

# The Oddly Enduring Appeal of Cricket

It's hard to believe cricket is one of the world's most popular and enduring sports. It is, without doubt, the slowest game ever created; five days to reach a result is slow by any acceptable standard. The comedian Robin Williams once described cricket as "baseball on Valium", but then he's American and can't be expected to understand the intricacies of such a complicated game.

Yet across India and Pakistan cricket ranks as almost a religion; it is a unifying force among the scattered islands of the Caribbean (after all, the West Indies is not actually a nation, yet they come together on a regular basis to play together); in England the euphoria at reclaiming the coveted Ashes from Australia in 2005 was greeted with cheering in the streets (and the consumption of vast quantities of alcohol in the pubs); while in Australia, about half the nation tunes in to listen to or watch a cricket match at some point in a Down Under summer.

How does a sport like cricket not only survive, but prosper and gain new adherents, in a world where practically everything else has to be done five minutes ago?

It's been described as an anachronistic 19th and early 20th century sport and its demise was expected as early as the 1960s. Yet more than four decades on, it is flourishing.

Part of the reason for the continued success of cricket has been its ability and willingness to adapt to change, while continuing to remain true to its core. The introduction and success of the one-day game may have horrified the purists, but it has led to cricketers learning to score faster, with the result Test matches are now perceived as 'quicker' than at any time in the history of the sport.

The new Twenty-20 phenomenon has really captured the public's imagination, although it still has the aura of the 'hit and giggle' matches played at lunch times in the schoolyard or in the backyard after a Sunday barbeque.

Of the top 15 fastest run-scorers of all time, seven are players of the present era, including Australian Test batsmen Adam Gilchrist and Matthew Hayden. Wisden, the Bible of cricket, has noted the Tests of

today are faster in terms of runs scored per balls faced than at any time in the history of the game. And yet, the Tests themselves are being played at a slower rate because fewer balls are bowled per day. Four decades ago spectators could be treated to the sight of 120-plus balls bowled per hour; this dropped to around 100 balls bowled per hour in some matches played in 2005. Then again, if batsmen are scoring faster against fewer deliveries, at least the end result is a quicker and livelier game. After all, watching 120 balls bowled at a reincarnated Trevor Bailey (known by his self-explanatory nickname of 'barnacle') compared to watching only 100 balls bowled at Adam Gilchrist wouldn't take a rocket scientist to determine which of the pair the vast majority of spectators would prefer to see in action.

In Australia, and parts of the West Indies, cricket faced the challenge of surging American sports such as basketball and baseball. At the end of the 1980s, basketball had captured the interest of around 44 percent of Australians, just 14 percentage points behind cricket, and gaining fast. Fast forward 15 years and cricket is now Australia's most watched sport on television and about a million people play the game on a regular and competitive basis. It ranks as having the interest of 56 percent of the population, pretty much where it was in 1989; basketball has fallen from its high to not much above 32 percent.

One key factor in the resurgence of Test cricket's popularity

in particular is the desire for a result. Nowadays, if weather permits, many Tests finish with a result in less than five days. This more positive approach is being seen as one of the major factors in the resurgence of cricket.

There is another factor that may well herald the real reason why cricket remains a popular sport: its very slowness. One social commentator noted, "Summer is about holidays and slowing down and enjoying yourself out in the sun. That's what cricket does. You go along and chill out and relax."

The Phuket cricket season is about to start again. For more details you can contact Mark via his email: [scarfy@loxinfo.co.th](mailto:scarfy@loxinfo.co.th)

(((RING)))  
 \*\*Pick Up\*\*  
 "Hello?"  
 "Hi honey, this is Daddy, Is Mommy near the phone?"  
 "No Daddy, She's upstairs in the bedroom with Uncle Paul."  
 After a brief pause, Daddy says, "But honey, you haven't got an Uncle Paul."  
 "Oh yes I do, and he's upstairs in the room with Mommy right now"  
 \*\*. Brief Pause  
 "Uh, okay then, this is what I want you to do. Put the phone down on the table, run upstairs and knock on the bedroom door, and shout to Mommy that Daddy's car just pulled into the driveway."  
 "Okay Daddy, just a minute"  
 A few minutes later the little girl comes back to the phone.  
 "I did it, Daddy"  
 "And what happened honey?" he asked  
 "Well, Mommy got all scared, jumped out of bed with no clothes on and ran around screaming. Then she tripped over the rug, hit her head on the dresser and now she isn't moving at all!"  
 "Oh my God!!! What about your Uncle Paul?"  
 "He jumped out of the bed with no clothes on, too. He was all scared and he jumped out of the back window and into the swimming pool. But I guess he didn't know that you took out the water last week to clean it. He hit the bottom of the pool and I think he's dead"  
 \*\*\* Long Pause \*\*\*  
 \*\*\*\*\* Longer Pause \*\*\*\*\*  
 Then Daddy says: "Swimming pool?? ... Is this 076-5731??"