

Twenty20:

IS IT THE RIGHT VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF CRICKET?

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Introduction

February 17, 2005 was a significant day for cricket with the first international 'Twenty20' match being played. A crowd of 29,000 watched the match between New Zealand and Australia, with each side facing only 20 overs each and the game usually being completed within three hours. It followed the huge success the format had in English County Cricket, after market research indicated the public wanted a shortened version of the game that could be attended in an evening after work. After sell out crowds of 15-20,000 people began attending these county games, the question arose as to whether the new form of the game would become an accepted way to play cricket in the new millennium. However, the playing of Twenty20 cricket raises several contract issues, including the potential extra load on players. On the other hand, Twenty20 cricket might also prove to have a significant impact on cricket revenue, an important consideration given Cricket Australia's recent contractual dispute with the players over the percentage of revenue that should be allocated to player wages.

This paper will examine the future of cricket in general in its commercial and contractual context, while a comparison of this new format will be made with the other forms of the game in the context of the history of the game.

A Brief History of Cricket

Like many sports, cricket was not invented, but evolved from rather obscure origins involving a variety of different sources. It is related to an early Scottish sport known as 'cat and dog' and is also closely related to the Medieval 'stool ball', a game played at Easter, the traditional season of courtship in the

Middle Ages. Both men and women played, with the game involving one player throwing a ball at an upturned, three legged stool, which was defended with an outstretched hand by another player. Later, a second stool was added, leading to the two wickets.¹ There also exists a picture from the fourteenth century depicting a young boy with a club and ball being shown by his tutor a game which looks very much like cricket.²

The term 'stump' that is used in cricket meanwhile may reflect its early days being played in the forest, but whatever the origin of the name, the game involved the use of a stick what was aimed at by the player. By 1700 two upright stumps had taken the place of the original stick, with a third stump being added in 1755, across which a bail was added. This so called 'wicket' certainly indicates a connection with pastoral life as sheep-pens had an entrance that usually consisted of a small hurdle with two uprights and a moveable crossbar, the 'bail'. Indeed the word 'wicket' in Anglo-Saxon meant 'to yield, to offer a way through'. The linguistic root of the word 'cricket' is the Anglo-Saxon word 'cricce' meaning 'something which is not quite straight', a reflection on the fact that the early bats were simply broken off tree branches.³

The first preserved cricket score and the earliest code of laws, meanwhile, date back to 1744. Games began to be organised in the nineteenth century, with the English County Championships, for instance, first being held in 1864, with Surrey being crowned inaugural champions.⁴ From its origins in England it spread to other countries in the then British Empire, including Australia. While the game was played from the early days of the colony in places like Hyde Park, it was in the middle of the nineteenth century that the game began to be fully organised. In Sydney a land grant was given to the area behind Victoria Barracks with the wicket being laid in 1852 at what was then known as the Garrison Ground. The first recorded match took place there in 1854, with the New South Wales (NSW) team first using it for practice in 1860, four years after its first intercolonial game against Victoria in 1856. In 1875 the NSW Cricket Association took over the ground with it being known as the Association Ground until its present name, the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG), was adopted in 1894.⁵ In Melbourne, a former cow paddock was converted into the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), which was to become the venue for the first Test match between Australia and England in 1877.⁶ The Sheffield Shield Competition (now the Pura Cup) between the then colonies, and later states, of Australia, was first conducted in 1892–93.⁷

Modern Domestic Cricket

While the Pura Cup remains the leading domestic competition, it should be noted that it runs at an annual loss, but through cross-subsidisation these losses are accepted as they are covered by profits accruing through One Day Internationals and Test cricket.⁸ The Pura Cup is therefore seen as an essential

breeding ground for Test and One Day International players. Cricket Australia's James Sutherland has stated that winning the domestic competitions should be a secondary consideration for the state cricket competitions, with the main priority being this production of potential Australian players.⁹ Similarly, English County Cricket was changed from a three day format to a four day format because such matches were considered to provide a player with better grounding for Test cricket than the three days matches.

