



*silly mid on*, and not forgetting the incredibly silly, *silly point*. I'm sure if one spoke to a seasoned cricketer, you'd find out that there is nothing silly at all about this but rather to find out that such terms originate from some deep obscure and arcane historical meaning.

Another weird aspect of cricket, at least from a casual observer like me, is the attire, particularly with the more formalised and rigorous *test cricket*, considered the traditional and original variant of cricket since 1877. As my late grandfather said to me, if it's not test cricket, it's not proper cricket. Players are traditionally dressed in white, although bigger and more colourful advertising logos have injected more colour prompting much outrage with true cricket traditionalists in which white is considered a colour of high-esteem for a 'gentlemen's game', and clouding the oval with unwanted colour makes it more difficult to spot the little red ball. And let me tell you something about that little red ball. It's bloody hard and, no doubt, that's going to hurt if you get caught in its crossfire. Some batters can hit this at an excess of a hundred miles an hour and you don't want to get in its way.

The term, *test cricket*, is often amusing when explaining to someone with *no* knowledge of cricket. Many I spoke to, including my wife, thought that test cricket wasn't the real cricket, but like a test akin to qualifying for a Formula One race. My earliest recollection of test cricket was when my late grandfather, who typified the quintessential English gentleman, became all excited when it was about to air on the TV. He would sink in to his easy chair and my grandmother would wheel in the trolley laden with fine-china mugs of tea accompanied by an assortment of biscuits and her homemade scones. The soft and relaxed banter of cricket commentators along with that unmistakable sound of a hard leather ball striking a bit of willow puts him to sleep in less than fifteen minutes time. Only when the occasional mildly excited applause that occurs when the ball gets hit into the crowd, known as an *over*, he would suddenly wake up. I'd turn around and he'd look at me and say that the game has been a riveting one so far. I'd give him that feigned nodding look of approval. Sure it was.

Considering that test cricket can go on for five whole days, interspersed with lunch and tea breaks, and with the possibility that no side might even win at all, test cricket is certainly testing! Back to the subject of white attire and particularly so when played in those Commonwealth countries in which it is commonly quite warm or hot, white is the most sensible colour to wear for obvious reasons. I mention Commonwealth countries because for those countries which are not,

cricket is utterly alien. Speak to any American about cricket and you'll see what I mean.

As for women, they have played cricket as long as men have and yet, there's been quite a lot of misogyny within the game, particularly with elite cricket. For example, the sanctum sanctorum of Lord's, a famous cricket oval in London, is the Long Room, a chamber no woman can enter. Not that long ago, in 1999, the rule was relaxed, and I remember in the news all the controversy that surrounded it, particularly by the 'old boy network'.

This leads me to my observation of the typical 'crowd' that occupies Lord's in test cricket during a hot day. It's not much of a crowd judging by the many unoccupied seats, but sure enough, there'll be lots of very red and sunburned men out there drinking tin after tin of bitter or ale. Test cricket seems to be a very subdued and formal atmosphere in which tradition is everything. Advertising is discreet. Colours are minimal. White clothes, green grass, red ball. Real people still hide away in the big scoreboards turning the numbers around. In a way, it's nice to see such tradition still in place much like Wimbledon with tennis.

Cricket traditionalists are fairly hardcore, much like my grandfather was. Back in 1971, when one-day cricket was introduced, there was much in the way of grumbling and derision with the hard-core traditionalists. My grandfather was one of them apparently and since I was a child, I remember him admonishing one-day cricket as that overly upbeat cricket game for the young upstarts with little or no attention span. I'd still laugh at this considering that anyone who can sit through a whole day of cricket could be considered someone having little or no attention span.

Much later during the 2000s, 3-hour cricket, or Twenty20 cricket, was introduced and it must have shook the traditionalists over the brink. I recently went to a Big Bash League event in South Australia. Yes, it was cricket, but the stadium was packed. It was noisy. Bright lights. Colourful shirts. Lots of flashing lights and advertising. And, for traditionalists, worst of all. Cheerleaders, although not very good ones. For mere mortals like me, this suited me perfectly, though I'm not a fan of being in crowds in general. You went with friends and family. Have food and drink and know that in less than 3-hours-time, there will be a winner.

The difference in atmosphere of watching a BBL game in Australia or enduring a five-day test cricket match like the Ashes could not be more chalk and cheese.

Cricket is one hell of a weird game, and, to this day, it still continues to mystify me how one can get so into it. But each to their own. I could watch snooker for hours which, to many, would make watching paint dry far more exciting.