
Cricket at the Bloem

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I was traveling by train to Balapitiya- to attend the funeral of a batchmate's father. As the train whizzed past the coastal belt I noticed along the railway track just adjacent to it, some youngsters absorbed in the game of cricket- unruffled by the huge noise created by the trains passing by. My mind just stood still- thinking of how the game of cricket has become a part of our life.

Cricket is a passion in Sri Lanka- from the slum areas of the busy cities to the enchanting serenity of the villages - cricket has disseminated to every nook and corner of the paradise isle. The interest towards the game has increased since the World Cup win of 1996. Most people love to watch cricket - many like to play the game and even the busiest man in town loves to talk about cricket.

This article is based on my experience of playing and watching cricket at the Bloemfontein Mens' Hostel- Faculty of Medicine, Colombo-what a place to enjoy the thrills and spills of the game. The play area is a square situated between the 2nd (new) and the 3rd blocks. The bell to call play rings within our mental clocks at around 4.30 pm- just after lectures. The guys coming out of their rooms in shorts or track suits armed with the bat and ball, is a familiar sight at this time. As this coincides with teatime most of them go directly to the canteen, have a quick munch and get to the play area with their teacups.

Play starts after the guys are divided into two teams. Cricket says eleven per team. Our team numbers start from about 4-5 per team to sometimes 13-14 per team, the larger the team, more the fun. Each game is either a 3 over or 4 overs per side game, which means you start whacking from ball one. An average first innings score for a 4 over game is about 30, which is hard to defend because the opposition will also start fireworks from ball one.

The rules of the game have been modified according to the play area and the feasibility of shots being played. The rooms in the first floor of the 2nd and 3rd blocks are out of bounds, and if the ball goes there the batsman is out. The interesting fact though, is that a few feet below that (the wall of the balcony) is six runs. Therefore, the margin for error is minimal.

Straight down the ground you get the large wall that separates the Bloem from the Rockwood Residencies - a luxury apartment complex - and if you hit this wall you get 6 runs for it. Apart from that, running between wickets, run-outs, no balls and wides add spice to the game. Small arguments over wickets and the traditional bullying are part of the extra entertainment.

Fetching the ball eats up a lot of playtime. If the owners of rooms are present they usually throw down the ball. If not, we have to climb into the balcony using the ladder, the owner unaware, to get the ball. All for the sake of the game.

The main enemy of the Bloem cricketers is Tommy the medicine dog, who goes around the faculty and the Bloem. The problem is that Tommy has a delightful habit of digging holes in the middle of the pitch in order to sleep at night. So the next day we would have to close up the holes before starting. We have warned the dog that the next time he does so, he might end up in the CMC van for stray dogs.

Medicine is a course full of stress. Exams are so very important in a medical student's life. But even during exams cricket at the Bloem is seen as a way of relieving stress. The way we play may not be as elegant as you see it on TV, nevertheless the spirit and enthusiasm is practically the same. I am really proud to be part of a group of medical students who has tried to keep the game alive, even with a very busy schedule. Long Live Cricket!!!