

THE *Bluffer's*[®] GUIDE TO

CRICKET

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NEW EDITION

THE *Bluffer's*[®] GUIDE TO

CRICKET



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PRE-MATCH DRILL

It has been said that the English, not being by nature a religious people, invented cricket to give them some idea of Eternity. This is blatant bluffing, though it does indicate that cricket is not to be treated lightly or dismissed as merely a sport. The English did not invent cricket, but they acted as its wet nurse, nurtured it, and finally made it their own. This is because cricket needs endless patience, unthinking loyalty and a slavish mentality: not the sort of game you can see being enjoyed by the hordes of Genghis Khan, the Sioux, the Paris mob of 1789 or the Bolsheviks.

GM Trevelyan – famous historian and useful late-order bat – once suggested that, if the aristocracy of the Ancien Régime had spent more time playing cricket with their serfs, the French Revolution would never have taken place. The truth is that neither the French aristocracy nor their serfs could ever have wanted to play cricket; it is not their game.

Bored almost beyond endurance, the uninitiated spectators and even players of cricket will moan: ‘What’s the point of it?’ Bluffers know that there is no point to

cricket, any more than there is a point to tennis, ballet, rose gardens or *nouvelle cuisine*.

Cricket maintains its precarious existence because 'the show must go on.' It has to be demonstrated that people can:

- Bowl faster.
- Score more runs.
- Make more appearances for their county.
- Take longer to score a run than ever before.

This, you must maintain stoutly (cricketers do lots of things stoutly), provides proof of human progress.

Support for English cricket – the distinguished variety which is the main focus of this guide – fluctuates with the performance of the national team. During decades of defeat, first by the West Indians and then the Australians, and then everybody else, it was reduced to a hardcore of thermos-gripping fans scattered thinly across increasingly shabby county grounds. But then, as the England team did better, interest revived. Smart new stands went up, new technology was introduced and a shorter form of the game called Twenty20 began pulling in large crowds. Now, it seems, cricket is in danger of becoming sexy – and that's not a bluff.

Winning the Ashes in 2005, after 18 miserable, soul-searching years, was a vital turning point for England (more on the history of this venerable contest later). Fair-weather supporters suddenly appeared in droves, with politicians and other inveterate bluffers suggesting that

they'd been lifelong fans all along. A few even hinted that, in their time, they'd been more than useful players themselves. When it was reported that, during an extended post-victory bender, Ashes hero Andrew 'Freddie' Flintoff had relieved himself in the prime minister's rose garden, even some of the stuffiest cricket followers found it easy to smile indulgently.

To listeners of the BBC's *Test Match Special*, another boundary was crossed in 2009 when sassy young pop star Lily Allen (now known as Lily Rose Cooper) told presenter Jonathan Agnew (Aggers) that she'd taken a fancy to the game and to fast bowler Graham Onions in particular.

Lily also showed an unexpected depth of cricket knowledge when she revealed that she preferred Tests to Twenty20 and old-fashioned cream flannels to the dazzling whites worn by the England team (who, despite this fashion blunder, managed to beat the Australians again that same summer). England and Lily (then tweeting about cricket to a million-plus followers) were on a roll.

In a second commentary box chat two years later, the same fragrant singer told Aggers how she was on the list to join the MCC (Marylebone Cricket Club – waiting time for membership about 18 years) and how, more pressingly, she was about to make tea for husband Sam's village team in Gloucestershire. For some reason she clearly didn't foresee much of a future as Mrs Onions.

By 2011, when England topped the world rankings, having thrashed the Aussies in their own backyard, an ignorance of cricket had become a social handicap,

carrying with it risk of exclusion from pub, party and office chat. To the rescue comes a new, updated, equally authoritative *Bluffer's Guide*.

Cricket bluffing ranges from hinting that you know more than you do, which is the general idea, to extravagant claims of a dazzling cricketing past, which is somewhat riskier. An extreme bluffer may even take the dangerous step of accepting an invitation to play. This is not recommended.

