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Cricket: the quintessential English game?

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Chapter 2: Cricket: The Quintessential English Game?

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If everything else in this nation of ours was lost but cricket ... it would be possible to reconstruct from the theory and practice of cricket all the eternal Englishness which has gone to the establishment of that constitution and the laws aforesaid. (Neville Cardus)

Cricket is consistently portrayed as the quintessential English game (Rumford 2007; Simons 1996). Maguire (1993: 297) for instance has argued that, 'Cricket is seen to represent what "England" is and gives meaning to the identity of being "English"'. Marqusee (1998: 15) has similarly noted that, 'everything [Americans] took, until recently, to be "English" – tradition, politeness, deference, gentle obscurantism – seems to be epitomised in "cricket"'. As a result texts on Englishness and English national identity invariably make illustrative reference to cricket (Aughey 2007; Baucom 1999; Colls 2002; Langford 2000; Mandler 2006). For example, Easthope (1999: 162) argues that 'English national culture, profoundly secular as it is, seems to treat only two things as genuinely transcendental – cricket and its own sense of humour', while Stephen Haseler (1996: 59), in *The English Tribe*, argues that cricket is 'the most exalted icon' of what he calls 'theme park heritage Englishness', in which the game has become 'a metaphor for the celebration of the English and rural nostalgia'.

The ways in which cricket invokes the underlying characteristics of Englishness are manifold. Cricket is believed to have been invented in England. Just as it could be claimed that no other nationality is as obsessed as the English are with the weather (Fox 2005; see also comparisons with tennis in Chapter 4), so few other sports seem to be so dominated by concerns about the impact of light, precipitation or humidity on the game's proceedings. Cricketers break for "tea". The extent of the game's literaturization and historiography (Bateman 2009) illustrate both the game's deep connection to the English language and the English 'national mood' of nostalgia (Ackroyd 2004: 442). Similarly cricket resonates with the imagined topography of England, for just as 'evocations of English landscape ... [often project] a Southern Englishness in the name of the whole' (Matless 1998: 17), so 'the landscapes of cricket ... [are] bucolic and rural ... [and] overwhelmingly English and Southern in location' (Bale 1994: 159).

As socially pervasive as the narrative of cricket and Englishness has become, it is important to consider two fundamental anomalies. An explicit contradiction is that cricket is also frequently depicted as *The Imperial Game* (Stoddart and Sandiford 1998) par excellence; 'the umbilical cord of Empire linking the mother country with her children' (Mangan 1986: 153). But the Empire was, fundamentally, a British rather than English venture and thus this anomaly raises the related question of whether imperial cricket was British or English. Has the game's distinctively English character been exaggerated, or does the game simply reflect, and continue to be subject to, the traditional elision which interprets Great Britain as simply 'Greater England' (Haseler 1996: 30)? The second anomaly relates to gender. If cricket is the quintessential English game, is this cricket per se or specifically male cricket and what, in turn, does this say about the relationship between gender and the nation?

In what follows we focus on these two anomalies as we critique the assessment of cricket as the quintessential English game. Initially we explore the emergence of the cricket and Englishness ideology identifying aspects of the symbolic annihilation (Kane and Greendorfer 1994) of women within this process. Then we examine the pan-British manifestation of cricket and the emergence of national representative sides for 'English' cricket. Finally we examine the role of Englishness in both the male and female version of the game. Through this we see that the cricket and Englishness ideology relies on a specific narrative of the game's history in which particular elements are brought to the fore and others marginalised. The chapter illustrates cricket's status as the quintessential English game is both gendered and reliant on a conflated view of English-British.