A one day format, meanwhile, was first used in the English County Cricket during the 1963 season with what was then known as the Gillette Cup which was a 60-over one day knockout competition. The John Player League was introduced in 1969, with 40-over matches being played on a Sunday. A 55-over Benson and Hedges Cup was introduced in 1972 with teams being divided into four groups with each team playing everyone in the group, the top two in each group then qualified for the knockout stage involving quarter finals, semi-finals and a final. One day cricket was adopted in England for financial reasons, as less and less people were able, or willing, to attend the longer form of the game. Other countries soon followed and in Australia a domestic one day competition known as the Gillette Cup started in 1969. Originally the Gillette Cup was a knockout competition, but it has now been extended to a league style format called the Ford Ranger Cup where all the teams play each other home and away, with the top two teams then playing off in a final.

International One Day Cricket

The first One Day International was played between Australia and England at the MCG during the 1970-71 English tour of Australia. Interestingly it was not played because of any perceived need to provide an extra means of revenue, but owes its existence to Melbourne's fickle weather. The scheduled Melbourne Test in that series was abandoned after several days of rain, so a one day match was hastily arranged for 5 January 1971 to try and provide at least some cricket. It was therefore totally coincidental that the venue for the first Test also became the venue for the first One Day International. A few international matches were scheduled on subsequent tours and it was then decided to stage a one day World Cup in England in 1975. The competition proved to be highly successful, culminating in a highly entertaining final at Lords between Australia, and the inaugural winners of the competition, the West Indies. Although the World Cup indicated that one day cricket could really work at international level, it was not until the advent of WSC that it became a major part of the international calendar.

WSC began after the Australian Cricket Board (ACB) refusal to grant its television rights to Kerry Packer's Channel Nine. As a result Packer began to sign up most of the world's top players, who were generally unhappy with the remuneration they were receiving, for a rebel competition called WSC. WSC

had its own Test matches, called 'Super Tests', but these did not prove to be very popular with spectators. One day matches however, particularly the first played under lights in Melbourne between Australia and the West Indies, proved far more popular. When a compromise was reached between Packer and the ACB after just two seasons of WSC, One Day Internationals, including many day/night matches, were incorporated into the programme and included rules regarding fielding restrictions that had been adopted by WSC.

While the popularity of one day cricket continued to grow in the two decades following WSC, in the last few years the perception has been that one day cricket is losing its entertainment appeal with the games becoming too 'pedestrian, predictable and monotonous', particularly in the 15-40 over period¹⁰ where the batting side routinely concentrates on collecting singles.¹¹ Statistics in some matches certainly back this statement up. For instance in the game between Australia and Pakistan in Perth on 30 January 2005, Pakistan scored 34 consecutive singles during this 16-40 over period. The following week in the Second Final of the VB Series between the same sides Australia scored nine fours and one six in the first fifteen overs, and only two fours and no sixes in the middle 25 overs, though it should be kept in mind that Australia did lose four wickets in that period which partly contributed to the reduced number of boundaries (see innings two in Table One). A similar result arose in the first one day match between Australia and New Zealand in Wellington with Australia scoring seven fours in the first fifteen overs and only three in the next 25, though once again the loss of five wickets during this period was significant (see innings four in Table One).

Table One: Boundary (fours/sixes) scoring patterns in a sample of one day matches, 2004–05

Periods	<15 overs	16–40 overs	41–50 overs
Innings 1	12/0*	9/0	5/1
Innings 2	9/1	2/0	4/1
Innings 3	4/0	7/1	4/0
Innings 4	7/0	3/0	2/2
TOTAL	35/1	33/1	15/4

Even though Table One is based on small data base, it does suggest that more fours tended to be hit in the first fifteen overs of an innings than in the next 25 overs. In the sample, 50 per cent more fours were scored in the first fifteen overs and in the last ten overs than in the middle 25 over period, while five times as many sixes were hit in the first fifteen and last ten than in the middle 25. It is also worth noting that in the first Twenty20 International both Australia and New Zealand hit sixteen fours, while Australia hit twelve sixes

and New Zealand six. Admittedly the small Eden Park Ground played a part in these figures, but it is interesting to compare these figures with the third One Day International at the same ground where Australia hit 26 fours and one six, New Zealand sixteen fours and no sixes in 50 overs.