Before you start bluffing, a word of warning. Size up your victim. Try to sound out how much, if anything, they know. Take particular care at a cricket ground. If they are wearing a lurid 'egg-and-bacon'-coloured blazer – the preferred uniform of members of the MCC, which effectively runs the game – or walk with pigeon feet (sign of a pace bowler), proceed with caution. If they are carrying a copy of the cricket annual *Wisden* or, worse still, a scorebook, run a mile.

This short but definitive guide will conduct you through the main danger zones often encountered in discussions about cricket. It will equip you with a vocabulary, easy-to-learn hints and evasive technique that will minimise the risk of being rumbled as a bluffer – and might even allow you to be accepted as a cricketing connoisseur of rare ability and experience. But it will do more. It will give you the tools to impress legions of marvelling listeners with your knowledge and insight – without anyone discovering that, until you read it, you didn't actually know the difference between bowling a maiden over and bagging a pair.

PLAY!

Tiresome though it might seem, only a fool will start bluffing without a basic knowledge of how to play the game. Don't worry too much about the finer points; some professionals have only a slender grasp. Instead, top up any memories of childhood cricket with doses of the televised stuff and you'll soon be halfway there. The TV coverage will probably take you back to the playground anyway as much of it is dominated by overgrown schoolboys with nicknames like Beefy and Bumble. But despite the larking about, these chaps know their cricket. You may remember that Sir Ian 'Beefy' Botham had one or two useful games for England, while Bumble (David Lloyd) was not only a top-class batsman but a coach and umpire, too. You will need to be familiar with these names (and nicknames) if you are to withstand close scrutiny in the company of genuine cricket aficionados.

The rudiments of cricket are the same whether played by keen amateurs on a village green or seasoned professionals in a packed stadium. Two sides of 11 players 'bat' or 'field'. The batsmen (or 'batters' if you prefer to be non-gender-

specific) try to make as many runs as possible while the bowlers and fielders try to get them out for as few runs as possible. Getting a batsman out is known as a 'wicket'.

Cricket is all about scoring runs and taking wickets (and statistics, of which more later). In most matches, the side that scores the greater number of runs wins. Perhaps the simplest way to explain the game is to describe what happens from the beginning:

1. A field is mown. A 'square' in the middle is mown even shorter. A 'pitch' on the square is mown shortest of all, so that there isn't any grass left.
2. Two white 'creases' are painted at each end of the pitch. They mark the areas from which a bowler may safely bowl and in which a batsman may safely stand.
3. Three sticks, called 'stumps', are tapped into the ground at each end of the pitch.
4. Two people wearing white coats enter the cricket field. They are not psychiatrists, but perhaps they should be. They place little bridging pieces of wood, called 'bails', on both sets of stumps. They are known as 'umpires'.
5. The umpires spend a lot of time inspecting the match cricket ball and looking at the glowering sky.

(All this activity, and the game hasn't even started yet.)

6. The fielding side come out of the pavilion, exuding confidence and barely contained pent-up aggression.

Play!

The captain leads, followed by minor members of the aristocracy, ordained ministers, visiting politicians and, last of all, sweaty but honest professionals.

7. Two batsmen emerge, pale but proud. The ‘non-striker’ stands by the bowler’s wicket. The ‘striker’ stands by the other wicket.
8. One umpire throws the ball to the bowler and shouts ‘Play!’.
9. It starts to rain. The bowler runs up and hurls the ball at the striker, or the wicket, or somewhere roughly in that direction.
10. After six such hurls (an ‘over’) the bowling switches to the other end and somebody else has a go.

From this point onwards, it is a matter of the batsmen getting as many runs as possible, and the bowlers and fielders getting them out.

A run is scored when one batsman swipes the ball with his bat, and the two batsmen ‘cross’ in the middle of the ‘pitch’ (also known as the ‘wicket’) and regain the safety of their crease (*see* next page for ‘Boundaries’). A team can win, lose or tie. When a game runs out of time, it’s called a ‘draw’. Other less knowledgeable observers might refer to this as a ‘waste of time’. They would be wrong, because a draw can be as gripping a spectacle as a match with a conclusive result. It is impossible to explain this to many non-English-speaking people (particularly Americans), but state it with confidence, because it is undeniably true. A draw snatched from the jaws

of defeat can sometimes be more satisfying than a win – even after five interminable days' play.