Cricket and Englishness as Invented tradition

As Eric Hobsbawm (1983) argued, many of today's traditions are, paradoxically, of relatively recent origin. These "invented" traditions may be deliberately constructed or emerge more organically, they can be state-led or popular movements, but all are essentially processes of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past. Their sense of permanency, and the continuity with the past that they (appear to) provide, is seen in contrast to modernity where change and innovation are more regular and more pronounced. Consequently, invented traditions consolidate identity-formation and enable social cohesion at times of considerable social change. While Hobsbawm (1983: 298) specifically notes that 'the last three decades of the nineteenth century mark a decisive transformation in the spread of old, the invention of new, and the institutionalization of most sports on a national or

even international scale', and that football in England, rugby in Wales and Gaelic football in Ireland 'provided new expressions of nationalism through the choice or invention of nationally specific sports' (Hobsbawm 1983: 300), the invention of tradition in cricket both pre-dates that of other sports, and is in many ways more significant to the social imagining of Englishness. It is also a specifically gendered development.

The sociogenesis of a model of English "national character" and the invented traditions of cricket as the "English game" were highly interdependent processes. The notion of national character emerged in late-eighteenth century England but 'saw a rapid development' in the 1830s and 1840s (Mandler 2006: 29). The English became perceived of as determined, upright, honest and self-disciplined, possessing limitless energy and perseverance (Langford 2000) and anti-intellectual, practical and particularist (Haseler, 1996). This changing consciousness occurred in conjunction with England's / Britain's industrial innovation and rise as a European power. A literary class helped to both delineate and disseminate the emerging notion of English national character (Mandler, 2006). Englishness was identified as embodied within "the people". A nostalgic cult of "old Englishness" developed as a reaction to the speed of change.

Cricket became the quintessential English game because its "invention" shared the defining features of these processes. Despite considerable evidence of the codification of cricket in the eighteenth century, based largely around the London social clubs for landed aristocrats in the metropolitan on political business (Malcolm 2013), cricket's social significance and peculiarly English character were literarily championed in the early to mid-nineteenth century (Bateman 2009). In this regard the works of Nyren (1833/1948) and Pycroft (1951/1948) are seminal. Both texts

argued that cricketers exhibited character traits which closely resonated with the model of English national character identified by Langford and Haseler. Nyren's nostalgic veneration of Hambledon (a Southern English village) helped to develop the popular association between cricket and the land (pastoralism), and the conception that the game, like English national character, was organic to the English people from time immemorial. This literature therefore attributed to cricket a sense of English social cohesion and continuity that was deemed distinctive to the English (in contrast to their mainland European counterparts):

Foreigners have rarely, very rarely, imitated us. The English settlers and residents everywhere play; but of no single cricket club have we ever heard dieted either with frogs, sour crout, or macaroni. (Pycroft 1851/1948: 63)

Nyren and Pycroft also represent the beginning of the concealment and obfuscation of female participation in cricket. Women have an established, albeit largely invisible, history of playing the game in England. The first-recorded women's cricket match was played in 1745 and was reported in *The Reading Mercury* as 'the greatest cricket-match that ever was played in south part of England' (Heyhoe Flint and Rheinberg 1976: 14). Women's cricket teams were often made up of married vs single women and women played for prizes such as ale or ribbons. These matches bear little resemblance to cricket today and women's behaviour was occasionally "rowdy". For example, during one women's match in 1833, it was reported that, 'As well as frequent applications to the tankard, they rendered themselves objects such as no husband, brother, parent or lover could contemplate with any degree of

satisfaction' (cited in Heyhoe Flint and Rheinberg 1976: 20). Behavioural codes were different for men and women; while men judged men, women were judged by their male relatives.

Indeed the judgement of women's behaviour suggests an "imagined" identity of women's cricket, in which the game was viewed as being played with a sense of propriety. While women's cricket was vibrant in the nineteenth century girl's public schools, justified at the auspicious Roedean School as a way to develop, 'a strong bond between the mother country and the colonies, between class and class and race and race' (Guttmann 1991:108), behavioural codes were closely aligned to social class and femininity. Consequently, when a professional *women's* touring team (the Original English Lady Cricketers) was formed with predominantly lower middle class women, the team received a mixed reaction and was relatively quickly disbanded. The fact that they played for money was considered inappropriate and beyond the accepted boundaries of the women's game. Women's cricket was therefore policed so that it posed no direct challenge to men's cricket and to quell any suggestion that women could rival the men's game.