Information was also gathered in relation to the number of runs scored in three periods of the game: the first fifteen overs, the middle 25 overs and the last ten overs. Table Two summarises the totals in these three periods for a sample of One Day Internationals during the 2004–05 season:

Table Two: Run scoring patterns in a sample of one day matches, 2004–05

Periods	<15 Overs	16–40 Overs	41–50 Overs
1	75	147	122
2	81	115	69
3	63	144	55
4	54	134	50
5	83	88	68
6	52	130	Incomplete [†]
7	74	87	77
8	43	111	66 [*]
9	81	102	81
TOTAL	554	928	588

† This innings finished in the 41st over and has not been included in the overall total but has been included to show an example of innings that was slow in the first fifteen but had a good scoring rate in the next 25.

* This was a match winning second innings score reached in the 48th over and has been included in the overall total.

Table Three combines the runs scored in the first fifteen overs with those scored in the last ten and compares this with the runs scored in the middle 25 overs.

Table Three: Total run scoring patterns at the start and end, and middle period of a sample of one day matches, 2004–05

Periods	<15+41–50	16–40
TOTAL	1142	928
PERCENTAGE	55	45

The overall conclusion to be reached from this small sample is that there is an element of truth to the statement that the one day format was becoming predictable in the middle stages of the match, and that a larger percentage of runs are scored in the first fifteen and last ten overs than in the middle 25. From this representative sample this scoring ratio was 55:45. We also need to take into account the effect that a fall of wickets might have on scoring patterns. For example, in innings four, six and eight early wickets kept the run rate down in the first fifteen overs, with the batting team then increasing the scoring rate in the next 25 overs.

In reaction to the perception that one day cricket was becoming predictable in the middle stages of an innings, the International Cricket Council (ICC) introduced innovations to try to solve this problem. One was the reduction of the mandatory period of field restrictions from fifteen to ten overs, with two five over power plays in which fielding restrictions would also be in place. The timing of these power plays is decided by the fielding team, with them usually being taken immediately after the first ten overs. The effect of the new rule is to increase the fielding restrictions from fifteen overs to 20 overs, this increasing the more entertaining fifteen over period, and reducing the number of overs in the more mundane 15-40 over period.

Despite the recent criticisms of one day cricket, it is worth noting that in 2007 the four highest successful run chases in the history of One Day Internationals were made, with Australia on the losing side in each of the four occasions. Firstly, New Zealand set the record at 332 during the Chappell-Hadlee Trophy match in Christchurch, a record that was subsequently smashed a few months later by South Africa when they reached Australia's then world record score of 434. During the so-called boring 15-40 over period, South Africa's run rate peaked at over nine runs an over. During the 2007 Chappell-Hadlee Trophy series New Zealand achieved scores of 336 in Auckland and 346 in Hamilton. Thus the solution to the perceived problems with one day cricket probably may lie not with any innovative rule changes, but with an increased ability of the players to sustain a high run rate for a long period of time. Run rates achieved by Australia, New Zealand and South Africa in the above mentioned games simply removed the perceived dull period in the one day format.

