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Broadcasting and cricket in England

No survey of cricket in England since the Second World War would be complete without a discussion of its relationship with broadcasting. Radio and television have provided instantaneous reporting of top-level cricket. The leading commentators have been among the game's star personalities and, while most have specialised in one medium, they have usually worked in both radio and television. The BBC has always dominated radio coverage of cricket and had a near monopoly of televised cricket until the 1990s. But radio and television have presented differing images of cricket and have had different impacts on its organisation and finances. Radio has done more to reflect the traditional atmosphere of cricket while television has done more to stimulate change in cricket.

The scale of cricket broadcasting

The scale of cricket broadcasting has reinforced cricket's standing as one of England's leading sports. Given the relatively small numbers who attend matches, one can argue that broadcasting has exaggerated the significance of cricket. BBC radio match coverage started in 1927 and by the end of the 1930s it broadcast cricket for more hours than any other sport. Since the start of *Test Match Special (TMS)* in 1957, which has provided live commentary on every ball of Test matches played in England, cricket has probably been the sport broadcast for most hours on national radio, while local radio also has extensive coverage. The BBC coverage of the England–Australia Test at Lord's in 1938 was the first cricket match broadcast by television anywhere in the world. In most years from the mid-1950s to the end of the 1980s, cricket was televised for more hours than any other ball sport. The expansion of BSkyB in the 1990s led to a massive increase in televised cricket. In 2004, Channel 4 broadcast almost 300 hours of cricket and BSkyB had more than 2,400 hours, but cricket had become the fourth most frequently televised sport, accounting for a little over 5 per cent of

sport televised by the terrestrial channels and BSkyB. Coverage of football, the sport televised most often, had become nearly five times greater than that of cricket.¹

As with other sports, cricket broadcasting has consisted overwhelmingly of reports and commentaries on matches. Investigative journalism into the administration and financing of cricket is rare. Magazine programmes have formed only a tiny proportion of cricket broadcasts. Only occasionally has cricket been the subject of fictional programmes, though village cricket grounds are often used to evoke a sense of rural England in television drama. Almost all coverage on national radio and television has been of men's international or county cricket, although local radio reports some club cricket. Between 2001 and 2009, BSkyB showed only twenty-four broadcasts of women's cricket and all of these were concerned with international cricket.²

Broadcast cricket has rarely attracted very large audiences. The seven million who listened at some time to the final day of the fourth England–Australia Test in 1948 may have been the highest number listening to cricket on radio.³ Unconfirmed reports suggest that the *TMS* audience averaged around five million for the Ashes Tests in 2009.⁴ Other England–Australia Test series had smaller audiences. In July 1961, the *TMS* average audience was usually higher than that for Wimbledon or horse racing but the July average in 1981 was only a third of that of 1961. By the 1960s televised cricket usually had bigger audiences than radio, though modest compared with other televised sports. On weekdays the final session of play in Tests in 1961 and 1965 often had over five million viewers but by 1969 barely exceeded one million, possibly because it was then on BBC2 and not all sets could receive this channel. Viewing numbers were not vastly different in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1987, fifteen other sports exceeded the average of 1.7 million viewers for BBC cricket transmissions⁵ and in 1997 the fourth day of the first England–Australia Test was the only cricket programme in a list of the hundred largest audiences for sport on terrestrial television. Cricket did not figure in a similar list of satellite television sport programmes.⁶ Channel 4 had very high viewing figures for the especially dramatic 2005 England–Australia series. For the last four Tests the average audience was always above a quarter of the total television audience.⁷ On the Saturday of the fourth Test, 8.4 million, almost half of all those viewing television at that time, were watching.⁸ Since 2006 only BSkyB has shown cricket played live in Britain but its audiences, no doubt because it is a subscription service, have generally been lower than when live cricket was on free-to-air channels. In 2009, the average number of 4–15-year-olds watching the Ashes series on BSkyB was only a fifth of those who saw the 2005 series on Channel 4.⁹

