

Unsticking the "Sticky Wicket" - A Very Concise Guide to the Game of Cricket

By Tom Culp

Describing cricket on one page is like trying to write the meaning of life on the head of a pin. In a somewhat related thought, as I believe Prince Phillip once said, "Life is only a game; it's not as if it were cricket." Cricket is a game where two teams of eleven players compete. One kind of match takes about 4-5 hours. Other kinds of matches ("tests") can go on for days. Each team bats once. There is often a "tea break" between the two teams batting. Each batsman bats only once until he is out. Two batsmen are on the field at once. Running on a batted ball is optional. Runs are scored when the batsmen cross as they run or when the ball is hit over the boundary. There is no "foul territory". Fielders try to get the batsmen out. The two most common (of 11 kinds) of outs are "caught out" and "bowled out" (bowler hits the wicket). The winner is the team at the end with the most runs. That's it. Now here are some of the details:

Objective: To score at least one more run than the opposing team. To have fun!

Field: Oval-shaped as indicated by the boundary line. No regulation size. All in play.

Equipment: Cricket bat—Typically willow wood, 4 1/2 " wide and about 38" long. Cricket ball—About the same size as a baseball; harder though; red leather over wound string and cork. Gloves—Only the wicketkeeper (like catcher) wears these. The Wicket—Three stumps (poles) and two bails (short pieces of wood that lie on top of the stumps) comprise a wicket. There are two wickets 66 feet apart, one at each end of the "pitch" (bowling area or sometimes called "wicket").

Players: Teams—Two teams of eleven players. Batsmen—Two batsmen (teammates) are always on the field, one at each wicket. One batsman gets six balls thrown to him. That is called an "over". Then the action switches to the other wicket. The second batsman gets his "over" and a different bowler. Batsmen keep batting until they're out. Bowler—The bowler throws overhand, stiff-armed. The ball usually bounces once, altering the speed, angle and spin. The ball can be thrown as fast as a baseball pitch. Fielders—Eleven fielders defend the oval. There are 20-30 possible positions (many with interesting names). The bowler or captain usually places the players. Many fielders also take turns as bowlers. Wicketkeeper—Functions like a catcher and squats behind the wicket and batsman.

Outs: There are 11 eleven ways to get a batsman out. The three most common are: Caught—A batted ball is caught before it bounces. Bowled—A bowled ball hits the wicket and knocks off the bail. Leg Before Wicket (LBW)—The batsman sticks out his leg, not the bat, to defend the wicket. Games are played until there are ten outs per team or when an agreed upon number of "overs", such as 25 are reached.

Scoring: One run is scored when the batsmen run to the opposite wicket. Four runs are automatically scored when a ball is hit on the ground over the boundary line or six runs when it goes over in the air (a "six"). An "extra" is a score other than by a hit ball (like a wild pitch). A "wide" (the ball is too far or high to be hit) or a "bye" (the wicketkeeper doesn't get the ball) are "extras".

"Sticky Wicket": After rain, the ground (the "wicket") becomes soft ("sticky") and the ball bounces more erratically, making it more difficult for the batsman. To be on one, figuratively speaking, is to experience great difficulty. Now you know.