

EBONY CRICKETERS WITH AN ENGLISH ACCENT

By ARTHUR JAMES PEGLER

Drawings made at Van Cortlandt Park by RALPH BARTON



The cricket grounds at Van Cortlandt Park on a Saturday or Sunday



"Oh, well bowled, sir!"

"One really can't call it cricket. With a rough pitch like that it's impossible to judge a ball. Only thing to do is to hit every blinking thing you can and take chances."

BASEBALL enthusiasts regard the British national game of cricket as lugubrious sport. They decry its long drawn periods, its protracted struggles between bowler and batsman, as devoid of spectacular thrills such as develop in baseball when "Babe" Ruth slams out a homer, for instance, while grandstand and bleachers writhe and sway under a shouting mob as the invaluable Mr. Ruth trots composedly over his familiar route.

Nevertheless, as many Americans admit, there is something about cricket. There must be "something" about a game that has survived in various forms and with varying fortunes since the thirteenth century and is today played in every country under the British flag as well as on non-British soil by many men of many races.

New York cricketers number thousands. That element, perhaps, to be referred to as the *haute ton* of the sport, assembles under colors of the Metropolitan District Cricket League and the New York Cricket Association, but its most enthusiastic and numerous votaries in these parts are West Indian negroes, of whom there are many hundreds living in the greater city—cricketers to the last man, and if not active participants in, at least eagerly interested spectators of, the game.

Visitors to Van Cortlandt Park any Saturday or Sunday in the cricket season are certain to find from one to four matches in progress and a gallery of dark-skinned spectators of both sexes following the fortunes of their favorite elevens with critical concentration.

American born negroes regard their cricket playing blood throats tolerantly but without enthusiasm, being baseball fans to a man and utterly unimpressed with the ceremonious and leisurely forms of the British sport.

"Ah'd lak to know what dey gets outter dis yah ol' cricket?" remarked one American African, as he watched a West Indian team at play.

"Ah knows what dey doesn't nevah get," grinned his companion. "Dey doesn't nevah get froo."

West Indian natives play the game with punctilious regard for its approved forms and ceremonies—precisely as it is played by British colonials. In fact, these negro enthusiasts may be considered rather more rigid observers of form than their white compatriots of the wicket. Cricket flannels, striped blazers and caps—the latter with club insignia worked in them—are reminiscent of English county cricket fields, while the feminine gallery presents a gay ensemble of color in afternoon gowning and multi-hued millinery.

In important matches a striped marquee forms the center of social interest, because, of course, there's the tea interval to be considered. Tea is served in the marquee wherever cricket matches are played in England or in British possessions, so obviously tea must be served when cricket is played elsewhere. The tea interval is respected on cricket club grounds at Port au Spain, Trinidad; St. Michael's Field, Bridgetown, Barbados; St. George's Grounds, Hamilton, Bermuda, and therefore perforce in Van Cortlandt Park, U. S. A.

Persons inclined to scoff at the leisureliness of cricket have ere now demanded to know what relation tea bears to the game, whereunto the cricketer might well retort with remarks about pop, peanuts and baseball, but he doesn't. To him it seems that the tea interval is as much cricket as is tossing for innings. Everybody knows that W. G. Grace, Ranjitsinhji, Fry, Jessop—all the historic stars of British cricket—knocked off for tea at 4, no matter where the game stood. Bosanquet, Australian inventor of the "googly" ball, productive of as heated a controversy among cricketers as was the "spitball" where devotees of the diamond foregather, and Laver, of Sydney, to-day held the "googly's" most noted exponent, insist on tea when it's tea time, so there you are. No use arguing over a thing that just is and always has been. Anyway, they serve tea in Van Cortlandt Park cricket matches, and it is then that one may hear the social chit-chat of the game.

"Hoah comes Lillian," exclaims an Amazonian young matron as a pale blue roadster swings silently to the field's edge. Lillian, a sinuous, coffee-colored beauty, veiled and

ponge coated, descends from her impressive motor, waves a gloved hand to the gallery group and awaits her white-flanneled escort.

