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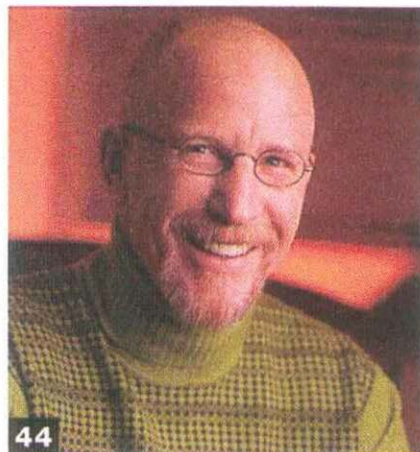
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# Sticky Wicket

The growth of this month's Philadelphia Cricket Festival parallels a local rise in the popularity of the world's biggest sport. Now, if those damned Yankees could only sort out the difference between a pitch and a pitch...

"Look at this," says Craig Joss, gesturing expansively. "This is one of the loveliest spring days, and you look out and see a red-colored ball on an emerald-green field and hear the polite applause from the audience. What a wonderful atmosphere."

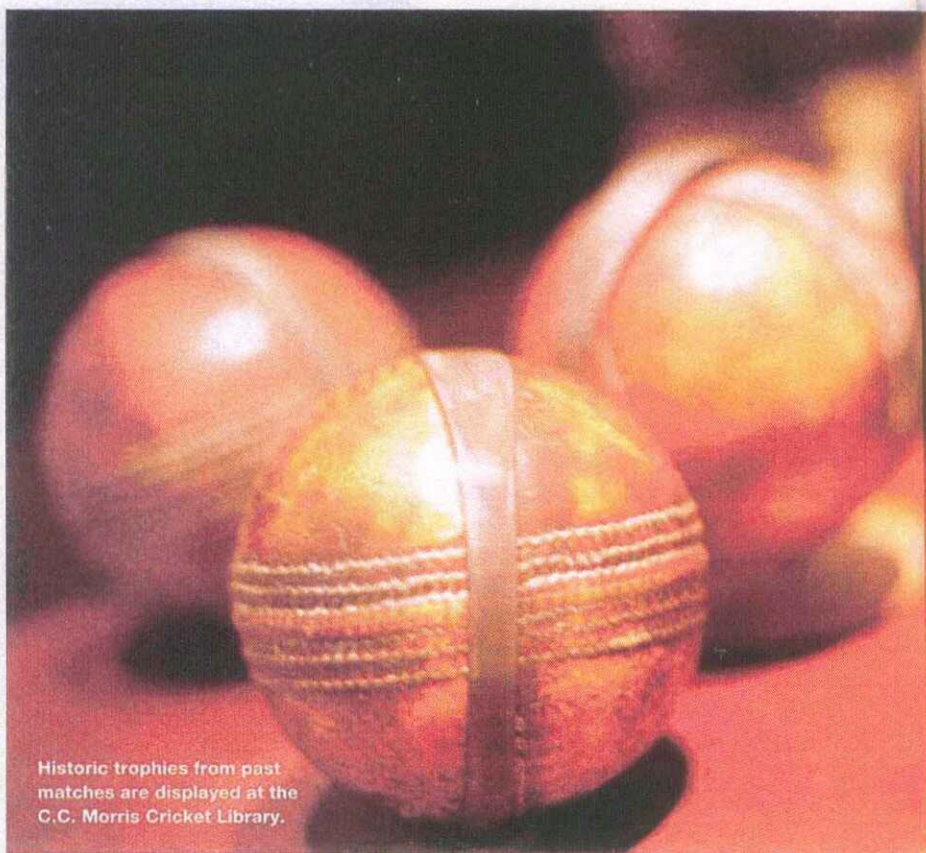
Joss, chairman of the Philadelphia International Cricket Festival, is describing the namesake game. It's a bit of a mystery to most of us Yanks, but local enthusiasts hope that won't be the case for long. Joss' festival is one of the world's preeminent cricket events, a 30-game marathon played at four area venues: the venerable Haverford College and the Merion, Germantown and Philadelphia cricket clubs.

Family brunch has ended at the Philadelphia club in Chestnut Hill, so a core of youngsters has just arrived for two youth exhibition games. Some of the children are dressed head-to-toe in cricket's traditional white. Because the spirit is casual rather than competitive, some are also in bare feet.