MAKING RUNS

Runs can either be scored by the batsman hitting the ball with his bat or by a method called 'extras'.

There are two ways that a batsman can score runs with the bat:

1. The batsman hits the ball out of the field of play (six runs without bouncing, four runs with). This is called a 'boundary' and spectators are expected to wake up and clap. The batsmen do not have to run, but generally meet in the middle of the wicket to 'punch' gloves and gloat about scoring without having to waste energy running up and down the wicket.
2. The batsman hits the ball far enough for both batsmen to change ends. This can be exciting, since each has to judge the safety of his or her position. It often leads to the following sort of verbal exchange:

Striker Yes!

Non-striker Wait!

Striker (*who will be credited with the run if they make it*) Come on!

Non-striker No!!

Striker (*now several strides down the wicket*) Run, you fool!

Play!

Non-striker (*damned if he or she is risking being out for another batsman's run*) Get back!

Striker (*damned if he or she is going back*) Come ON!!

Non-striker **** off!!

By now, both batsmen are at the same end of the pitch, looking at each other with barely disguised loathing. At the other end, the fielding side have removed the bails with the now-retained ball and are covering their mouths to stifle their sniggers. One of the batsmen is out. Which? Probably the non-striker, the more passive of the two, although the Laws of Cricket would say otherwise. Either way, one batsman has to make the supreme sacrifice and walk back to the pavilion like a white-flannelled Sydney Carton. Vast sympathy awaits.



Cricket is flooded with sympathy...
The more inept the performance,
the greater the sympathy.

Cricket is flooded with sympathy. Sympathy for being out; for having been given out when you weren't; for letting the ball pass between your feet and looking foolish; for bowling all afternoon and not taking a single wicket; for not getting a chance to bowl; for bowling a load of tripe and being hit all over the park; for scoring

no runs; for scoring 99 runs; for not getting a chance to bat; for dropping eight simple catches. The more inept the performance, the greater the sympathy.

The batting team can also be awarded runs by way of extras. These consist of:

Bye The batsman misses the ball; so does the wicketkeeper (the fielder immediately behind the stumps wearing huge padded gloves). Everyone looks foolish. The batsmen change ends.

Leg bye The ball, not in line with the wicket (otherwise leg before wicket or 'lbw'), hits the batsman's leg or body. It bounces far enough away for the batsmen to change ends.

No-ball The bowler oversteps the crease while delivering the ball. The umpire is supposed to shout 'N' ba!' and to stick an arm out sideways (trying not to decapitate the bowler) so the batsman knows he may take a mighty swing at the ball, since the only way you can be out off a no-ball is to be 'run out' (see Ways of Getting Out, below).

Wide The ball is bowled so wide of the wicket that a batsman could not be reasonably expected to hit it, even if he were nimble enough to get close.

WAYS OF GETTING OUT

There are many ways to get 'out':

Bowled The batsman hits or misses the ball, which travels on and knocks a bail off the stumps. Or the ball uproots the stumps from the ground, which amounts to

the same thing (except that it is much more humiliating for the batsman).

Caught The batsman hits the ball, which is grabbed by the fielder or bowler before it hits the ground.

Stumped The batsman misses the ball and has foolishly left 'safe' ground in his attempt to bludgeon it to the far corners of the ground. The wicketkeeper catches the ball. The batsman is still out of his crease. The wicketkeeper removes a bail by striking the stumps with the hand in which the ball is held.

Run-out The batsman hits or misses the ball and tries to run from one end of the pitch to the other, or leaves the crease and tries to get back. But before regaining safe ground, the fielder either throws the ball to the bowler or wicketkeeper (who do as in stumped) or throws the ball directly on to the wicket, knocking a bail off.

Hit wicket While trying to hit the ball, the batsman hits his own wicket. The *hara-kiri* of cricket.

Leg before wicket (lbw) Diabolically hard to understand, but involving the ball hitting the batsman's leg when it would otherwise have hit the wicket. This is not always the case, however. Rather like the offside rule in football, nobody is quite sure how it works.