"Algy appears to have made his peace with the temperamental lady," ventures a male acquaintance of the arriving pair.

"My deah man, they're as good as married," retorts the Amazon, "everything but the wedding bells. Oh, really—'pon my word—had it from Lillian herself only yesterday."

A flutter of polite greeting marks the advent of the pair.

"Bit late, aren't you, old dears," inquires somebody.

"Ignition," explains Algy laconically. "Cawn't seem to get the hang of it."

Matches between these West Indian clubs are worth watching for the good quality of cricket they frequently present. No less interesting is the conversation of players and spectators. The dialect, if such it may be termed, is quite distinct from that of the American negro. It is, in fact, an intonation rather than a dialect—the intonation, if you please, of British West Indian officialdom and of British colonial society.

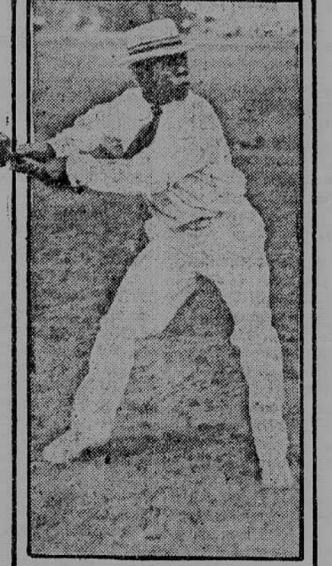
No cockney accent obtrudes among the Dark-town cricketers of Van Cortlandt Park. The captain of a soccer team, who hails from Liverpool, after listening to a low-toned conversation among three tall ebony-skinned players from Barbados, turned to his companion and remarked:

"If it wasn't for their h'inky 'ides, you'd say they was h'aristocrats."

A bevy of dusky maids and matrons disposed in camp chairs beneath a spreading maple watched the play nearest at hand and discussed topics of universal interest in quite the correct cultivated cricket manner.

"Of course, deah," concluded an ample dame in orchid organdie and a picture hat, "this soh't of thing cawn't lawst. Why, I'm paying more for a perfectly wretched apartment in Seventh Avenue than the Governor's agent pays for a twenty room house in Bridgetown, Barbados, with five acres of garden and a conservatory, to say nothing of the outbuildings."

"Beastly, I call it," interposed a black Venus in short striped sport skirt and turban, crossing shapely silk-clad legs and clasping coal black hands about one knee. "Thirty dollars for three quite small rooms with a bath in the hall is our monthly contribution to the profiteer. We could buy a really good house in St. Croix for six months' rent in Manhattan."



West Indian natives play the game with punctilious regard for its approved forms and ceremonies, of course including the inevitable interval of tea-drinking

"Well played, sir!" broke out a be-blazered Trinidadian as one of the batters banged a drive to leg that looked good for three, and with his batting vis-à-vis began scurrying back and forth between wickets, while a fielder chased the maroon ball.

Followed a flutter of hand-clapping and some expert comment on the "roughness of the pitch," remedied in some degree a few minutes later when a strip of grass-colored matting was spread between wickets, where-upon "Mr. Jones began shooting 'em in with far greater accuracy than before. The hard-surfaced and heavy matting is held to approximate, closely as may be, such smoothness as hard-rolled turf affords in carefully maintained cricket fields.

A crack bowler of the Barbados contingent sat on his bat at the field's edge during tea

these, he said, were few enough even in British territory.

"So far as the mob is concerned," went on my bowler friend, "it wants the ball knocked all over the field. Fact is, you know, bowling is the really scientific end of cricket. Take a high class man, such as Spofforth was, for instance, able to keep a batter blocking all day, because, if he tried to hit, his balls would fly; or such men as Atwell, Hearne, Turner or Ferris—they were the scientists of cricket, because they held down run making, but they also reduced the spectacular possibilities. The spectator applauds any batsman who makes a decent score, but the bowling good or bad, but fine bowling is set down to poor batting—never gets a hand. No, the public doesn't care for good bowling, taking it in the mass. Bowling is too deep a science for popu-

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continued, "it's impossible to judge a ball. Only thing to do is to hit every blinking thing you can and take chances."