Yet this exhibition is far from a backyard Wiffle Ball game. There's a *carpe diem* sense this day; next week, these lawns will be converted for tennis, which, like golf, is a far more popular pursuit among the Philadelphia Cricket Club's faithful. Of the 1,200 members, only 30 are rostered for cricket.

But don't be fooled; the sport is quite popular on the Main Line, and its recent resurgence is riveted to the 13-year-old Philadelphia International Cricket Festival, which runs the first week of each May at Haverford College and on the grounds of the Merion, Germantown and Philadelphia cricket clubs.

As further proof of cricket's Main Line prominence and providence, England's Marylebone Cricket Club, which represents



Historic trophies from past matches are displayed at the C.C. Morris Cricket Library.

the organizing body of cricket in the Mother Country, sent a B touring side (team) on a U.S. tour that landed at Haverford College's Cope Field in September to test an all-star Philadelphia side.

"The Marylebone Cricket Club is an incredibly influential body and will be such forever," says Mike Thomas, who organized the Philadelphia side. "With that trip, its mission was to promote cricket in the United States."

Cricket is experiencing a rebirth of significant magnitude in the United States. There

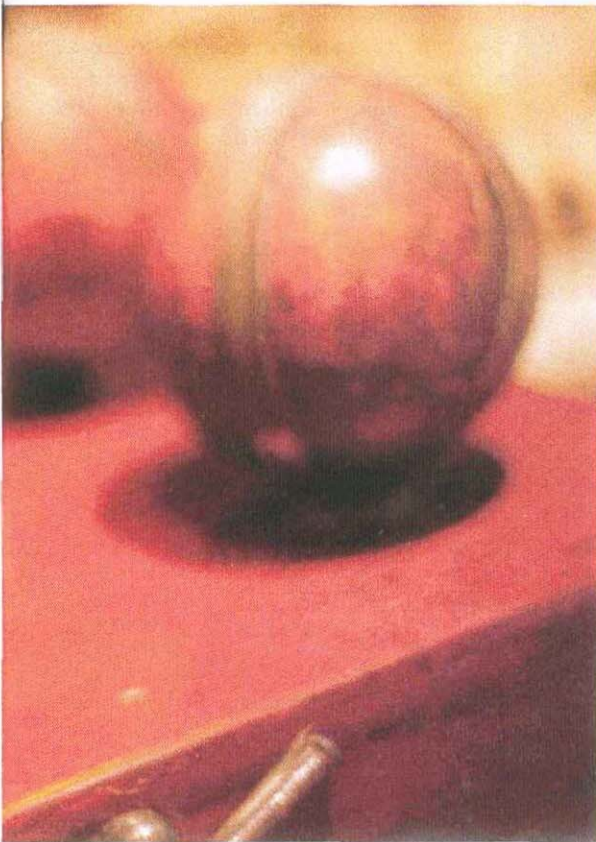
are 29 established leagues, 500 clubs and 10,000 players, according to USA Cricket, this country's organizing body. The organization figures to quadruple those totals by 2006. Since one-day test cricket began in the early 1970s, big money has infiltrated the world's second most popular sport. Top players now make millions.

"The festival has brought a spirit back into the clubs, and into this demography, where there are lots of ex-pats and others from the sub-continent," says Howard Chinn, one of the festival's organizers.

# What?

By J.F. Pirro

Photographs  
by Luigi Ciuffetelli



Kamran Khan of Haverford College coaches the only collegiate varsity cricket team in the country.

“It’s still not an American sport, but there are a few token (Americans) who play.”

Kamran Khan, who is in his 30th year coaching cricket at Haverford College, has brought more than a few Americans through his program, which remains the only collegiate varsity team in the nation. Haverford was also the only team to win all five of its matches in last year’s festival. There are also club teams at the University of Pennsylvania, Drexel and Princeton, among others in the region, but cricket—collegiate or otherwise—has been home at Haverford

College longer than anywhere else in the United States.

In 1834, English landscape architect William Carvill, who was designing the campus, introduced the game to the first club of entirely American-born youth. Thirty years later, Haverford hosted the University of Pennsylvania in the first intercollegiate cricket match. Only the Harvard-Yale boat race is an older collegiate athletic contest. By 1896, Haverford sent the first American undergraduate to England, and by 1969, the C.C. Morris Crick-

et Library opened in an alcove on the main level of the college’s James P. Magill Library. It now houses the largest collection of cricket literature and memorabilia in the Western Hemisphere.