These matches indicate that high scoring may well remove the perception that one day cricket had become pedestrian, and cricket writer Malcolm Conn has suggested that the scores achieved in the South Africa and Australia game are likely to become more common in years to come. The author's observation of One Day Internationals during 2006–07 is that the power plays are providing more variety to one day cricket. The West Indies, for example, often use opener Chris Gayle to launch an early onslaught that can then force the opposing captain into not using the power plays immediately after the first ten

overs. During the 2007 Commonwealth Bank series in Australia, New Zealand captain, Stephen Fleming, did not use the two power plays in the first 20 overs on a number of occasions because of what was taking place in the course of the match. In Sydney, the relatively low score of 209 set by New Zealand meant that they needed to keep the pressure on Australia early in the innings, which they achieved by not using the second power play between overs 16 and 20. The tactic was a success, given the state of the match, even though New Zealand eventually lost by two wickets. Later in Perth, the fast early scoring by Australia saw Fleming keep back the second power play until after the thirtieth over, hoping that Australia would have lost a few wickets by that stage. Although the tactic failed in the sense that Australia scored heavily in that period, the spectators did experience a different tactic in the game.

Overall, while there are statistics to back up the perception that there is a predictable nature to one day cricket, there are also indications that the new power plays and the ability of teams to score higher scores are having an impact on the predictable middle stages of the game, and therefore on the entertainment value of One Day Internationals. Despite its abbreviated format, one day cricket is still, by the standards of other sports, a long game and market research from England showed that spectators wanted an even briefer game.

Twenty20

As the name suggests, each side has 20 overs each in which to bat with restrictions being placed on the fielding side similar to one day cricket for the first six overs. A batsman is allowed only 90 seconds to get to the crease, which is why the batting side places itself in seats on the boundary rather than in the dressing rooms. While this is done primarily to save time, it also has the added marketing aspect of bringing the players into closer contact with the crowd.

In light of the success of the Twenty20 format in England, the governing body of Australian cricket, Cricket Australia (formerly the ACB), scheduled a Twenty20 competition between the state teams in January 2006. The games attracted very good crowds, often exceeding 10,000. The following year, in excess of 28,000 attended the Queensland v New South Wales match at the Brisbane Cricket Ground. For the 2006–07 competition New South Wales also included rugby league player, Andrew Johns in its side as a ‘marketing’ exercise and scheduled a match in Newcastle, Johns’s home town. While Australian player, Andrew Symonds, has supported such a ploy, stating that the playing of celebrities in such games has its place, Johns’s selection does indicate that the players do not take the format as seriously as the other two forms of the game. Cricket writer Mike Coward has stated that such a selection is ‘an insult to the intelligence of cricket folk’, and ‘those who have had the honour of playing cricket for their state’.¹²

The first international Twenty20 match in Australia was played against South Africa on 8 January 2006, before a sell out crowd of 38,000 at the Brisbane Cricket Ground. The players wore nicknames on the backs of their shirts and music accompanied them as they came out to bat. This all added to the sense that it was 'theatre' put on for entertainment. There was also some great cricket played, particularly the batting by Australia, and cricket writer Andrew Ramsay stated afterwards that he had 'seen the future of cricket.'¹³

What was also significant was the large national television audience of 2.5 million,¹⁴ which led to calls from cricket broadcaster Channel Nine to organise another later in the season when rival Channel Seven was televising the Australian Open tennis. Although this request was denied, the network is interested in increasing the number of Twenty20 Internationals in the coming seasons.¹⁵ In the 2006–07 season a Twenty20 International was played between Australia and England before a capacity crowd at the SCG. Again the use of nicknames and music helped create a sense of theatre, with some players also wearing microphones to provide interaction with the television audience. There was some good cricket, with plenty of fours and sixes and an overall rate of eleven runs an over. Even though England lost early wickets in the run chase, the match remained competitive and half way through its innings England still had a reasonable chance of winning. An appealing feature of Twenty20 matches is that even with a large first innings score, like Australia's 221 in Sydney, the other team still has a reasonable chance of winning. The condensed nature of Twenty20 is likely to provide a greater proportion of competitive matches — being defined as those in which both teams have a reasonable chance of winning at the three quarter stage of the match — than in One Day Internationals and Test matches. While a competitive match is not the only reason why a game can be entertaining, it is certainly a significant factor.