Limited audiences for broadcast cricket, and for televised cricket in particular, prompt the question of why so much cricket has been broadcast. One explanation is that cricket's authorities never banned live cricket broadcasting. BBC radio was allowed to choose its broadcasting hours from 1948 and BBC television from 1959. Cricket had attractions for broadcasters. Although rained-off matches and matches finishing early inconvenienced television broadcasters, cricket had higher viewing figures than most other programmes on midweek mornings and afternoons. The introduction of *Test Match Special* helped the BBC to fill the under-used Third Programme wavelength. Cricket also filled BBC2 airtime. By 1974, BBC1 and BBC2 showed equal amounts of cricket, but in the 1980s BBC2 showed more. Until the 1990s, fees for broadcasting cricket, and other sports, were not especially high. In the 1980s cricket administrators often complained that the ITV network's lack of interest in televising cricket depressed television fees, but because its sponsorship agreements often depended on television exposure, the TCCB could not risk losing BBC coverage. Fiercer competition among broadcasters in the 1990s for televised cricket drove up broadcasting fees. In 1998, Channel 4 outbid the BBC for the rights to the terrestrial coverage of cricket. BSkyB's establishment of four sport channels by 1999 indicates that its management saw sport as a means of selling subscriptions and the length of cricket matches may have helped to fill its sport channels. The decision in 1998 of Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, to delist live Test cricket from those sporting events for which cable or satellite could not have a monopoly encouraged BSkyB to outbid Channel 4 in 2004 for the rights to live cricket in the United Kingdom. No doubt because BSkyB competition had driven up the costs of all television sport rights, no terrestrial broadcaster bid for live cricket rights in 2009. Many suspected that because of its determination to keep the Grand National, Wimbledon and Formula One, the BBC could not afford to bid for cricket.

The cultural ramifications of cricket may have been a major reason why the BBC broadcast so much cricket for so long. The BBC and cricket were seen as establishment organisations. 'Misgivings abounded' alongside worries over the 'seemliness' of selling the rights to the 1968 Gillette Cup Final to the ITV network.¹⁰ Among those with social and economic power, cricket had been regarded as expressing conceptions of Englishness which cohered with pastoralism, perceptions of imperialism as a civilising mission and respect for tradition. Cricket's supposed traditions of fair play and of putting the interests of one's side before oneself were thought to reflect Christian teachings and to encourage moral qualities including selflessness, honesty, physical courage, respect for others, courtesy, camaraderie and cheerfulness in the face of adversity. Such beliefs about cricket harmonised with

assumptions about the BBC being a public service broadcaster and with Reith's claim that its mission was to 'inform, educate and entertain', a view which persisted at the BBC after Reith's departure in 1938. Cricket could be regarded as morally uplifting entertainment. Failure to bid for television rights in 2004 and 2009 provoked complaints about the BBC ignoring its public service broadcasting remit.

The nature of broadcast cricket

Technological developments have had greater impacts on televised than on radio cricket coverage although the quality of the sound, especially of matches played abroad, is now far superior on radio to that of the 1950s and e-mail has made it easier for listeners to make instant contact with radio producers and commentators. The visual quality of televised cricket improved in the 1960s with video-recording systems permitting instant playbacks of key incidents in matches, the coming of 625-line pictures in 1964 and colour in 1968. In 2006, BSkyB's high-definition facility enhanced picture clarity although only a minority of viewers have HD receivers. Over the past quarter of a century pitch microphones, cameras in stumps, a greater array of graphics and facilities to track the course of the ball have extended the range of visual material which is presented to viewers. With over twenty cameras at matches, virtually every run is now shown from at least three perspectives.

