

5 Reasons why Americans will Love Cricket (if given the chance)

I am a born and bred baseball fan. I grew up with the Phillies, then had season tickets with the Orioles when I moved to Baltimore. Now I follow the Diamondbacks and Rockies. But I travel a lot for work and got interested in cricket from long evenings watching TV in hotel rooms in the UK and Australia.

It didn't take much time to learn the basics (friends and Wikipedia helped), and I learned to love the game. I think America is missing out on one of the best, not to mention fastest growing, sports in the world. And it doesn't have to be that way. Here are five reasons why the new faster paced version of cricket will appeal to Americans.

1. Cricket is not the game it used to be. Sure they still play 5 day matches with breaks for lunch. But there is a new version of Cricket that lasts about as long as a baseball game and has plenty of action. In 20/20 Cricket, each side gets 120 pitches and whoever scores the most runs wins. The skills required are every bit as tough as baseball.
2. There are lots of runs. A typical baseball game score might be 5 to 3 after 2 to 3 hours. In 20/20 cricket the score could be 180 to 150 in the same amount of time. Most Americans don't watch soccer because of the low scoring games. This is the exact opposite.
3. Pitching a cricket ball overhand is fast and complicated. In cricket, pitching is confusingly called "bowling." Fast bowlers can throw the ball over 90 miles per hour. And Spin bowlers can make the ball move just like a curve ball.
4. Hitting a cricket ball is a lot harder than you think. It bounces once before the batter hits it and the ball can spin away from or toward the batter. The field is a big oval with no foul territory and no such thing as a foul ball or a strikeout. You keep batting until the other side gets you out, one of three ways: they catch a fly ball, you get caught "off base" or the pitched ball hits one of the three vertical sticks (the "wicket") behind the batter. Some batters hit 100 runs in a single at bat, called a century, and very difficult to do.
5. Catching a cricket ball is tough too. The cricket ball is as hard and heavy as a major league baseball, but only one player (the equivalent of the catcher) gets to wear a glove. Catching a line drive with bare hands is enough to cut up a player's hand. Fly balls must also be caught without a glove. And diving dramatic catches are not uncommon.

Americans will have to get over some strange, sometimes funny sounding, names for things, like "midoff" instead of "shortstop," and new equipment, like the flat cricket bat instead of the round baseball bat. But the game is fun to watch. There is an easy way to follow the play and more complex strategy underneath for those who are interested. There is a playing history that goes back hundreds of years, with their own version of superstars like Babe Ruth. Cricket will never replace baseball and it never should. But this is a sport that many Americans could learn to love if given the chance.

You can see Cricket played on some pay per view satellite TV stations. But a mainstream sports channel should give 20/20 cricket a try. If we can watch Australian rules football late a night, why not cricket?

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