In 1926 the England Women's Cricket Association (WCA) was formed by upper class women of largely independent means. Discussions about the formation of the WCA had been going on for some time and ultimately proponents successfully argued that the WCA would, 'enable any women or girl wishing to play cricket to do so and to play the game with strict order and decorum' (Heyhoe Flint and Rheinberg, 1976:31). The women were conscious that cricket was a sport associated with masculinity, that the grounds and key facilities belonged to male cricketers, and consequently that the women's behaviour was critical to ensure it did not challenge or pose a threat to the quintessential English game (Heyhoe Flint and Rheinberg

1976). The separation of the women's game allowed for women's cricket to be played as a sport that could fit in with ideas of Englishness and women's loyalty to the nation, but at the same time there was an acknowledgement that women played for leisure primarily, and both deferred to and followed the (real) men's game. The notions of national character and national identity rarely if ever explicitly emerged but, given the depictions of cricket as the national game, should be considered continually implicit. The lack of mention essentially re-affirms how the conflation of nation and manhood were taken for granted (Nagel 2005). Ideas about English national character as expressed through cricket therefore merged with notions of masculinity and femininity and are thus structured by gender norms.

A fundamental part of the invented traditions of cricket, therefore, was the notion that cricket was both fundamentally English and male and therefore unsuited to both the non-English populations of Great Britain and to women. Indeed, 'the temperament of the Welsh, Scots, Irish and French were often used to explain the limited impact of cricket there' (Bradley 1995: 37), while, as Bateman (2009: 27) notes, 'as forms of literature positioned cricket within a discourse of moral manliness, women were increasingly positioned beyond the boundary of the cricket field'. However, as we shall see in the next section, a considerable oversimplification, if not fiction, has been created in the sociogenesis of cricket as the quintessential English rather than British game.

The pan-British popularity of cricket

The connections between cricket and Englishness and its associated distancing from the 'Celtic fringe' falsely dichotomises a population that emerged through a process

of conquest that was 'slow, piecemeal, largely unplanned and often the result of local initiative and local invitation' (Kumar 2003: 84). Indeed the creation of Great Britain was less a product of "internal colonialism" (Hechter 1975) and more a process of political, cultural and economic integration. The outcome of this was that 'British society became a blurred patchwork of ethnic groups' (Kumar 2003: 85). Contrary to the game's conventional portrayal, this was similarly evident in cricket.

Indicative of this, it has even been claimed that cricket has Celtic origins (Bateman 2009). In reality, this probably reflects the fact that cricket-like folk games were probably played across much of Europe (and beyond) up to and after the eighteenth century, but there is also consistent evidence that the game in its emerging, modern, relatively standardised form was being played throughout Britain at this time. For instance, Johnes (2005) argues that the first recorded match was played in 1783 in Camarthenshire. While according to the *Welsh Academy Encyclopaedia of Wales* (Davies and Jenkins 2008), the first recorded match was played in Llanegwad in Pembrokeshire and the first club was formed in Swansea in 1785. Penman (1992) claims that Scottish cricket records date back to 1750, but a match played at Schaw Park, Alloa in 1785 is generally identified as the first played in the country. Finally in Ireland there is evidence that Cromwell's commissioners formally banned a game called 'Krickett' in 1656 (Siggins 2005), but it is more widely held that the first cricket match - consisting of members of the British army garrison playing against "All Ireland" for 1,000 guineas - took place in 1792 at Phoenix Park, Dublin. Indeed it should be noted that an Anglo-Irishman – Matthew Brodrick – collaborated with the Duke of Richmond to create the oldest surviving set of cricket laws (1727).