Rangy Mr. Jones was trying, I was informed, to overcome with speed the ball's erratic tendency to shoot in any and every direction after contact with the rough ground, for the cricket batsman, be it known, has to hit on the rebound, not on the ball's direct flight. Despite Mr. Jones's best efforts his bowling was somewhat wild.

"Watch this chap," advised the man in leg guards who had been stumped. "This chap," it developed, was noted for ability to "drive 'em into deep field." He slammed the second ball straight back past the bowler for a sextet and was appropriately honored.

"Fine cricket, sir," exclaimed a solitary spectator.

"Bien joue!" vociferated the ittle man of the long mustache, and a big Barbadian remarked in a conversational tone, "Good boy, Davy."

There was expert gossip of Fitz Hinds, "Red" Olivierre, W. Gibbs and O. Layne, bright stars, I was assured, in the local West Indian cricket galaxy.

"Olivierre," said my friend of the imperial, "is an accomplished bat—one of the best on this continent. He's a brother, you know, to C. A. Olivierre, who qualified for Derbyshire in 1876. Then we have Gibbs and Layne, both

interval, talking cricket between sips. Apropos of tea drinking, this muscular young negro opined that it "rawther varied the interest, you know."

Cricket, my informant suggested, wasn't much as a spectator's game. He lamented the fact that good bowling held few fascinations for any but the most expert observers, and lar appreciation. Of course, cricket isn't baseball. Any effort to put what you people call 'pep' into the game merely ruins it."

Just then a short, stout batsman sporting a crinkly but carefully cultivated mustache and imperial, caught one on the top and sent it rocketing. A rangy fielder stood squarely in the ball's line of descent as that chunky batsman chivied himself between wickets, keeping an anxious eye on the sphere. Possibilities of the situation overcame a cultivated habit of reserve in the nearby group of French-speaking St. Croix expatriates. They were excited and showed it.

"Attrapez-le!" shouted a tall thin man in a long white coat—an official, I was told.

"Get under it, Bill!" was the contribution of a swarthy Jamaican.

The fielder caught that measly pop-up and tossed it to the bowler, who, discovering the other batsman star gazing, neatly stumped the gentleman.

"How's that, umpire?" he demanded, though of course there couldn't be the slightest doubt how it was.

"Comment est?" inquired the batter of the imperial, also insisting on a decision.

"Batter's out!" snapped the long white-coated dignitary, quite in the best manner of umpires everywhere.

"One really cawn't call it cricket," complained the short, stout man, who had been caught heading for the tea tray, but under his arm. "With a rough pitch like that," he

continued, "it's impossible to judge a ball. Only thing to do is to hit every blinking thing you can and take chances."

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first rate, all round men, fit for any company. There are scores of lesser lights."

Stumps were drawn at half-past 6. Followed leisurely packing in preparation for the subway journey. Some of the players and their women folks departed in automobiles, which also carried the heavy dunnage that goes with cricket. Suddenly chorused voices rose in song—fine voices, too. The man I was talking with took his hat off. He said they were singing the American national anthem. Some of the vocalists must have been recent arrivals. This is how they sang it:

"My coun-try 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of lib-er-tee,
God save our king,
Send him vic-to-ri-ous,
Happy and glor-i-ous,
Long to-oo reign over us,
Le-et free-dom ring"

Cricket historians assert that the game developed from a two-handed ball-tossing exercise practiced by monks in ancient times. In a Boadicea Library manuscript dated April 18, 1844, entitled "Romance of the Good King Alexander," there appears what is declared to be the first pictorial representation of a cricket game, with fielders in addition to the batsmen and bowler, all figures in the illustration being those of monks wearing cowls and gowns. Cricket, say baseball enthusiasts who have interested themselves sufficiently to study its origin, is not a game at all, but a religion. They point to its monastic beginnings in justification of this statement.

Kipling's denunciation of "Flanneled fools at the wicket and muddled oafs at the goal," a protest against easy-going British philosophies that permitted national interest to remain centered in cricket and football scores while the country faced a crisis which eventuated in the World War, was merely a case of history repeating itself, so far as cricket was concerned.