The Future of Cricket

The question now is whether Twenty20 cricket is just a passing fad, or whether the format is the future of cricket in a society that is becoming increasingly time poor. Opinions from past and present players vary as to Twenty20's merits. Former Australian players Terry Jenner, Kerry O'Keefe and Doug Walters have spoken out against the format, with Jenner stating it will harm the development of spinners.¹⁶ O'Keefe and Walters see it as gimmicky and suggest that the solution to the perceived problems with the one day format is to reduce it from 50 overs to 40.¹⁷ Present-day Australian wicketkeeper, Adam Gilchrist, likewise describes the new format as monotonous,¹⁸ while former New Zealand player, Lance Cairns, states that the game offers little more than novelty value.¹⁹ However, former Australian captain, Greg Chappell, feels there is room for both 50 over games and Twenty20 matches while West Indian great, Viv Richards, does not denounce the new format, but at

the same time expresses the view that it should not take over from the 50 over format which he considers to be the true test of the players' ability in the limited form of the game. Andrew Symonds considers the game to be 'just a bit of fun' for the players, between both themselves and the crowd.²⁰ Current Australian captain, Ricky Ponting, and vice-captain Gilchrist have both raised concerns about the potential problems with an uncontrolled growth of the Twenty20 format.²¹ Gilchrist has also stated that increasingly workload being placed on the world's top players will see players pick and choose the matches that they play in, with spectators then being deprived of the drawcard players.²² The 2007 Chappell-Hadlee Series in New Zealand was a recent example of players, such as Gilchrist, choosing not to participate and therefore affecting the status of the series.²³

Nevertheless, a Twenty20 World Cup was announced by the ICC and the tournament took place in South Africa in 2007. This indicates that the format may well form an increasing part of the international scene in the near future. While this 2007 competition was optional the 2009 competition, to be held in England, will be mandatory for ICC member countries.²⁴ The question of the workload for the players is one that looks set to increase in the future, which then raises contractual related issues relating to how many games players should be playing, and also impacts on the ongoing issue in Australian cricket regarding how much money should be allocated to player wages.

In 2006 Cricket Australia sought to reduce the amount of money it paid to players. This would have involved reducing the number of contracted players from 25 to 20 as part of a move to reduce the overall money paid to players from 25 per cent of cricket's overall income to just 20 per cent. The reason behind this was that market research had shown that interest in cricket has not expanded beyond its traditional Anglo-Celtic background, with people of more recent migrant groups to arrive in Australia not showing a great interest in the game. In Australia's highly competitive professional sports market this was a major concern for Cricket Australia, which wanted to save on its player wages bill in order to release funds for the development and promotion of the game. Cricket Australia believed that there were too many players earning \$200,000 a year, while playing all their cricket in domestic competitions in front of very small crowds. This move by Cricket Australia was, understandably, not supported by the players, but despite such views, the board of Cricket Australia voted to push ahead with this plan. However, pressure from sponsors as well as the players saw the wages fund remain at 25 per cent of revenue and the number of contracted players remain at 25.²⁵ The reason that pressure came from sponsors was that they wanted the matter finalised before a memorandum of understanding with the players expired on 30 June. At that time 75 per cent of the first class players in Australia would have been out of contract, leaving the majority of Australia's cricketers free to sign sponsorship

deals with the rivals of Cricket Australia's major sponsors.²⁶ This could have created the same situation in Australia as that which happened in the West Indies where senior players had been left out of the team at various times because of similar contract conflicts involving rival sponsors.²⁷

What was suggested is that if Twenty20 becomes successful at state level and attracted regular crowds of 15–20,000, this would provide an increase in revenue that would allow Cricket Australia to promote and develop the game, while continuing to pay players 25 per cent of total revenue. Cricket Australia's ability to increase revenue through international matches is more problematic. Scheduling is the major issue. At present Australian cricketers may play as many as 30 one day matches and fifteen Tests in a calendar year, but as the Australian Cricketers' Association points out, around 75 per cent of these are played in a three month period, and the inclusion of Twenty20 matches will only add to the already tight scheduling.²⁸ It is therefore likely that the players will not consent to more international games, meaning that the introduction of Twenty20 matches will have to come at the expense of other matches, most likely One Day Internationals.