Given the confines of space it is difficult to provide a detailed account of the role and importance of cricket in these respective countries. Indeed at the outset it should be noted that there was considerable diversity in the “colonial” experience structured by, amongst other things, temporal differences, physical geographical boundaries, internal cohesion/divisions, degrees of (overt) conflict with the “coloniser”, and religion. But in each nation the diffusion of the game appears to have been structured through varying combinations of educational institutions, military occupation (in Wales and Ireland), and a social elite which saw personal value in achieving social distinction and (potentially) assimilation through participation in the game (Malcolm 2013). Consequently, in each of the “home nations” the game became popular among a broad social demographic. For example, in Scotland there were Glaswegian works-based teams, passionate cricket crowds in the Borders and teams in, ‘every village ... mining as well as in country districts’ (Burnett 2000: 58). Similarly, in Ireland cricket’s popularity is believed to have peaked around 1870, at which time the game was played across all 32 counties (Gemmell 2010). The permeation of cricket into all spheres of society is evident in the enthusiasm for cricket amongst leading figures in the Irish nationalist movement such as John Redmond and Charles Stewart Parnell. The considerable impact of the Irish diaspora on Australian cricket is further evidence of this (Bairner and Malcolm 2010).

Thus cricket achieved considerable popularity in all parts of Britain during the nineteenth century. By 1860 the game had probably become the most popular sport in Ireland (cited in Gemmell 2010) and data indicate that in the early 1880s only football was more popular than cricket in Scotland (Tranter 1987). The strength of Welsh cricket was such that Swansea and Cardiff rugby clubs were essentially

formed out of cricket clubs in 1873 and 1876 respectively (Johnes 2005), and a young W.G. Grace chose to play cricket for Neath rather than his local county Gloucestershire, because the former was thought to play at a higher standard.

However, this seemingly widespread popularity belies some very different and significant forms of institutional integration. Simply stated, Welsh cricket followed a parallel path to the nation's political and economic development in essentially integrating with existing 'English' structures. This is most evident in the participation of Glamorgan CCC in mainstream 'English' domestic cricket. Conversely the relative independence of the Scots saw separate Scottish leagues, fixtures between "Scottish XIs" and "England" from 1865, and the 1909 formation of the Scottish Cricket Union. Perhaps most interestingly of all, the Irish replicated many of the structures of English cricket, with a peripatetic amateur team, an Irish equivalent of *The Wisden Cricketer's Almanack* (described by many as the bible of cricket), and tours to America, and proposals to build a cricket ground in Dublin equivalent to Lord's in London in 1835. Fundamentally, however, the Irish game it remained at arm's length from English organisations (Malcolm 2013).

There was then no single pattern of "internal imperialism" but a variety of contextually specific "solutions". While such pragmatism and particularism has itself been identified as characteristically "English" (Colls 2002), cricket's strong historical presence across the nations of the British Isles indicates that the game's distinctively English character has been exaggerated. In inventing the tradition of Englishness and cricket these Celtic antecedents – like women's participation – have been obscured. In so doing cricket conforms to a defining feature of Englishness – namely the elision of English and British identities - and the more universal articulation of masculinity and national identity (Nagel 2005).

The Emergence of 'England' Cricket Teams

The subtle processes that saw cricket portrayed through a particular national and gendered paradigm were similarly evident when teams, nominally representative of the nation, emerged. Characteristic of the early development of the men's game was the integration of a number of Welsh, Scottish and Irish players into the "England" cricket team. For instance, Gregor MacGregor played for both the England cricket team and the Scottish rugby union team during the 1890s, and the English-born R.A. Fitzgerald played cricket for both Ireland and the Gentlemen of England before becoming the MCC's first paid secretary. If, as Ackroyd (2004: 237) argues, 'Englishness is the principle of appropriation', then cricket could be said to be the quintessential English game because it has historically been characterized by the appropriation of Celtic resources.

Second, this propensity for elision was evident in the way the English authorities treated the contests in which they engaged their Celtic neighbours. Specifically, the English simply refused to recognise matches against Scotland and Ireland as "internationals". Thus whereas Irish cricket historians consider the 1855 fixture against the Gentlemen of England as Ireland's first representative game (e.g. Siggins 2005), and a "Scotland XI" first played an "All England XI" in 1871, the English identify the 1877 game against Australia as England's first international fixture. Doing so is effectively a consequence of denying the existence of separate cricketing nations *within* Britain. As Kumar (2006: 8) argues, 'to have celebrated their own English identity, as the creators and directors of Great Britain, would have been impolitic in the extreme'.