There are three other ways to be 'out': **handled the ball**, **hit the ball twice** and **obstructed the field**. It should be clear from their titles what they entail, and that they

apply only to absolute bounders. Some bowlers believe that the best way to dismiss a batsman is by crippling him (see 'The Bodyline Tour', page 27). Since there must be two batsmen available at any time, a complete side of 11 is dismissed when 10 wickets have fallen or 10 batsmen have been crippled.

APPEALS

Sometimes it is obvious when a batsman is dismissed. The stumps may be spreadeagled as previously described or the ball clearly caught. Also, the batsman's upper lip stiffens while the lower one quivers. But often there is room for doubt. It is here that the 'appeal' comes into play. In theory, one from the fielding side has to enquire politely, 'How was that?', and the umpire has to respond either by indicating that the batsman is out or by saying that he isn't.

In practice, the bowler and as many fielders as are still awake scream a monosyllabic 'Zzhhaarrrt!', and the umpire either indicates 'out' or snorts contemptuously. It is not unknown for modern cricketers to disagree with the umpire and display a degree of anguish if their appeal is disallowed. This display may take the form of spitting, punching the ground, twisting the features of the face into an ugly pattern or, apparently, mouthing the words 'flipping heck!'.

FIELDING POSITIONS

Never call anyone a 'backstop'. There is no such position in cricket, and it shows you to be a complete duffer, not

bluffer, fit only for softball or rounders. There is, however, a 'longstop' but this position is only occupied when the fielding side has an appallingly bad wicketkeeper. Since it is considered a disgrace to need a longstop, put someone in the longstop position only when strictly necessary but call them 'very fine leg'.

Sadly, there are not enough fielders to go everywhere the ball is most likely to be hit, so the captain, in consultation with the bowler and the team's nosy parker, decides which nine gaps he will attempt to plug. At the beginning of an innings, when one side goes 'in' and when the bowler has a bright, shiny, hard new ball and the batsmen are unsure and haven't 'got their eyes in', the captain will set what is called an 'attacking' field. This means that most of the fielders are behind the batsman, looking menacingly at the bowler.

Once the shine has gone from the ball and the batsmen are well set and the bowlers tired, the captain will set a 'defensive' field. This means that all the fielders are behind the bowler, looking menacingly at the batsman.

You can generally put your fielders where you like, but there are some rules and restrictions. Fast bowlers like to put all their fielders near the batsman. This is because fast bowlers rely on brute strength and do not expect a batsman to do more than defend. Slow bowlers like to put all their fielders as far away from the batsman as possible. This is because slow bowlers rely on guile and cunning and expect that the batsman will thrash his/her bowling all over the place. There is probably a deep truth about the human condition here. There are deep truths about the

human condition throughout cricket.

Bluffers should be wary of cricketing clichés such as ‘Cricket is a funny old game’ or ‘It’s fielders who win matches’. In school or club cricket, the latter is meant to stiffen the



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resolve of those who are rotten batsmen or bowlers and who are only in the team to make up the numbers. But at county or international level it approaches the truth. One dropped catch can cost a match; one brilliant ‘run out’ may save a match. Some of the greatest sights in cricket are those of really good fielders racing across the grass, swooping to pick up the ball on the run, then throwing it to the wicketkeeper with the speed and accuracy of a well-aimed bullet. It only looks awful if it goes wrong.

In the old days, fielding was regarded as a chore. Batting and bowling were what mattered. You didn’t get your name in the paper for running after a ball that someone else had hit off someone else’s bowling. ‘Lithe’, ‘supple’ and ‘lissom’ were not words generally applied to WG Grace, Alfred Mynn or ‘Lumpy’ Stevens. Only 50 years ago, it was regular practice to stick out a large

Play!

boot to stop the ball and only the eccentric or show-offs would dive, even for a catch. Nowadays, fielders are expected to throw themselves upwards, downwards and sideways, even if it means permanent physical damage. A lot of cricket coaching focuses on overriding natural self-preservation instincts.