The essence of cricket commentary has remained the description of each ball and the batsman's reaction to it. As radio commentary has to be continuous, the natural breaks of play have permitted more analysis of play and descriptive material not directly related to play than occurs with other team sports. John Arlott described Howard Marshall, who emerged as the BBC's leading cricket commentator in the 1930s, as 'eminently suited to cricket: he had a deep, warm, unhurried voice; a respect for the hard news ... and a friendly feeling towards the men who played the game.'¹¹ John Arlott, who was also a poet, was widely praised for his descriptive powers and wit. The Australian commentator Alan McGilvray wrote that Arlott could make a rainy day sound interesting: 'His colourful turn of phrase, his creative word pictures, could not be matched by any other commentator. You could close your eyes and listen to Arlott's commentaries and see everything as if you were sitting on the mid-on boundary.'¹² Henry Blofeld, a commentator since 1974, is famed for his references to buses, butterflies and birds. A tone of self-conscious levity was introduced to *TMS* in the 1970s following Brian Johnston's move from television and this has been continued by Jonathan Agnew's verbal practical jokes played on other commentators.

Brian Johnston's failure to commentate because of a fit of the giggles after Agnew said that Ian Botham had collided with the stumps because he 'didn't quite get his leg over' has become one of the most memorable moments in radio sport commentary. Don Mosey, a radio producer and commentator, recalled that when rain stopped play, Johnston could 'sustain and unobtrusively direct a conversation (ideally with two others involved) far better than anyone else and he never failed to come up with a new topic when one seemed to be fading'. His interviews were 'enduringly and unfailingly brilliant' because of his ability to follow up what was said and to make an interview more like a conversation. Mosey believed that chatting with Johnston about *Neighbours* on *TMS* was carrying on a conversation that 'involves the listening public as part of it'.¹³

Since the Second World War radio Test match coverage has always included commentators, who describe play as it happens, and summarisers, usually retired Test cricketers, who comment on the play. Initially, summarisers were invited to speak between overs or when wickets fell but over the past twenty years the talk between commentators and summarisers has become more like a conversation, with summarisers speaking when they wish. The summariser Mike Selvey welcomed this more conversational approach because 'I don't like to think of it as two separate people working apart from each other', but added that 'It's a little less formal and it's a lot harder than it used to be'.¹⁴

Television commentary was long governed by the dictum that commentators should speak only when they could add to the picture. In a recording of the last day of the final England–Australia Test in 1968, a highly exciting day's play, commentators said nothing if no run was scored from a ball or if a wicket did not fall. Richie Benaud, a successful captain of the Australian Test team, was a BBC television commentator from 1964 to 1998 and then for Channel 4 and for Five's cricket highlights. Widely regarded as the best television commentator, Benaud has often been praised for saying so little. Over the past decade the amount of talk on television coverage has increased, although commentators still tend to remain quiet while the bowler is running in and the batsman plays the ball. The greater range of technical aids has perhaps provided more opportunities for comment. For Test matches, BSkyB has more or less abandoned having a distinction between commentators and summarisers, although commentators take it in turn to act as the 'third man' who uses action replays to analyse technical matters for viewers. Richie Benaud and Jim Laker in the 1960s were the first former Test players to be television commentators but now almost all BSkyB commentators have played Test cricket.

The esteem of *Test Match Special*

By the 1970s, *Test Match Special* had become a major feature of the English cricket scene. Its critical acclaim perhaps explains why the BBC has continued to broadcast it. George Scott of the *Listener* wrote in 1974 that the ‘glory of the English summer is cricket, and one of the glories of British broadcasting is the ball-by-ball commentary on Radio 3’.¹⁵ In 1988, Simon Barnes of *The Times* defined it as ‘more than a programme: a tradition, a heritage, a responsibility. It is part of the fabric of the English summer.’¹⁶ John Perara, the ECB commercial director, said in 2008 that *TMS* was ‘an iconic programme which has become a part of the very tapestry of British life’ and had set the standard for cricket broadcasting on radio across the world.¹⁷ The Queen’s meeting with the *TMS* team at Lord’s in 2001 registered the esteem of the programme with ‘the great and the good’. The radio critic Gillian Reynolds wrote on the fiftieth anniversary of *TMS* that ‘If cricket is more than a game, *Test Match Special* is more than a programme.’¹⁸

The launch of *TMS* with its ball-by-ball coverage was simply an expansion of how BBC radio had been covering cricket. Arlott wrote in 1981 that *Test Match Special* ‘was already itself before it was recognised and titled’ in 1957. Unlike other acclaimed radio programmes of the 1950s, *TMS* has survived. It has outlasted the BBC’s *Grandstand*, which was the world’s longest-running television sport programme. No other radio sport programme in Britain has stimulated such affection or prestige. In the last third of the twentieth century many claimed to turn off the sound when watching BBC televised cricket so that they could listen to *TMS*.

