

Is having a 20/20 team the real question?

Ok, having just read the Almanac article by Chris Riordan piece and the responses, I thought this occasion called for another fuller response. My thought is, who cares about the team, just join the party.

You see, I have witnessed a 20/20 game on Thursday night, the Melbourne Stars versus the Adelaide Strikers in fact, my first cricket game since 1981. Let me take you back. **Diversion 1: My then boyfriend Peter and his family were all members of the MCC. He would go off to the cricket and I began listening on the radio to see what it was all about. He would explain the finer details, but as with everything, fine details usually evade me after 10 minutes, so I just enjoyed hearing some of the greats playing at that time and the strength of the 1980's Australian team. I would garden or play with the kittens or do housework or cook and listen. Or just lie around on the hot summer days and most of the details would float into the ether and some stuck. (Diversion 1A: that cricketing family also barracked for Collingwood and I named one of the kittens "Kinky" after Rene' Kink.)**

What stuck most was the interest, and keeping half an eye and one of the ears, on cricket over the years. I did manage one day at the Test in those days with Peter and his family, and this one I remember was the searing hot day, we arrived at 9.30am and were waiting for the shade to cover the members area where we sat, which was going to be relatively soon. The game hadn't started but it was going to be a 40 degrees that day and I, being the first generation Australian and genetically NOT geared for Melbourne summers, fainted. I remember coming to consciousness, the wonderful St. Johns Ambulance taking me by stretcher to their rooms, being tended to until fully awake and then going home. Thus ended my cricket going career and I stuck to, when I finally returned to sport spectatorship, the winter wonders of Aussie Rules.

Again, I have been watching and listening to the cricket more fully the last few years, and with a vague attraction and interest in the Melbourne Stars once they'd secured Shane Warne, partly because of the celebrity of all of his and his entourages goings on, but also because I'd never seen Warne bowl live. **(Diversion 2: On TV I saw when Liz Hurley and the tribe of three of Warnie's kids and her own son were in the middle, for Liz to toss the coin. She did so, and then someone else was interviewed, but the camera kept going back to Liz who was wondering back and forward along the pitch trying to work out what to do or where to go next. The camera kept following her and not the interviewee).** I was busy having kids and not being terribly engaged when he was at his peak. So that double interest pulled me to vaguely support the Stars, though with little passion and I certainly haven't watched every game.

My lovely daughter Rachel, a virgin cricket attendee, my eldest at almost 23, works at IINET and was able to secure good Level 2 tickets with a group of other computer/internet techies. They are the ones that you ring when there is a problem. Be nice and they are very helpful! **(Diversion 3: I first joined the emailing world many moons ago, my original email was my name, then c031.aone.net.au. I have a new one I use for my cartoon and art work and for this site, but this ancient one is still in use, has travelled with me through thick and thin, and only this year have a met a fellow artist in my art society, also my age, who has kept his old one as well. Two bloody dinosaurs. And IINET, through buying out my original server and then my daughters employer Netspace, is my host, so all the roads lead to....)**

Anywayyyyyy, back to the story at hand. Rachel and I travelled to the mighty MCG with cricket on our minds rather than the traditional finals trek which the MCG represents for me. And doesn't that bring great memories as a Saints supporter. We were handed cardboard with a yellow "4" on one side and a green "6" on the other to hold up for the cameras and our amusement should we witness good batting. Thus armed with our signage, our Japanese sushi rolls, my footy thermos, my St.Kilda mug, we were set.

We got there 40 minutes before the game began, the teams were warming up, there was a welcome to land acknowledgement, an indigenous cricket team was being recognised, and Eddie McGuire was there to add his presence to the occasion, the MC crowd "exciter" was doing his cricket shtick instead of his usual footy shtick that I remembered him for. Later, they also wheeled out Andy from Hamish and Andy family dressed as a Star player.) We watched as the green "Starman" came out and tried to rev up the crowd. He looked very weird, for a start, he didn't look like a star, more like a lizard, he was green, he rode about the boundary with one of those wheelie things that people knock over other people with or fall off, and he was busy being busy and excited and trying to occupy the crowd.

The crowd were fine. They had bought their own occupations. Beach balls and balloons.

Soon enough, it was all ready to go, the suitable hype had happened, the running through the big green inflated entrance contraption (somewhat like a jumping castle), a smattering of fireworks to say, hey, get happy now, and it was all on.

