them and onto the stumps.

On the other hand (or the same one in most cases) the leg cutter is a practice of dubious worth. It can be effective if you plunge a knife into the batter’s leg, but not if you stick it into your own.

That special ball (the knuckle ball, related to the knuckle sandwich and the broken leg) can come in very handy.

**HANDS**

Ironically, the biggest surprise to youngsters learning how to play

These are all cutters. Imagine bowling one of these at a tail-ender! Top: Charles Henry Wheelwright Foster’s 46-footer Barbara, below: variety of nail clippers; the clipper on the left is in the plier style, the centre and right clippers are in the compound lever style.
cricket is often the fact that the hands are involved in leg spin bowling. They imagine the legs are the important element.

Look a bit closer, and it’s easy to see it is no great mystery. The hands are used to hold the leg before letting it go.

**VARIATIONS**

For the leg break, if you want to break a leg, make sure it’s not your own. When I used to play I never bowled a leg break. My hands were too big. I just picked up the batters whole and crushed them to death.

Actions like this eliminate the nerve of the opposition. It takes a real idiot to stand up to a bowler like me.
MORE PHYSICS

A leaning Italian once demonstrated that any object, a cricket ball, for example, would drop at a rate of 32 feet per second squared. Whatever that means... It’s definitely impressive, all wrapped up in numbers and everything.

Your strategy, to take advantage of science? Easy. Find a high building. Say, the Eiffel Tower...

Why not build an Eiffel Tower on the field directly above the batter at the crease and take the lift to the top (climbing would take too long and you’d be puffed).

If you were to drop a penny (this is when the penny drops), it will reach a velocity of some sort by the time it gets to the ground, quite sufficient to go straight through the head of one of the
ducks who might be floating in a pond there (they do, at this time of the year) leaving a neat, penny-sized slot.

These ducks, harvested by the Help the Blind Association are used in charity drives. They put them outside kiosks in Paris, where they’ve earned the very salubrious sobriquet (or nom-de-plume): seeing eye ducks¹⁶.

It’s very important, at this point, to point out these are not the ducks made by a batsman when they get out without scoring (which belong in the batting section¹⁷).

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¹⁶ This seems important, but it’s not.
¹⁷ Sorry, you had your chance, you should have mentioned it while we were there. It’s too late now.
So, back to bowling, one of my favourite topics, as if you didn’t know.

Bowling requires (a) the correct approach and (b) a good line, like: “We’ll have to stop meeting like this” or “I always bowl a good length” and (c) foreplay (using the forearm or the forehead) and (d) letting the ball go and (e) the follow through. (This means having another ball up your sleeve to follow the first one if the first one didn’t work.)

Bowling is not magic. It’s just something done by bowlers.

If bowling could be done by non-bowlers, it would be. But that’s simply not possible. Bowling by non-bowlers would be a category error and we can’t have that, can we?

We are we going with this?
A LAST WORD: THROWING
Have we nearly finished already? Doesn’t time fly!

If we only had one last thing to say, we would say this: “Lots of youngsters get carried away with their own strength. Some of them get carried away by other youngsters and some of them get carried away by older players who should know better.”

18 There you are, it’s been said. There’s no going back now.

THE END
We have now come to the end of our lesson on the fine art of cricket, neither fine, nor an art, we are sorry to say. But as we scurry to the next page, its emptiness a vast plain in which to hide, we live to write another day.

And so we declare “stumps.”

19 Don’t get me started.