Whilst men's cricket effectively appropriated Celtic resources, a greater level of coexistence was tolerated in women's cricket. For instance, the first "international" cricket match played by women took place between a Scotland XI and English XI on 29 and 30 August 1932 at Worcestershire's County Ground (WCA Report 1932). The England team was made up of women from several different teams, whereas the Scotland team was predominantly players from one club in St Andrews. England won the match. The WCA (1932: 13) was keen to thank the authorities for 'allowing' them use of the grounds which were deemed to belong to the men.

Shortly after the first women's international tour was arranged between the WCA and the Australian Women's Cricket Council (AWCC). While the first international tour was significant enough to receive some press interest, it was far less than would be expected for a men's tour. An article in the *Women's Weekly* on 24 November 1934 (Australia) reported:

To the Australian players this tour means a great deal . . . To occupy the leading pages in the newspapers, to be photographed, and to know that their names are being broadcast through the commonwealth and England adds glamour to the scene. (cited in Cashman and Weaver 1991: 84)

Significantly though, the primary narrative of the press was not in relation to national representation, but the gender appropriateness of the players' appearance and behaviour. This was far from self-evident for coming shortly after the notorious men's Ashes series of 1932-1933, in which the controversy over bodyline bowling evoked a critical debate about the fairness of England's tactics and the unwritten behavioural

codes that made cricket the quintessential English game, and thus was proximate to heightened awareness of national difference and reflections on the nature of English national character. Yet despite, or perhaps because of, this context England captain Betty Archdale was keen to stress that, 'we are not here for any Ashes but merely to play cricket' (cited in Cashman and Weaver 1991: 85). In declining to call their series "the Ashes", the women insisted that their game was separate from and therefore different to the men's.

England won the series easily, and the tour created a lot of public interest, with 3,500 spectators attending the first match played at the Western Australian Cricket Association ground in Perth. The press, however, focussed on suitability of 'male' sports for women. Prominent in this was the appearance of Betty Archdale with a number of writers commenting on what they saw as her boyish appearance. However, the women were congratulated on being more "civilised" and perceived to play a "fair" game which was considered in direct contrast to the recent bodyline series. Archdale reflected, 'people were relieved to find that we could play cricket without trying to kill the other side' (cited in Cashman and Weaver 1991: 94). This difference enabled the women to distinguish their game as separate and different, and this may have helped with the popularity of women's cricket. But implicit was the belief that women lacked the strength and ability of men, and they were therefore liminal as representations of the nation, and distinctly not embodiments of English national character. Future tours (the next came in 1937 when Australia travelled to England) helped consolidate the women's game, but in continuing to be organised as cricket for women, ran by women, they remained separate to both the men's game and conceptions equating cricket with Englishness.

The status of the women's game relative to the men's is indicated by the gender marking, for instance the Ashes and the International Cricket Council of ICC Cricket World Cup in contrast to "The Women's Ashes" (as it is now called) or the "ICC Women's World Cup". This reflects the historical dominance of the men within the game which in turn has ramifications for the way in which Englishness is gendered.

Contemporary expressions of Englishness in cricket

As Kumar (2006) notes, English nationalism can be conceived of as a specifically imperial form of nationalism. Overt displays of nationalism are counterproductive to nations with imperial missions and hence 'modesty and perhaps even self-deprecation' (Kumar 2006: 6) come to predominate. Cricket provided the perfect sporting vehicle for English (imperial) nationalism, played by teams wearing near identical clothing in front of spectators expected to treat the achievements of both sides with equal respect and with matches frequently concluded with no obvious winner or loser. The English/British depicted the playing successes of emerging nations as a victory for the "civilizing mission" they had invoked. Thus cricket was the Imperial Game par excellence (Stoddart and Sandiford 1998).

