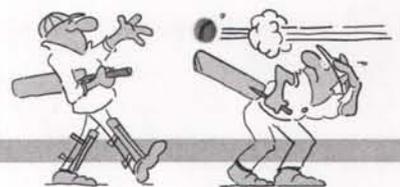


This is Cricket, By Jove!

MICHAEL BLADON



Cricket is the English national game. And to many Englishmen, it is both a game and a standard of behaviour. Cricket does not have rules, it has laws. It is also the "national" game in New Zealand, Australia, India, Africa, Pakistan, the West Indies and Bangladesh. When Canada became a Dominion in 1867, the Prime Minister declared cricket a national sport.

The first written reference to cricket is in an excerpt of an account of the 28th year of Edward the First (1239-1307) which listed expenses as part of the game. King Edward III banned cricket as it interfered with archery. Still later, one could be fined and imprisoned for three years if found playing the game on personal property. Opinions obviously changed as there are many records of cricket being played by the British Army and Royal Navy in the 1700s.

Moving overseas, the first game played in Canada by civilians was on Ile-Ste Hélène near Montreal in 1785. The Toronto Cricketing Club formed in 1827 and is now called the Toronto Cricket, Skating and Curling Club. Toronto, Guelph, Kingston, Woodstock and Hamilton all had teams until the 1840s.

Cricket was played on the front campus of what is now the University of Guelph for over one hundred years. York University also has a cricket ground open to the public. A "crease" was laid at Rideau Hall, formerly the Vice-Regal Lodge, in Ottawa in 1865. This same land was set aside for cricket when Canada became a Dominion.

In British Columbia, the sport was played from 1849 when a British army officer brought cricket equipment with him. Also recorded from 1864 was a cricket ground on part of the Nanaimo Indian Reserve. A league still exists in BC today consisting of teams from Nanaimo,

Comox Valley, Arrowsmith and Campbell River.

Moving to Alberta, Edmonton was one of a few clubs to have its own private ground since 1882. Teams competed from Fort Saskatchewan and Strathcona and by 1912, there were sufficient adherents to the game that the Edmonton and District Cricket League was formed.

In 1892, the Canadian Cricket Association was founded and today, there are eight provincial associations.

A major influence on cricket in Canada is its geography. Since a large portion of the country is frozen

for 6-7 months of the year, this causes difficulties for grounds maintenance, practice, training and coaching. With the game played from coast to coast, the mere size of the country can also cause scheduling and transportation problems for those with a keen interest in the game.

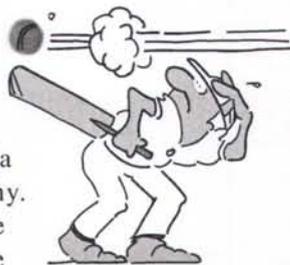
Canada's cricket history has been impacted significantly by immigration, both from early armed force migrants to people from Britain, the Caribbean and Asia. And largely due to immigration, there are over 5,000 players on more than 100 teams in three official leagues in Toronto. This does not account for the many other players who do not belong to a league.

In August 2003, 16 non-affiliated teams played in a tapeball tournament on rented parking lots in Toronto. (A tapeball is a tennis ball wrapped with duct tape.) There

are currently 200 teams in Toronto playing tapeball. Many rent baseball diamonds and play under the lights.

In Mississauga, because of demand, cricket has become entrenched as a school sport. British Columbia boasts more than 60 teams plus a premier league in five divisions; high school cricket is played on the lower mainland. The Manitoba Cricket Association has successfully introduced the game to 14 junior high and senior high schools. There is a Saturday league run for the schools and week-long summer camps for juniors aged 7-19 years.

Canada has qualified a team for the Under 19 World Cup in Bangladesh in 2004. Canada's national team, which played in the World Cup last spring (and rekindled interest in the game), is comprised of nine members whose birthplace is from nine different countries



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of the old British Empire. Once again, immigration is playing a part in those selected (note: there are only 11 members on a team).

To end, we've delved into Canada's cricket history and reported that the game is alive and well across this vast country. As sports turf managers, some day you may be asked to provide space for the game. All that is required is a level grassed area between 500-550 feet.

Finally, if you hear it said "that isn't cricket," you'll know it refers to unfair or unsportsmanlike behaviour – and it may be wise to watch your back! ♦

Research for this article was done on www.canadacricket.com. James Christie of The Globe and Mail wrote an interesting article called *Cricket Rules* published on September, 13, 2003.