Although some cricket enthusiasts complained about the levity of *TMS* and discussion of matters not directly concerned with play, others have argued that these features appealed to those with little knowledge of cricket. Not concentrating exclusively on play encouraged forms of audience participation before they became more common in radio sport broadcasting. Soon after the start of *TMS* listeners began forwarding gifts to the commentary team, and by the 1970s sending cakes had become one of the programme’s rituals. The Queen has presented the *TMS* team with a cake made in the royal kitchens. Interviews with those from other walks of life, telephone and e-mail enquiries from listeners and discussion among commentators and summarisers about cricket matters when rain stops play – one often meets those who say that they enjoy the programme most during interruptions for rain – are related to the nature of cricket. Highly articulate commentators and summarisers have resonated with, and helped to foster, the notion that cricket is more cerebral than other sports and dovetails with assumptions about much cricket writing being a branch of high literature. Arlott thought

that cricket had a contemplative dimension which was expressed in writing and painting and that commentary was ‘only a step down from this’.¹⁹

Praise for the BBC’s televised cricket rarely matched that for *TMS*. Until the 1970s, adverse comment was unusual, possibly because so little was seen of coverage overseas, but in the last quarter of the twentieth century its visual quality was often criticised as inferior to that of Australian television. The BBC began showing every ball from behind the bowler’s arm only in 1989, but this was adopted by Australian television in the 1970s. Some inside the BBC felt that its cricket presentation was too slow to change. Tony Lewis, the former England captain who had been a commentator and presenter for BBC televised cricket, wrote that the BBC ‘never pushed to take a lead in the televising of the game. It was tugged along by the popular experiments of others’ and was ‘not in the van of technical experiment and improvement’. When part of *Grandstand*, cricket coverage was interrupted by increasingly frequent visits to horse racing and other sports. Australia’s Channel Nine, Lewis argued, ‘advanced miles ahead of the BBC in production and pictures’.²⁰

The ECB decision to sell the rights for showing cricket on terrestrial television from 1999 to Channel 4 was not based entirely on the money offered by Channel 4. The ECB was impressed by a Channel 4 presentation which promised to do more to reach women, the young and ethnic minorities. Will Wyatt, Deputy Director-General of the BBC, conceded later that ‘the lack of new ideas in our coverage was a factor in our losing the contract’.²¹ For its coverage of cricket for Channel 4 between 1999 and 2005, the production company Sunset+Vine won around thirty awards, including four BAFTAs and the Royal Television Society prize for the best live outside television broadcast.²² The House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee concurred ‘wholeheartedly’ with ‘the critically acclaimed coverage’ of Channel 4 cricket.²³ Channel 4 innovations had included more use of a split-screen facility to provide technical analysis of play, longer pre-views of play, discussion during the lunch interval and women presenters. Praise for Channel 4 cricket reinforced beliefs about BBC televised cricket having been behind the times. Although BSkyB has provided more extensive coverage of cricket than other broadcasters, has employed a wider range of technological devices to explain the course of play and gives the impression that cricket has a high level of action, it has not obtained a standing and affection within cricket equal to that of *TMS*.

Broadcasting and the image of cricket

Radio and television have projected different images of cricket. Class privilege has long been associated with cricket. In 2009, three members of the