But even this could not insulate cricket from the broader social trends which saw a growth of English celebratory patriotism in the mid-1990s. In conjunction with imperial de-construction, globalization, European integration and British devolution cricketing activities began to be seen as having a broader political resonance. Initially this led to the expression of a "Little Englander" mentality, or what has been termed "malign Englishness", evident in the defence of traditions and resistance to

change (Edmunds and Turner 2001). This was manifest in cricket in relation to the emergence of the West Indies and latterly Pakistan as the dominant international teams, in Anglo-Australian cricketing relations and in debates about both the relationship between cricket and UK immigrants, and the role of minority ethnic players in the English cricket team (Malcolm 2013). But from the mid-1990s a competing narrative emerged – benign Englishness – which was informed by a cognisance of the contingent character and fluidity of national identity and marked by a greater degree of openness and inclusivity.

Initially it was the emergence of the “Barmy Army” – a group of English cricket fans most clearly evident when supporting the team overseas – that signalled this change. Their original motto, ‘To love England, to love cricket, to love the players’, was indicative of their three primary motivations; namely to have fun, exert an influence on matches (through expressive and partisan support) and to celebrate national identity. They initially met with considerable resistance, critiqued by cricket journalists who feared that English football hooligans had penetrated the quintessential English game. But such fears were not realised and the potential commercial leverage the Barmy Army offered meant that they were subsequently welcomed and incorporated by the cricketing authorities. Interestingly the Barmy Army also initially embraced the conflation of English and British, utilising the Union Jack (rather than the flag of St. George) as the major graphic image of the logo they reproduced on their various branded products (Parry and Malcolm 2004).

England’s 2005 Ashes victory over Australia was fundamental in bringing this form of celebratory patriotism to the attention of the broader British public. The long awaited nature of the victory, and the manner in which the series was contested, led to extensive media coverage, popularising both the game and this particular style of

nationalistic fandom. The diverse ethnic make-up of the team was celebrated, the accessibility of the players was welcomed (especially relative to footballers) and the laddish behaviour of the players in the post-victory celebrations was tolerated with amusement. England's talismanic player, Andrew "Freddie" Flintoff came to be seen as the embodiment of Englishness, represented as the kind of hardworking, loyal, brave reliable, down to earth character outlined in Nyren and Pycroft's depictions of the game (Malcolm 2013).

What emerged therefore was a modern version of Englishness which was both shaped by contemporary trends but in part remained rooted in the traditions of English national character delineated almost two centuries earlier. Such adaptability was important in enabling cricket to remain the quintessential English game. But as part of this process there was further continuity in relation to the continued tensions between English-British and the gender bias traced so far. It is to each of these that we now turn.

English and British

The pan-British response to the 2005 success of the England cricket team provided an interesting mixture of antagonism towards such overtly nationalistic celebrations of "Englishness" and evidence of how cricket blurred nationalistic boundaries within Britain more than other sports. Following a victory parade through London (for both the male and female teams, as the latter also won their 2005 "Ashes" series), Scottish Parliament member, Christine Grahame, submitted a motion entitled "It's Simply not Cricket", which 'lamented the overwhelming UK-wide coverage of a sport of only marginal interest in Scotland'. Grahame's motion met with a hostile response

condemning her 'petty and narrow minded nationalism' (*Scotsman*, 15 September 2005). Many Scottish commentators subsequently identified both their support for the England cricket team – for instance columnist Martin Hannan who described himself as a 'Fierce patriot ... cut me and I bleed Saltires' (*Scotland on Sunday*, 11 September 2005) – and the distinctions they made between the cricket, football and rugby teams that represented England. Tom English, writing in *Scotland on Sunday* (11 September 2005), revelled in the aftermath of the England football team's defeat to Northern Ireland, yet declared himself 'happy for the England cricket team ... because from a distance they seem an altogether agreeable lot'. Similarly broadcaster and columnist Nicky Campbell noted his (class-based) antipathy toward the England rugby union team – referring to 'Sir Clive [Woodward]'s Smarmy Army' - and asked, 'What's different about Test Cricket?'. Campbell's answer was that, 'We don't play you and, if we are good, we play for you and occasionally captain you' (*Guardian*, 15 September 2005). Whilst Prime Minister Gordon Brown (a Scot) attracted considerable criticism for declaring his support for England during the 2006 Football World Cup, his support for the England cricket team was fundamentally unproblematic.