Twenty/twenty is at least engaging. Things happen and usually fairly quickly. (Mind you, Tests matches this season have become just that too.) Adelaide Strikers won the toss and decided to bat. Bad decision. They didn't bat very well, or the Melbourne Stars bowled better. Which ever way you looked at it, it was exciting to watch, something was always happening. Stars bowled out the entire team for 125. Harris for 17, Klinger, 25. Blizzard 7, Ferguson topped scored for 41, Franklin 7, Cooper 9, Crostwaite, 4. O'Brien 8, Thomas 4, Lyon 0 and it was all over. (BTW, who are all these men, I only recognised 3 people from the Strikers, a few more for the local Stars). There were seven catches, the Stars made it look easy. One run out, two bowled (which feels the most thrilling) and 1 LBW. So we got to see a bit of everything from a spectators perspective. It seemed that the Stars were very good bowlers and very good fielders. (Or alternately, that the others were a bit crap.) The crowd gets excited when Warnie bowls and I missed not listening on FOXTEL when he commentates when bowling. **(Diversion 4: I'd loved the wicket he got a few weeks when I'd caught a Foxtel game, he'd told the crew he was going to try a particular method and got the wicket. I wouldn't know enough as to whether he actually bowled what he said he would, but that whole shebang was kind of fun to witness. "I'm going to do that" and he did. Warnie is nothing if not an entertainment machine: just Google Warne and cyclist, Warne and Mobile Phones).**

In between the field changes, or new batsmen (and there were many for the Strikers), the organisers played music to add atmosphere. I have to say, they were trying a little too hard with the music, who cares about creating atmosphere. You can't fake atmosphere, but they were persistent. "Starwars" music was played when Warnie came on to bowl.

I noticed the police sitting inside the boundary was wearing more casual gear – tarckie pants and white runners to be exact, as was his mate sitting a few feet away. Their main task seemed to be catching stray beach balls and deflating them. Once he gave them back, but I think it depended on

what was happening in the game. They were put them under their seats and then the balls were just a pile of crumpled plastic.

The crowd didn't care. There seemed an ever ready supply of hot air to fill up more. Then there was also the Mexican wave. I hate it at football games, too distracting and I never take much notice, but cricket is a game of wonderful moments of nothing that the ABC commentators fill up with chatter and stories and the Fox crew or Channel 9 do the same, so when you are at home, all those changing of ends and changing of fields for the different batsmen, are covered by noise and often advertisements or toilet breaks or getting cups of tea. Here, you see all the little nuances, all the little discussions, the captain Cameron White directing his troops.

Warnie is very bossy when he comes in to bowl, his field has to be just so. He and Mum could get together and chat about this "control" thing so that life can run just the way it should!

We got to participate in lots of Mexican waves and they kept going around and around and around.

And not to forget the fireworks. How can I forget the fireworks? On "4"s being scored, small sparks were let off, and then on the two "sixes" bigger, higher more colourful fireworks. I waved the little cards, mine and Rachels, at the bingo moments. At the end, more fireworks were put into the centre and set off at the end of the game. The night was worth it for the fireworks alone.

Rachel succumbed to the temptation of hot chips, you couldn't escape rubbish food at the MCG, the smell wafted around the arena, perhaps vapours of hot chips were being surreptitiously pumped into the crowd along with the music, and the fake clapping noises that would start the crowd clapping. I was a good "mouse" and did what the stimulants told me to do, I would find myself clapping at the desired time and to the desired beat and rhythm.

So when the Melbourne Stars came to bat, it wasn't a threatening score to chase, though after losing the early wickets of Quiney run out for 2 and Wright caught for 9 and Voges "st" which I, now in writing, can't decipher or understand. Hussey and White settled things down until White was caught and Baily and Hussey were both not out, Hussey 41 and Bailey 19. They won with a few big smashes in the last few overs with a score of 129.

The game was fun and it was funny. As with football, it's about the people you go with, the big man who always sits in front of you (causing Rachel to move up a seat, there were plenty spare), the chattering of Rachel and her work mates in the second half as the Stars batted to their total with apparent ease, (and the techies became a little bored and the man in front a little annoyed at the chatter) and then the lovely time when you leave and get to take over Brunton Ave as pedestrians. And the wonderful hours spent doing something pleasant with a person you love. Thanks Rachel.

I think the crowd was about 20,000 plus, so the trains were easy and we were home after a night of firsts. The Soccer and Tennis seemed to be still in play in our sporting capital of the world.

Yvette Wroby

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