This could mean that in the future Australia may find itself playing approximately fifteen tests, fifteen One Day Internationals and fifteen Twenty20 matches in a given year. On a tour like the 2005 one to New Zealand, for example, instead of playing one Twenty20 match and five One Day Internationals, the schedule may well involve three Twenty20s and three One Day Internationals. The reason why replacing one day matches with Twenty20 matches may not raise the level of revenue for Cricket Australia is that most of the One Day Internationals played in Australia in 2004–5 were either sell-outs or close to it. Therefore the shifting of some of the One Day Internationals to Twenty20 game will not necessarily result in more people coming through the gates. However, as the first Twenty20 International in Australia illustrated, television ratings may be another matter, and it is possible that the inclusion of more such matches could increase the revenue Cricket Australia obtains from television rights. While more Twenty20 matches may obtain greater ratings, the three hours with less time for advertisements within the game, may mean that the income earned by television may actually be less than for a One Day International. At present, television's interest in the format appears to be on the basis of them being in addition to One Day Internationals, while the demands on the players indicates that they are more likely to be in place of One Day Internationals. Coward questions how many sponsors will be lost if Twenty20 became the main limited over format of the game, as well as suggesting that television revenue may well be lost, rather than gained.²⁹

If cricket is to embrace a third format at international level, what should also be considered is the impact that one form of the game can have on another. For instance, while the 2005 Ashes series was unquestionably a great

Test match series, one reason for its entertainment value was the high scoring rate. Throughout 2005, Australia maintained an average of four runs per over, a far cry from the two and half runs an over that has been the traditional scoring rate in Test cricket. The main influence on this increased run rate has been the large amount of one day cricket that modern players are involved in, and an increased ability to score quickly that stemmed from this. Test cricket would possibly not survive in the modern sports entertainment market if the traditional rate of scoring was the normal rate for present day Test matches. One day cricket, therefore, rather than being the killer of Test cricket, has arguably been its saviour. Present day players like Ponting, Gilchrist and Matthew Hayden have meanwhile stated that scores of 400 and, maybe even 500, may become standard in one day cricket as Twenty20 cricket begins to give batsmen the confidence and skills to score more quickly in the 50 over game. Twenty20, therefore, may provide an indirect cure to the perceived pedestrian middle stages of a one day match.

Conclusion

Cricket has been a major sport in Australia since early colonial days. There is no doubt that cricket today does not automatically have the strong position on the Australian sporting calendar that it once had, and now faces stiff opposition from other sports for players, spectators and sponsorship. A major issue affecting the future of cricket is whether Twenty20 is just a fad, or will become a permanent part of both the domestic and international calendar. While it is likely that the format might become part of the international calendar, it might not necessarily increase revenue to any great degree, and there are significant player workload issues that will arise if it becomes a permanent component of international cricket. However, no such player workload issues exist in relation to domestic cricket, and Twenty20 may have a significant impact on the amount of revenue that can be raised at that level. This might then help to solve one of Cricket Australia's perceived problems — creating more income from the presently loss-making domestic season and providing a means of retaining the present payments to the players, while still provide Cricket Australia with sufficient money for the future development of the game. The new format itself might well perform a promotional role by attracting new spectators who so far have not been attracted by cricket's existing two forms of the game.

There is little doubt that Twenty20 is still riding a wave of novelty, and its shortcomings might become more apparent in the years to come. However, it would also appear that there is genuine appeal in a three-hour cricket match. Twenty20 might therefore present cricket with a further opportunity to provide entertainment that better fits into the timeframe of spectators, and potentially provide another means by which cricket can compete against other sports in the Australian sporting calendar.

NOTES

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