Inside the campus’ John A. Lester Cricket ’96 Pavilion are wooden placards of rosters featuring most of the college’s sides since the Civil War: “This is so special,” says Khan. “Haverford’s role is tremendous because cricket started here. Once we started playing, we have continued to play.”

In his first season, Khan was still a stu-

dent at Villanova University. A Pakistan native, he was once a member of that country's national team, then the playing captain of the U.S. National Team for a decade. At Haverford, he's always run a fall and spring schedule against club teams.

For more than a century, until the 1920s, cricket was king all around Philadelphia. English mill workers of Germantown and Kensington formed adult teams, and others were organized for bankers, insurance clerks, railroad workers, even young women.

Before long, many of the region's most distinguished families played, including Main Line bluebloods like the Wisters, Lippincotts, Newhalls, Clarks, Scotts, Thayers, Biddles, Browns, Scattergoods, Bohlens and Morrisies. Now the cricketers, even those at Haverford College, boast names like Bhuiyan, Genna, Khondker and Patel.

In the sport's heyday, as many as 200 teams were active in this region. The Union Cricket Club in Camden (1840) was the first club in America. Germantown and Philadelphia (both 1854) celebrated 150th anniversaries jointly last year. Merion (1865) and Belmont (1874), which disbanded and sold its grounds in 1913, soon followed.

The Halifax Cup, an official city club cricket championship, was awarded between 1880-1926, and as part of the revival, has recently been resurrected each fall. In the three years since its return, Philadelphia, Merion and Germantown have each won the prize.

When it comes to explaining the link between international cricket, the sport's grand old history and its recent rebirth in America—especially on the Main Line—there's no better source than J. Alfred

Reeves, president of the other Main Line club team, the British Officers Club, which plays at Haverford's Cope Field.

In September 2002, Reeves was the recipient of a presentation piece of Waterford Crystal, personally delivered by the Duke of York, Prince Andrew, in recognition of Reeves' effort to revive cricket in the United States. Approved by the Palace at Buckingham, the award was made in conjunction with the queen's golden jubilee.

Reeves, who began playing cricket in England at age 9, is also celebrating a 50th anniversary, that of his marriage to his wife, Betty. She is quick to quote a refrigerator note at home in Villanova, which doubles as club headquarters: "Life is only a game," she says. "It's not as if it were cricket."

The first time they courted was after one of his cricket matches in the Yorkshire

## A Cricket Primer

Cricket is the nation's second oldest sport next to lacrosse, and the world's second most popular next to soccer. Mystified? Seems we Americans are alone in that respect.

Cricket is often compared to baseball, but not without error. They both involve a bat and a ball. However, there are only 10 outs per side in cricket, compared to 27 in baseball (three per team per each of nine innings), so each out in cricket, or any would-be catch that's dropped, is about three times as costly.

The field is called the *pitch*—the throw made by the *bowler* is not. A pitched ball is simply called a *ball*. The pitch has two wickets 22 yards apart, each consisting of three round wooden *stumps* that stand 28.9 inches high, each topped two small pieces of wood called *bails*.

The bat has a handle about 12 inches long made of laminated cane and a willow blade, flat on one side, 4 1/4 inches wide and

22 inches long. The opposite side is curved like the hull of a canoe. A bat weighs slightly more than 2 pounds.

The ball has a core of cork, which is sheathed in layers of fine twine and cork shavings covered in heavy red leather sewn with six parallel seams. Its circumference is about 9 centimeters. It weighs between 5 1/2 ounces and 5 3/4 ounces. It's harder than a baseball.

The game is played between two sides, each with 11 players. Two men are always at bat at the same time, one at each wicket. Each team remains at bat until 10 of its men are out. The bowler delivers the ball, stiff-armed, toward the wicket. The wicket keeper, or *catcher*, stands behind the wicket at the opposite end of the pitch.