England team, including the captain, were educated at public schools, usually a signifier of a wealthy background. Until the 1963 season first-class cricketers were divided into amateurs, who mostly had upper- or middle-class backgrounds, and professionals, who usually had working-class origins. County captains were normally amateurs. In the twentieth century England did not have a professional captain until 1952. At many grounds amateurs and professionals had separate changing rooms. Broadcasting did not defend the class relationships of cricket or campaign for the amateur–professional distinction to be scrapped, but radio in particular reflected cricket’s power relationships and tended to accept them as normal. Peter Baxter, producer of *TMS* from 1973 to 2007, agreed in 2009 that *TMS* had a ‘public school world’ but explained that this was not by design.²⁴ Brian Johnston and Henry Blofeld attended Eton and most of the other long-serving commentators were educated at public schools. John Arlott and Don Mosey, educated at grammar schools, at times resented the public-school presence on the programme. Between 1958 and 1973 the English summarisers had all played cricket as amateurs, but Fred Trueman, a miner’s son, was a summariser from 1974 to 1999. Adding ‘ers’ to the names of commentators, a practice encouraged by Brian Johnston, can be seen as a public-school habit, though even Fred Trueman took this up. Some listeners were irritated by the public-school tone. In 1989, Val Arnold-Foster of the *Guardian* thought that not everybody enjoyed the ‘silly-billy bits ... the nicknames and the giggles, the jolly bottles and the chocolate cakes, the whole public-school lark’.²⁵

With television, the presence of those not from public schools expanded earlier than with radio. By 1987, none of the BBC television commentary team had been educated at a public school. Few from public schools have been employed as anchormen, commentators or summarisers by BSkyB or Channel 4. BSkyB sacked Henry Blofeld as a commentator in 1996. Mark Nicholas, educated at Bradfield College, was the main presenter and a commentator for Channel 4 and now presents Five’s recorded highlights. David Gower, who attended King’s School, Canterbury, presented the BBC cricket magazine programme *Gower’s Cricket Monthly* and is a BSkyB anchorman and commentator. But one can also argue that having summarisers and television commentators who were former Test cricketers, whether from public schools or not, recognises meritocratic expertise rather than class privilege.

Cricket has often been considered a symbol of England, as expressing an Englishness which emphasises pastoralism, decorum and restraint. Claims that *TMS* is different from cricket broadcasts overseas reinforces the assumption about cricket reflecting an English identity. The broadcasting critic Bernard Davies pointed out in 1980 that Arlott’s accent was ‘rustic’ and that his commentaries showed that cricket was less of a game than a

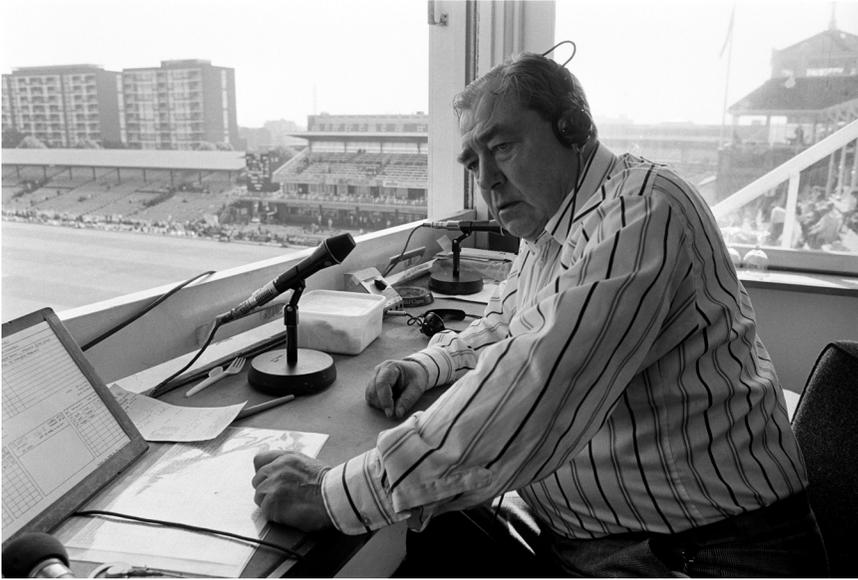


Figure 4.1. John Arlott making his final Test match commentary at the England–Australia Centenary Test in September 1980. (Press Association)