King Edward III in 1365 denounced the game as "Ludos in honestis et minus utiles aut valentes," asserting that it interfered with the practice of archery, England then, as always, needing soldiers who knew how to shoot.

Under statutes adopted in the reign of King Edward IV cricket was again characterized as "one of those games which still continue to be so detrimental to the practice of archery. By the terms of the statute any one permitting the game to be played on his premises was liable to three years' imprisonment and a fine of £20 and any player to two years' imprisonment and a fine of £10, the "implements to be confiscated."

As the game is played to-day wickets are pitched opposite to and parallel with each other, twenty-two yards apart, the bowling creases being marked with whitewash on the turf, eight feet eight inches in length. Captains of the sides toss for innings, and the winner generally sends his own side in first. Two batsmen with plenty of defensive ability are first put in, the best run getters following in order, weaker batters going in last. As there are always two batsmen, when ten of the side have been put out, one of the final batting team is "not out." That is to say, he is out because there are no longer other batsmen to support him. This survivor is therefore said to "carry his bat."

Often a skillful batsman lasts out the entire side, defying the efforts of the bowlers to displace him and being supported in turn by his entire eleven until the last man is bowled, caught or stumped, and the hero, who carries his bat, walks off amid modulated plaudits of a cricket gallery.

There are nine ways a batter may be put out. He may be "bowled," as when the bowler knocks over his wicket with a bowled ball; "caught" if the ball is held by any member of the opposing team after it has left his bat; "stumped," if the bowler knocks his bails off while he has neither foot nor bat inside the crease; "lbw," meaning leg before wicket, when he is struck by a bowled ball which but for interference would have put him out; "run out," as when the bowler tips his bails before he reaches the crease during run making.

The batter is also out if he hits the ball more than once, touches it with his hands, hits his wicket with the bat, knocking off his own bails, or obstructs the field. So, after all's said and done, perhaps the reader will agree that there really is "something" about cricket.

CHELSEA, THE POOR RELATION

(Continued from page two)

waiting for the coroner, and the children ran back and forth, stepping over it. Then I heard something of the family story. The man at one time had been a traveling salesman, the woman educated in a convent, and they met and married in some small town in Vermont. Then drink; the woman, with neither the strength to help him nor the courage to leave him, went down with him into deeper and deeper poverty and harder days. The old father followed her, incapable of helping much, and yet pitifully trying to do what he could. Not long afterward the old man died at Bellevue, the mother went to a consumptive home and the children were put into an orphan asylum. Again the cellar tenement was for rent.

The last inhabitants of this haunted place were not a family at all, but an aggregation

of men and women who never worked, but spent their time drinking and robbing their weaker neighbors whom they enticed into the wretched hole. It was finally cleaned out by the united efforts of the police and the Board of Health; pressure was brought to bear on the landlord and the house has now been renovated. There is even steam heat there. The evil spirits have been ousted. But they were not drink alone; the place was haunted as well by cold and dirt and sewage. You can't make people act like human beings who live in such a filthy spot.

Most of the visitors who come to see us do find their way to our neighborhood house, the Hudson Guild, and any talk about Chelsea must include the work done by the Guild. It started nearly twenty-five years ago as a boys' club, founded by Dr. John Lovejoy

Elliott. Dr. Elliott tried to find something better for the boys to do than shooting craps and forming gangs. He did it, and the Guild is now a big neighborhood house, the headquarters of a group of neighborhood clubs that reach perhaps four thousand members. These clubs are not only self-governing but they elect members to the Clubs' Council—that is responsible for all the activities of the Guild. This same spirit of self-government is being carried into the neighborhood organizations by means of volunteer workers among the people of Chelsea.

The open air movies on Monday and Friday nights all through the summer, the milk station in Chelsea Park, the Cooperative Store, the Guild Farm in New Jersey, the bungalows that our Women's Club rents on Staten Island and the Health League are all examples of neighborhood cooperative work.

As Dr. Elliott says, it is cooperation that will first democratize the community and then city life, and we believe it.