The bowler tries to hit the batsman's wicket and dislodge the bails, called *shivering the stumps*, the equivalent of a strike out. Also, a good ball could cause a batsman to pop up. The bowler uses speed, or strategy, and usually bounces the ball off the ground in front of the batsman to create spin and deceive the batsman. The bowler gets six balls, then the umpire calls *over*. The fielders flip sides, then another bowler bowls from the opposite end.

The batsman's first job is to defend his wicket. His second job is to produce runs by hitting the ball into the field far enough to run to the other wicket and exchange places with the other batter before the ball is fielded and returned to either wicket.

There are no foul balls, and bowlers don't run unless they think they can reach the other wicket. When the ball is hit to the boundary on the ground, it counts for an automatic four runs. If it is hit over the boundary (think home-run wall) on the fly, it counts for six runs.

Instead of first base or second base, there are infield positions such as *mid on*, *mid off* and *point*, as well as outfielders such as *long on*, *long off* and *deep square leg*. There are as many as 30 fielding positions in cricket, and when the gloveless infielders move as close as 15 feet from the batsman, they are known as



League for Rotherham on a day when the players cleared snow off the field before the match. "Betty sat there wearing my overcoat, her overcoat, a fur hat and wool gloves, but she stayed for the whole match, so it was love at first sight," Reeves recalls.

Now, at age 80, Reeves is in his 20th season of the BOC. "I've been president since the first day, and now they can't get rid of the fellow," he says in his British accent.

When Reeves arrived on the Main Line 25 years ago, he took an apartment overlooking the Merion Cricket grounds. He jumped over the club's gates one day—"I didn't know it was private"—and into a practice run by Tanny Sargeant, who is credited with restarting the sport at Merion after years of dormancy. Reeves, who is also vice-president of the C.C. Morris Cricket Library, asked the crop *see cricket page 69*



Club jackets worn from the past.

*silly, as in silly point or silly mid off.*

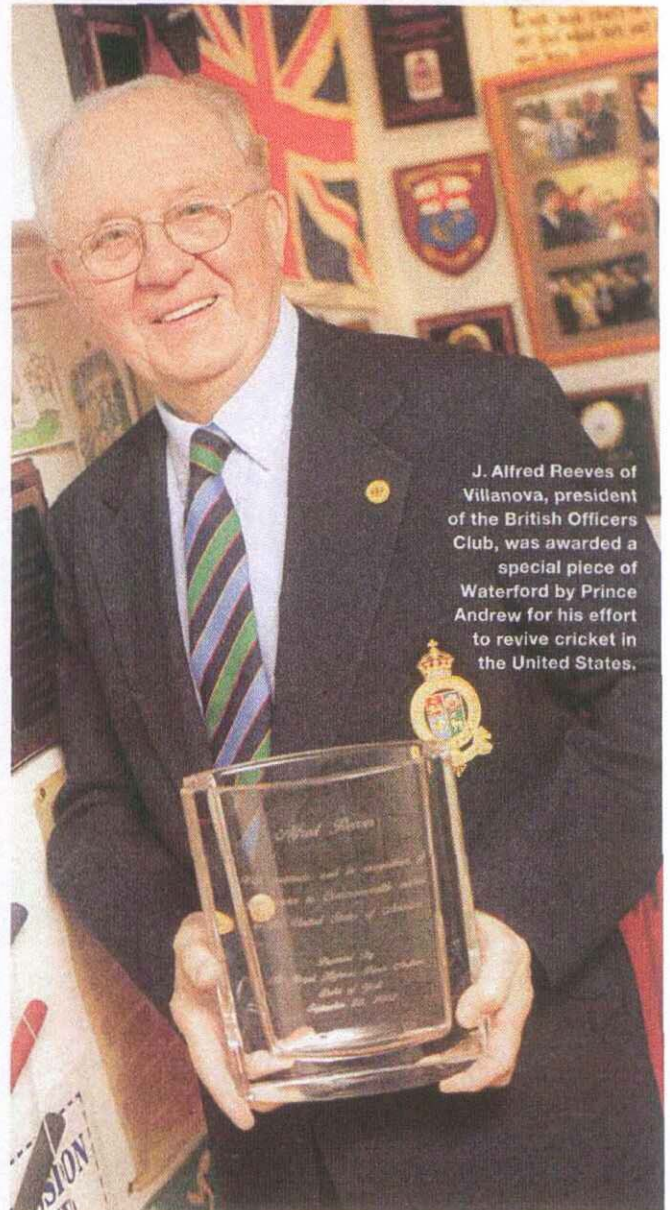
Like baseball, cricket is believed to have roots in a medieval English game called rounders. It may have been played as early as the 12th century. The first traces of the sport in America appeared in 1709, when William Byrd of Westover, Virginia, documented a game at his plantation on the James River. In 1751, the New York Gazette and the Weekly Post Boy reported an account of an 11-a-side match, and in 1744 Ben Franklin brought back from England a copy of the 1744 "Laws of Cricket." There's also some evidence that General George Washington's troops played a game of *wickets* at Valley Forge in the summer of 1778.