‘pageantry of Englishry’ and underlined England’s ‘deep moral sense and feelings for pastoral beauty’,²⁶ though this could not be said of most other commentators. Radio and television commentary in England has always exuded restraint, although summarisers could be withering in their criticisms of players. Broadcast commentary has rarely sounded so frenzied as football commentary, possibly because football has fewer natural pauses than cricket. Australian television cricket commentators in particular have often been criticised for sounding more excitable and for shouting more than their English counterparts. In 1990, Paul Fitzpatrick of the *Guardian* found Sky’s cricket commentary ‘the height of good taste’ and contrasted it with the ‘near-hysterical commentating and the superficiality and vulgarity’ of Australia’s World Series cricket coverage.²⁷ Although English commentators and summarisers clearly want England to win international matches, their commentary is rarely so stridently nationalistic in support of England as occurs with other broadcast sports, possibly because commentary teams have usually included broadcasters and retired players from England’s opponents. Radio commentary has reflected the pauses of cricket, whereas BSkyB’s visual presentation, with its replays of each run and graphics, gives an impression of cricket being faster and more action-packed. The light-hearted tone and gentle humour of commentary have rarely descended to

belly laughs and can be regarded as an expression of English reserve and restraint.

Even today beliefs that cricket has higher standards of sportsmanship than other sports, though less widespread than before the Second World War, are not dead. In the 1950s and 1960s commentators were reluctant to suggest that players deliberately flouted the laws of cricket. Little attention was drawn to the doubtful action of the England bowler Tony Lock. Radio did not condemn England's slowing the over rate to save the Leeds Test in 1953. In the 1970s and 1980s broadcasters were more reticent than the press in criticising the tactics of the four-man West Indian pace attack, and in the 1990s the press, not radio or television, revealed the suspicions of England players that Pakistan fast bowlers were obtaining reverse swing by illicitly gouging the ball. In 1994, BBC television showed Michael Atherton, the England captain, rubbing what was thought to be dirt from his pocket on the ball. A BBC employee said that the shots of Atherton 'fiddling' with the ball had been recorded during a quiet period of play. The producer used them 'so the commentators had something to talk about', not realising 'what a row' they would cause. 'If the BBC had known,' he added, 'I'm sure they would have kept the pictures off the air.'²⁸ Jonathan Agnew, the BBC cricket correspondent, felt that Atherton should have resigned the England captaincy.

By exposing cheating, the increasing numbers of television cameras may have discouraged unfair play. Broadcasters have been prepared to co-operate with cricket authorities' attempts to ensure that broadcasting does not sully cricket's reputation for sportsmanship. The prohibition on pitch microphones eavesdropping on conversations between players may be intended to mask the extent of sledging – players making disparaging comments about opponents in order to disrupt their concentration – which is usually regarded as sharp practice in England though not in Australia. Attitudes among broadcasters to sportsmanship have changed with time. Although sledging is not broadcast, commentators now praise players for 'getting in the faces' of opponents. Commentators do not usually urge fast bowlers to use short-pitched bowling to intimidate batsmen, although in 2009 Shane Warne argued that a fast bowler should have tried to 'knock the head off' a new batsman, but they do call on bowlers to direct their attack around a batsman's chest. Some former England players were uncomfortable when England managed to draw the first Test of the 2009 Ashes series by time wasting, but Jonathan Agnew on radio defended this as gamesmanship which all of today's Test sides would have used.

With its growing technological sophistication, television is being employed to help umpires make decisions. Since 1993 a third umpire in the stands

with access to television replays to advise on all line decisions has been used at all Tests in England. From 1996 the third umpire was able to initiate contact with the umpires on the field about boundary decisions and in 1997 the ICC decided that the third umpire could be consulted over catches. In 2008 the ICC recommended that in Test matches a side could refer up to three unsuccessful decisions to the third umpire, but for LBW appeals technology would be used only to establish where the ball struck the batsman and not its possible further path. Broadcasters have often called for greater use of technology in decision-making. Ian Botham argued in 2007 that the next step had to be for 'TV umpires' to rule on more decisions and allow on-field umpires to 'get on with their main job of making sure the game runs smoothly without the intolerable pressure of being proved wrong by the cameras'. Because umpiring errors could affect adversely a cricketer's livelihood, he thought it 'perverse' not to use television.²⁹ Some umpires feared that television technology was undermining their status. In the 2008 issue of *Wisden* David Frith wrote of umpires who 'jealously prize their power' and saw television replays as threatening their authority.³⁰

