

Final Whistle

adapted from an article by Scyld Berry

- 1 If we all lived in France, I would have given my book a different title.

But, in Britain, "philosophy" is a bad or at least pretentious word, like "intellectual", even though it means seeking to understand. So I would have liked to call my book, *The Game of Life: a Philosophy of Cricket*. Or (more pretentiously?) *The Philosophy of Cricket*, as I do not know of a previous



attempt to answer the basic question: why do we play and watch this sport in England and its three other main hot-spots around the world?

- 2 In Australia, the answer is simple: playing cricket against the British regiments stationed in Sydney was the only form of revenge open to the native-born sons of convicts. In India, the Parsis of Bombay wanted to play cricket against British soldiers or civilians. Partly, the game was fun and partly it was jolly useful networking. And in the West Indies, the answer is simple, too. Cricket was the only way the black man was allowed to compete with the white man on any playing field, let alone a level one.

- 3 But perhaps the most interesting question is: why do almost all of England's 670 Test cricketers¹⁾ come from three main categories?

- 4 A third of them — 220 to be precise — attended fee-paying schools. Most have been batsmen, who have built long innings on decent pitches against challenging opposition, with a former county cricketer as coach and all the networking potential: e.g. Alastair Cook, one of the most prolific batsmen of the modern era, came to notice in a game between Bedford School and MCC, Marylebone Cricket Club.

- 5 Those who did not attend a fee-paying school, had someone close to them who showed them the ropes. Out of the 670, 154 had either a brother, father or uncle who also played for England, and another 110 had one who played first-class cricket. That means two out of every five England Test cricketers have grown up with someone to bat and bowl against, to coach them, to give or lend them kit and steer them towards the summit.

- 6 Or else you come from one of the three northerly counties where cricket is part of the community. Deduct the 81 England Test cricketers born outside England and Wales, which leaves 589, then one-third — or 190 to be precise — have been born in Yorkshire, Lancashire and Nottinghamshire.

7 Of course, there are overlaps: English international cricketer Joe Root was born in Yorkshire, has a brother who plays first-class cricket and attended a fee-paying school. But that still leaves whole sections of society in England either under-represented or not represented at all. None of those 670 Test cricketers was born in Wolverhampton. Only one was born in Hull and one in Newcastle, in the 19th century. Only two were born in Cardiff, then attended fee-paying schools in England.

8 6, there has never been a pathway to the top in some English cities. And the most important question: what is going to be done about it so that English cricket involves all sections of society?

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noot 1 Test cricket is the longest form of the sport of cricket and is considered its highest standard.