During the Philadelphia International Cricket Festival week in May, Sports Illustrated featured a story on the game; still at war, India and Pakistan found time to share cricket and tea. And a month before last year's festival, West Indies captain Brian Charles Lara made news around the world when he became the first man in test match history to score a quadruple century. He eclipsed 400 runs when he batted for nearly 13 consecutive hours over a two-day span against England at the Antigua Recreation Ground. Six months prior, Australia's Matthew Hayden had set the previous record of 380.

For those like Rodney C. Phillips, a Barbados native who officiated the last of the 30 games played during last year's Philadelphia festival, cricket is more than a game; it's part of his Caribbean culture. "We may have different governments, currency and accents (in the West Indies), but the one thing we have in common with the Mother Country is cricket," he says.

He explains why grown men were crying openly after a recent loss to England. "Losing to the Mother Country was like giving up our independence again," says Phillips. "In the Caribbean, cricket is really an impassioned thing, so when you lose, it's like losing a part of who you are."

Which is certainly something we Americans can understand. ♦



J. Alfred Reeves of Villanova, president of the British Officers Club, was awarded a special piece of Waterford by Prince Andrew for his effort to revive cricket in the United States.

**cricket** *from page 53*

of cricketers if he could join in. Ever since, he's been dedicated to renewal of the sport.

As such, he schedules 75 fixtures (the British term for matches) for the BOC each year between mid-April and late October. With more than 60 players, the BOC is the largest of the local clubs. Reeves says the growth, which has been spurred on largely since opening the door to immigrants, has been miraculous. "We tend to be from the West Indies or to be Muslims or Pakistanis, but we'll have none of that because we're all equal," he says.

Reeves' rules have always required that every member have a vote—and follow a strict code of conduct. "If you argue with an umpire, if you argue with anyone, without warning you are out," he says. (Three weeks prior to last year's festival, he survived his own near parting when he underwent a sensitive lung operation. "I'm proud to say the club prayed for me in five different languages," Reeves says.)

The BOC fields two sides, one competitive, the other social. The top side competes in the Garden State League and travels widely—and this year, for his 80th birth-

day, Reeves says the club "had better win something," either the league or the festival.

In a somewhat controversial format change made last year, the festival no longer crowns a champion. In past years, two divisions of six teams sent the two best teams to the title game. Instead, last year's final involved two all-star representatives from each of the 12 teams.

"It's an experiment," says Haverford's Joss, 42, who earned a doctorate in civil engineering from Drexel long after playing his schoolboy cricket in what was then Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). "In theory, these are the top 24 performers of the event, so those in attendance get to see the finest of batters and bowlers (the equivalent of a pitcher) play."

While the likes of Mike Thomas, the venerable BOC captain and one of the two all-stars from his club, roll their eyes at the slip in competitiveness, others, like Merion's Tony Vale, one of the festival's original founders, say the event is run exceptionally well. "We wouldn't keep getting teams back if it wasn't being done right," Vale says.

The first festival featured only four teams and two sites. With expansion into

Germantown and Philadelphia, the festival gave those two grounds their first cricket matches in 75 years. "This has been a revival of a Philadelphia tradition, and this region truly was the center of cricket," Joss says. "If you look in the archives, everyone was playing on these very grounds, and American travels to international matches were infamous."

Nonetheless, Joss calls these the early days of the revival. "For the game, this is a renaissance, and now we'd like to see a cricket community develop in the United States like it has for soccer," he says. "As more people become aware of the tradition and heritage, it brings more and more people back to the sport."