Television has always shown shots of spectators but in recent decades it has been accused of undermining the dignity of cricket by encouraging noisier and more flamboyant spectator behaviour. In the 1970s, commentators criticised spectators who ran onto the square to congratulate players when a wicket fell or centuries were scored and the subsequent refusal to show streakers and pitch invasions reflects an assumption that television coverage influences crowd behaviour. Possibly, television coverage of other sports provoked rowdier behaviour at cricket. Television seems to have encouraged groups of spectators to wear fancy dress, although in the 1990s some Test match grounds disapproved of this. A man who was the back half of a pantomime cow needed hospital treatment after being crash-tackled by stewards at Headingley. In 1997, the cricket journalist Michael Henderson wrote that 'a Test match offers an unrivalled opportunity to show off, particularly as television cameras love to focus on people dressed as vegetables'. He also thought that on radio Agnew 'likes to tell his listeners what the cavorters in the bleachers are wearing'.³¹

Matthew Parry and Dominic Malcolm have drawn parallels between the so-called 'Barmy Army', who give England vociferous support at home and overseas, and broader cultural changes including New Laddism and a legitimisation of consumption expressed through foreign travel, but they also link its rise with BSkyB's cricket coverage. They argue that to sell subscriptions, BSkyB tried to appeal to 'a larger "football-type" audience and the "New Lad" culture more generally' and made fans at matches integral to its cricket coverage. The Barmy Army provided 'easily identifiable

scenery for broadcasters' becoming 'the prime target of television cameras seeking animated sections of the crowd ... The Barmy Army feeds on this attention; it contributes to their fun, encourages their exhibitionist pre-occupations and bolsters their notion that they can exert an influence on playing events.'³²

Broadcasting and the financing of cricket

Broadcasting fees are now the financial life-blood of cricket. Initially, cricket received little money from broadcasting. In the 1930s the BBC claimed that it was not paying for the right to broadcast a match but providing a facility fee as compensation for gate receipts lost through its equipment occupying seats. After the War it became accepted in effect that facility fees were paid for the right to broadcast matches. Radio fees, never a vast contribution to cricket finance, were overtaken in the 1950s by those from television. For the Tests against Australia in 1953, BBC radio payments of seventy-five guineas for each day's play were tiny compared with total gate receipts of more than £200,000.³³ If rumours that the BBC agreed in 2000 to pay the ECB £17.5 million over five years for the radio rights to cricket in England are correct, radio payments would have been about only a seventh of those from television. In 1965, BBC payments to televise cricket played in England exceeded £50,000 and by 1981 payments from the BBC and the Australian Broadcasting Commission were almost one million. Television fees from broadcasters for cricket played in the UK totalled £3 million in 1990, £25 million in 1999 and £63 million in 2009. Much of cricket's income from sponsorship and advertising has also been dependent on television. In the early 1990s the TCCB's sponsorship and advertising revenues exceeded broadcasting fees.

For much of the twentieth century most county clubs could not support themselves but were subsidised by what are called the central distribution of profits arising from international cricket, overseas tours, centrally negotiated sponsorship and advertising agreements and broadcasting fees. In 1995, the central distribution accounted for 40 per cent of the income of the first-class counties and samples of county balance sheets since then suggest that it has remained over a third. The contribution of broadcasting fees to the central distribution was proportional to what it constituted to the income of cricket's central authority. By the late 1970s broadcasting fees were providing a quarter of the central distribution, 40 per cent in 2000 and 80 per cent in 2009, and these figures do not include the impact of television on sponsorship and advertising.³⁴ Without the central distributions some counties could have been forced to abandon their first-class status.

