History

Cricket was first recorded in 16th-century England, and it was played in grammar schools, farm communities and everywhere in between. But things really took off when 18th-century nobles realised that not only was it a great sport but also an excellent opportunity for betting.

With sky-high stakes being wagered, it was felt necessary to come up with agreed rules. The oldest surviving set of cricket laws date from 1744 – printed on a handkerchief, naturally. It's now in the MCC Museum at Lord’s in London.

The first international match was in 1877 when Australia beat England in Melbourne. The match was dubbed a “Test”, since the gruelling nature of playing over five days was deemed the ultimate “test” for any side.

But it was Australia’s first win on English soil – in 1882 at The Oval in London – that led to matches between the two nations being christened the Ashes. Following the defeat, newspapers published an obituary mourning “the death of English cricket”, adding that “the body will be cremated and the ashes taken to Australia”.

Great players

Cricket’s earliest star was WG Grace, who played 44 seasons from 1865 to 1908. Despite the game’s reputation for fairness, Grace was as famous for his gamesmanship as his batting. He once ran three, then when the ball was flung in from the outfield, caught it, put it in his pocket and ran three more.

The top batsman in history is India’s Sachin Tendulkar, who retired in 2013 after scoring 15,921 runs in 200 Tests and 18,426 in 463 one-day internationals. He is the only player to have made 100 international centuries, was the first batsman to score a double century in a one-day International and is the only player to amass more than 30,000 international runs.

A special mention must go to West Indies' legend Sir Garfield (Gary) Sobers, who became the first batsman to hit six sixes in a single over off six consecutive balls in first-class cricket, playing for Nottinghamshire against Glamorgan in 1968.

Super stats

The fastest ball bowled was 161.3 km/h (100.23mph) by Shoaib Akhtar for Pakistan against England in a 2003 World Cup match in South Africa.

The longest Test innings by a batsman was 970 minutes – more than 16 hours – by Hanif Mohammad, when scoring 337 for Pakistan against the West Indies in 1958.

The highest individual Test score is West Indies batsman Brian Lara’s 400 not out against England in Antigua in 2004. Lara also made the highest first-class score of 501 not out for Warwickshire against Durham at Edgbaston in 1994.

Rules

There are two teams: The team bowling has 11 players on the field. The team batting has two players on the field.

The aim of Cricket is to score more 'Runs' than the other team. Runs are scored by batsmen running between the wickets after hitting the ball or by hitting the ball over the boundary.

The captain of the bowling team chooses a bowler from his team; the other 10 players are called fielders. The bowler aims the ball at a [wicket](https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wicket), made up of three sticks (called stumps) stuck into the earth, with two small sticks (called bails) balanced on them. One of the fielders, called the wicket keeper, stands behind the wicket to catch the ball if the bowler misses the wicket. The other fielders chase the ball after the batsman has hit it.

The bowler runs in and bowls towards the batsman. He does not throw the ball but bowls the ball overarm with a straight arm. He bowls six times – this is known as an ‘over’. Then another player becomes the bowler for the next over, and bowls from the other end, and so on.

The batsman is trying to defend the wicket from getting hit with the ball. He does this with a bat. When he hits the ball with his bat, he may run toward the other wicket. To score a run, the two batsmen must both run from their wicket to the other wicket. If the ball crosses the boundary without bouncing after being hit, six runs are scored. If the ball rolls or bounces over the boundary it counts as four runs.

There are different ways that a batsman can get out. The most common ways are:

·        The batsman misses the ball and the ball hits the wicket: called ‘bowled’.

·        The ball hits the batsman's leg when it would have hit the wicket. Called ‘LBW’ (leg before wicket).

·        A fielder catches the ball after the batsman hits it.

·        While the batsmen are running, a fielder can throw the ball at the wicket. If the ball hits the wicket before the batsmen gets there, the batsman is out: this is called ‘run out’.

When a batsman is out, another comes onto the field to take his place. The ‘innings’ is over when ten wickets are taken (i.e. ten of the eleven batsmen are out). After this, the team which was the bowling team becomes the 'batting' team. They now have to score more runs than the other team. If they score more runs before ten wickets are taken, they win. If they do not, the other team wins.

There are different lengths of time for which cricket can be played ranging from 20 overs – about 3 hours - to a Test match lasting 5 days.