Such attitudes reflect a continued commingling of aspects of British cricket which, again, is characterised by very different Irish, Scottish and Welsh experiences. For instance, via an explicit globalization agenda, the ICC has increased the opportunities for lower ranked cricketing nations (i.e. Scotland and Ireland) to compete against full members (England). The 2007 ICC Cricket World Cup represented the first competition in which all three teams competed, and Ireland's defeat of England in the 2011 ICC World Cup provided the former with perhaps the nation's most significant cricketing victory to date. Ireland's relative success has had

peculiar implications, with England successively “skimming off” the best Irish talent (starting with Ed Joyce, followed by Eoin Morgan and Boyd Rankin; additionally Scotland’s Gavin Hamilton was selected to play test cricket for England). Conversely the integration of Welsh and English cricket has advanced in recent years. From 2002 to 2007, Welsh-born David Morgan was Chair of the England and Wales Cricket Board (tellingly abbreviated to just ECB) and in 2005 Cardiff born Hugh Morris was appointed deputy Chief Executive and later Managing Director of the England (men’s) cricket team. “England” even began to play international fixtures in the Welsh capital, Cardiff. Highlighting the unique nature of the arrangement, Bairner and Malcolm (2010: 198) asked, ‘Why would a national team play its home games in another country except in unusual circumstances such as civil unrest or as a result of being penalised for unacceptable behaviour by fans?’

Gender

Similarly the place of the women’s team in defining the quintessential English game remained tenuous. In 1998 the WCA merged with the ECB. This was in part due to financial issues but also broader social processes in which governing bodies and sports policies became more focused on “equity” (Velija, 2015), and enabled the game to become increasingly professional with current (female) players reported to earn £40,000 per year (Kessel, 2015). While poor relative to their male counterparts (who have central contracts worth £700,000 per year), the difference in earnings below the top level is even greater, with no opportunity for women to play cricket professionally outside the national set-up. Perhaps partly because of the low monetary rewards, members of the England Women’s Cricket team express a sense

of pride and importance of playing for the nation. As Charlotte Edwards noted, ‘it meant everything to me to play for England and wear the cap’ (*Daily Mail*, 17 May 2014; see also the data reported in Chapter 8). Albeit increasing, the women’s game continues to receive minimal media coverage, and the extent to which the women’s game is more widely seen to represent the ‘nation’ is not clear. The fact the women are expected to play out a love for the nation, rather than financial rewards, seems to correlate with the nostalgia which imbues English cricket. Also perhaps given broader cultural narratives critiquing the exploitative behaviour of (financial) elites and the resultant social inequalities, the women’s game may align with a form of English national identity that embraces equity and tolerance. But there is little evidence to suggest that women winning the (women’s) Ashes or other notable tournaments creates a feeling of national pride in the way that men’s cricket does, or that losses are criticised with equal ferocity. Where England’s male and female cricketers’ fixtures are scheduled to play on the same day/venue, the latter always play first and provide something akin to “pre-match entertainment”.

Conclusion

Cricket has a historical presence and continuing legacy as the quintessential English game. The depth of interpenetration is such that not only does this exist at the ideological level but fundamentally structures important parts of the way the game is played – taking tea, stopping due to inclement weather, venerating statistics, supporting in a particular style, etc. The association owes much to the specific ways in which female players, and those from the Celtic fringes of Britain, have had their involvement structured and depicted by administrators, the media and in public

discourse. Even in the relatively dynamic contemporary period of United Kingdom disunity and changing gender relations, the assumptions ingrained into the (particularly revered) traditions of cricket act as a form of resistance to more radical change. The continued relegation of the women's game relative to the men's, despite the existence of some obvious potential "virtues", illustrates the malleability of national character in the face of contextual - often commercial - contingencies, while contemporary relations between English men's cricket and its Celtic counterparts shows the stability forged by a balance of power underpinned by a subtle elision and appropriation which undermines any demonstration of difference. Consequently, it is men's "cricket" that continues to articulate with notions of English national identity, ultimately constructing a distinctly masculine representation of the quintessential English game.

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