During the past two decades it has been argued that the central distributions, by propping up eighteen first-class counties, have discouraged thoroughgoing reform of the highest level of domestic cricket and so been inimical to the best interests of cricket in England. Yet a strong case can be made for arguing that the need for television income brought massive changes to county cricket. Television has been at the heart of the expansion in limited-overs cricket, an enormous change in cricket. The BBC did not campaign for the launch of the Gillette Cup, the counties' first limited-overs competition in 1963, but the Sunday League in 1969 and the Benson and Hedges Cup in 1972 almost certainly would not have started without sponsorship and sponsors wanting guaranteed television coverage. The first three cricket world cups, all limited-overs competitions, held in England in 1975, 1979 and 1983, were planned on the basis that television coverage would attract the necessary sponsorship. Yet not all cricket sponsorship has been dependent on television exposure. In the early 1980s the sponsorship for the County Championship, which was rarely televised, was greater than that for the limited-over county competitions. Twenty20 cricket has grown in recent years partly because the length of matches suits television schedules.

The significance of television income and its effects on sponsorship and advertising have led to an expansion of England cricket. England played forty-eight Test matches at home in the 1950s but seventy-one between 2000 and 2009. In the 2008 season England played seven Tests, eleven 50-overs internationals and two Twenty20 matches. Higher gate receipts for England games did much to stimulate this growth of international cricket but broadcasters paid more for England matches. During the 1990s England's failure to win a Test series at home against Australia, West Indies, Pakistan and Sri Lanka provoked fears that television viewing figures could fall and that broadcasters would pay less to televise cricket. County cricket was transformed to make it a more effective preparation for Test cricket. In 1993 all County Championship matches were scheduled for four days. The Championship was split into two divisions with promotion and relegation in 2000, a reform originally discussed before the First World War. In 2000, central contracts were introduced for players likely to play for England. These were paid by the ECB and the England team management was permitted to specify when players with central contracts could play county cricket. The big names of England cricket now play very little county cricket.

The welfare of cricket in England is now very much dependent on broadcasting, and television in particular. Through television fees cricket has more financial security than it has ever known but economic reliance on broadcasting may have dangers. The long-term health of cricket will be decided by the level of interest in the sport and by the vigour of cricket as a participant

sport. The ECB has argued that television fees have allowed more to be spent on promoting recreational cricket. In 2008, the ECB gave £14 million to 2,000 community cricket clubs, £5 million to schools cricket and £10 million in interest-free loans to community cricket clubs and to subsidise half the cost of 10,000 coaches.³⁵ It maintained that in 2006–07 participation in club and school cricket increased by 27 per cent, but the Department of Culture, Media and Sport reported a slight drop in participation among those aged over sixteen.³⁶ Although the televising of women's cricket has increased over the past two decades, it still forms only a tiny fraction of all televised cricket, but the merger of the Women's Cricket Association with the ECB has given the women's game a bigger share of broadcasting income and stimulated playing by women and girls. In 2006–07 the number of women and girls participating in cricket increased by 45 per cent. In 2007, 43,000 girls took part in more than 7,000 Kwik Cricket matches played at primary schools.³⁷ In 2009, a major part of the ECB case against Ashes Test series becoming listed events once more was that subscription broadcasters would pay far less for non-exclusive rights and so reduce what could be spent on supporting participation. Others have maintained that limiting the viewing of live cricket to those who can afford a subscription will be disastrous. The editor of *Wisden* wrote in 2005 that 'the overwhelming majority of the British population will never come across a game of cricket in their daily lives. Never, never, never, never ... the longer term consequences will take a generation to unfold. Some believe these could be serious. I think we're looking at a potential catastrophe.'³⁸ Negotiating its relationship with broadcasting looks likely to remain the key issue for the ECB.

NOTES

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- 3 John Arlott, 'The Origins of "Test Match Special"' in P. Baxter (ed.), *Test Match Special* (London: Queen Anne, 1981), p. 16.
- 4 'Review of Free-to-air Listed Events: Report by the Independent Advisory Panel to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport', November 2009, paragraph 83, www.culture.gov.uk (accessed 1 December 2009).
- 5 R9/992/1 Audience Research Continuous Services Reports CS/88/04: Sport on TV 1988, BBC Written Archives.
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- 15 *Listener*, 20 June 1974.
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