

THE C.C. MORRIS CRICKET LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

US Cricket Museum, Haverford, Pennsylvania 19041

For the benefit of new onlookers, here is a much simplified explanation. Cricket's similarity to baseball is limited to the fact that both games use a bat and ball - almost everything else is different. There are only 10 "outs" in cricket compared with 27 in baseball, so each "out" in cricket (or any catch that is dropped) is about three times as important as in baseball. Also, in cricket the two umpires (traditionally distinguishable from the players by their long white coats) only give decisions on outs when "appealed" to - and there are no "rhubarbs."

The cricket "pitch" consists of a stretch of turf or matting in the middle of a large field. It has two wickets 22 yards apart, each consisting of three round wooden "stumps" standing 28 inches high. The distance across these stumps is 9 inches. Lying loosely in grooves across the top of the stumps are two small pieces of wood called "bails." A whitewashed line, called the "bowling crease," is drawn on the turf in line with the wicket and a similar line, called the "popping crease," is drawn parallel to it, four feet in front of the wicket. The batsman must have one foot behind the popping crease.

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 about 22 inches long. Cricket bats weigh slightly over 2 pounds. The ball has a core of cork around which are wound layers of fine twine and thin cork shavings until the proper size is reached, when a cover of heavy red leather is sewed on with six parallel seams. It's circumference is about 9 inches and its weight between 5-1/2 ounces and 5-3/4 ounces - it is slightly smaller, but heavier than a baseball - and harder. The batsmen and wicket keeper usually wear protective leg pads and gloves, but all others play barehanded.

The game is played between two teams, each of eleven players. The captain's toss for "innings" and the winning captain has the choice of his team batting or fielding first. Two men are always at bat at the same time, one at each wicket. Each team stays at bat until ten of its men are out. One man on each team is therefore recorded as "not out" since he cannot continue at bat without a partner.

The bowler delivers the ball, stiff-armed, toward the wicket, from behind the popping crease. The wicket-keeper stands behind the wicket at the Opposite end of the pitch with duties rather like a catcher in baseball. The bowler's objective is to hit the batsman's wicket or to cause him to pop up and be caught, using speed or strategy to achieve this and usually bouncing the ball off the ground in front of the batsman. Most bowlers can impart a spin to certain balls so that on bouncing they have a deceptive "break" or change of direction. (In addition, as described below, there are various other ways to put a man out.)

After the bowler has delivered six balls (eight in Australia and sometimes in the United States), the umpire at the bowler's end calls "over"; the fielders change positions and another bowler bowls from the opposite end - often with a different arrangement of the fielders based on his different style of bowling.

The batsman's job is to defend his wicket with his bat. His secondary objective is to score runs by hitting the ball into the field in any direction far enough so that he can run to the other wicket before the ball is fielded and thrown in. (There are no fouls in cricket.) As the batsman runs, his partner also runs to the end the batsman has just left. They may continue this, back and forth, until the ball is thrown back in to either wicket. Unlike baseball, the batsman is *not required* to run after he hits the ball. However, he wants runs, and each time he travels safely the distance between the wickets, he scores a run. When the ball is hit to the boundary on the ground, it counts as an automatic four runs without the batsmen actually running; while if it goes over the boundary on the fly, six runs are recorded for the batsman.

There are 20 or 30 fielding positions, with specific names, on a cricket field – many more than the available fielders. The captain, after consultation with his bowler, distributes his men in the positions he thinks they will be most useful, based on the type of bowling and the kind of batsman is at bat. (The chart below shows many of the possible positions.)

In many instances, the mere stopping of a grounder by a close-in fielder will deter the batsman from attempting a run. This is a major difference from baseball where any ball hit fair starts a play.

A batsman can be “out” in the following principal ways (there are others)

“Bowled” - if the bowler hits the wicket with the ball and the bails are dislodged.

“Caught” - if the ball, after being struck by the batsman is caught by any fielder before it touches the ground.

“Stumped” - If a batsman sets outside his popping crease and the wicket-keeper knocks off the bails with the ball.

“L.B.W.” or “Leg Before Wicket” - if the batsman stops with his legs or body a bowled ball which did not first hit his bat and which, in the opinion of the umpire would have struck the wicket.

“Hit Wicket” - if a batsman knocks a bail from his wicket while batting.

“Run Out” - if a ball is knocked off a wicket by a fielded ball while the two batsmen are trying to make a run. In this case the batsman nearest to that wicket is out.

In major league cricket, two innings (of ten outs) per team are the norm and matches may last several days. In this country, most cricket is limited to one afternoon, with each team batting for a single innings.

The umpires use arm signals to transmit to the scorer their decisions on boundaries and other questions which arise during play. Spectators follow the scoring by the numbers put up on the “telegraph” near the scorer's box. The top line indicates the current total score of the batting side, the middle line shows the number of batsmen who have been put out and the lowest shows the last batsman's individual score, or on occasion, the number of “overs” bowled.