Most important on his agenda is developing junior cricket programs, or what he calls an "infrastructure." He's also looking to start a collegiate tournament at Haverford that would run in the fall, while other clubs are competing for the Halifax Cup. At the upper end, his goals center on improving the U.S. National Team, which consistently fails to qualify as one of the 16 invited to World Cup Trials.

For the moment, it's clear the youth



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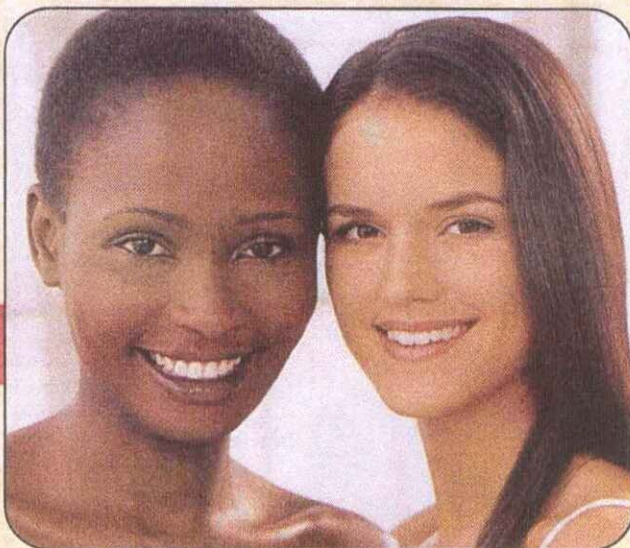
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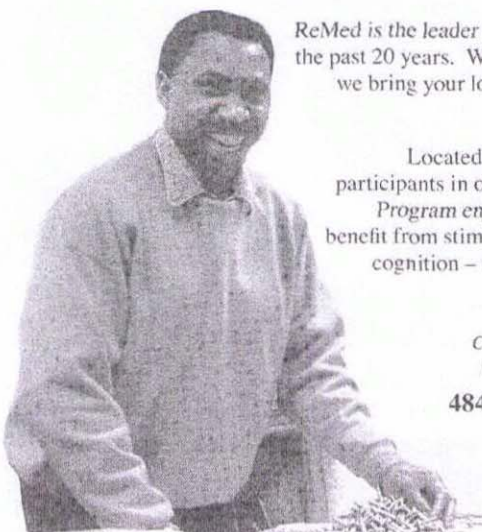
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movement is afoot. Vale, who lives in the shadows of the Merion grounds in Haverford, found an easy recruit in his own son, Peter, 17, a junior at Episcopal Academy. Likewise, another father-son duo from Merion C.C., James "Wicker" Francis and his son, James B. Francis, plays.

Peter Vale is a ranked Middle States tennis player, so cricket is a diversion, but a fun one. "I guess what stood out for me is that it's so unusual," he says. "When I talk about it with kids from school, they've never heard of it, but I think it's so cool."

Cricket is, indeed, finding its way into local schools. Lester Archer, who grew up in Ghiana, South America, teaches computer classes at the Haverford School. Last spring he started a club team. "It was a big challenge until we get other schools to start it in the Inter-Academic League," he says. "But who knows? We might be starting a trend for alternative sports."

"We're still in the crawling stages," says Gladwyne's John Crowther, whose son Julian, 12, is one of Archer's players.

The Crowthers have a family membership at Merion, so Julian has played for four years. "People are starting to realize how much fun this is," he says. "When they start, they think only batting is fun, but fielding is fun too."

His father boasts that Julian can catch the ball with his bare hands, a requirement that "many of the kids find difficult."

"Sometimes it hurts," Julian admits.

Mike Marcus is the force behind youth cricket at Merion. Tom Culp has the same responsibility at Philadelphia, where cricket is part of summer youth camps. "Kids love anything with a bat and ball," says Culp. "I'm not hung up on tradition, nor do the kids necessarily care where the sport came from. They just want to have fun, and right away they can see cricket is a fun game to play."

Culp's son, Chip, 15, plays, as do two other father-son pairs at Philadelphia, Richard and Conor O'Brien and Ameer and Shariq Chughtai. Yet Culp admits, "You're never going to see little league cricket. This is a quirky little thing few people do, and I know that." Still, he's proof you can teach an old dog new tricks, so he's quick to admit, "If we want to keep it alive, we must teach the younger people to play."

Which is what those two youth exhibition games were all about. ♦