

The Cricket Match

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The time when the West Indies cricket eleven come to England to show the Englishmen the finer points of the game, Algernon was working in a tyre factory down by Chiswick way, and he lambast them English fellars for so.

"That is the way to, play the game," he tell them, as the series went on and West Indies making some big score and bowling out them English fellars for duck and thing, "you thought we didn't know how to play the game, eh! That is cricket, lovely cricket."

And all day he singing a calypso that he make up about the cricket matches that play, ending up by saying that in the world of sport, is to wait until the West Indies report.

Well in truth and in fact, the people in this country believe that everybody who come from the West Indies at least like the game even if they can't play it. But you could take it from me that it have some tests that don't like the game at all, and among them was Algernon. But he see a chance to give the Nordics tone and he get all the gen on the matches and the players, and come like an authority in the factory on cricket. In fact, the more they ask him the more convinced Algernon get that perhaps he have the talent of a Walcott in him only waiting for a chance to come out.

They have a portable radio hide away from the foreman and they listening to the score every day. And as the match going on you should hear Algernon: "Yes, lovely stroke," and "That should have been a six," and so on. Meanwhile he picking up any round object that near to hand and making demonstration, showing them how Ramadhin does spin the ball.

"I bet you used to play a lot back home," the English fellars tell him.

"Who, me!" Algernon say. "Man, cricket is breakfast and dinner where I come from. If you want to learn about the game you must go down there. I don't want to brag," he say, hanging his head a little, "but I used to live next door to Ramadhin, and we used to teach each other the fine points."

But what you think Algernon know about cricket in truth? The most he ever play was in the street, with a bat make from a coconut branch, a dry mango seed for ball, and a

pitchoil tin for wicket. And that was when he was a boy, and one day he get lash with the mango seed and since that time he never play again.

But all day long in the factory, he and another West Indian fellar name Roy getting on as if they invent the game, and the more the West Indies eleven score, the more they getting on. At last an Englisher name Charles, who was living in the suburbs, say to Algernon one morning:

"You chaps from the West Indies are really fine cricketers. I was just wondering . . . I play for a side where I live, and the other day I mentioned you and Roy to our captain, and he said why don't you organise an eleven and come down our way one Saturday for a match? Of course," Charles went on earnestly, "we don't expect to be good enough for you, but still, it will be fun."

"Oh," Algernon say airily, "I don't know. I uses to play in firstclass matches, and most of the boys I know accustom to a real good game with strong opposition. What kind of pitch you have? "

"The pitch is good," Charles say. "Real English turf."

Algernon start to hedge. He scratch his head. He say, "I don't know. What do you think about the idea, Roy?"

Roy decide to hem and leave Algernon to get them out of the mooch. He say, "I don't know, either. It sound like a good idea, though."

"See what you can do," Charles say, " and let me know this week."

Afterwards in the canteen having elevenses Roy tell Algernon: "You see what your big mouth get us into."

"My big mouth!" Algernon say. "Who it is say he bowl four top bats for duck one after the other in a match in Queen's Park Oval in Port of Spain? Who it is say he score two hundred and fifty not out in a match against Jamaica?"

"Well to tell you the truth Algernon," Roy say, now that they was down to brass tacks, "I ain't play cricket for a long time. In fact, I don't believe I could still play."

"Me too, boy," Algernon say. "I mean, up here in England you don't get a chance to practise or anything. I must be out of form."

They sit down there in the canteen cogitating on the problem.

"Anyway," Roy say, "it look as if we will have to hustle an eleven somehow. We can't back out of it now."

"I studying," Algernon say, scratching his head. "What about Eric, you think he will play? "

"You could ask him, he might. And what about Williams? And Wilky? And Heads? Those boys should know how to play."

"Yes, but look at trouble to get them? Wilky working night and he will want to sleep. Heads is a man you can't find when you want. And Williams — I ain't see him for a long time, because he owe me a pound and he don't come my way these days."

"Still," Roy say, "we will have to manage to get a side together. If we back out of this now them English fellars will say we are only talkers. You better wait for me after work this evening, and we will go around by some of the boys and see what we could do."

That was Monday, and the Wednesday night about twelve of the boys get together in Algernon room in Kensal Rise, and Algernon boiling water in the kettle and making tea while they discuss the situation.

"Algernon always have big mouth, and at last it land him in trouble."

"Cricket! I never play in my life! "

"I uses to play a little 'pass-out' in my days, but to go and play against an English side! Boy, them fellars like this game, and they could play, too!"

"One time I hit a ball and it went over a fence and break a lady window and . . ."

"All right, all right, ease up on the good old days, the problem is right now. I mean, we have to rally."

"Yes, and then when we go there everybody get bowl for duck, and when them fellars batting we can't get them out. Not me. "

But in the end, after a lot of blague and argument, they agree that they would go and play.

"What about some practice?" Wilky say anxiously. Wilky was the only fellar who really serious about the game.

"Practice ! " Roy say. "It ain't have time for that. I wonder if I could still hold a bat?" And he get up and pick up a stick Algernon had in the corner and begin to make stance.

"Is not that way to hold a bat, stupid. Is so."

And there in Algernon room the boys begin to remember what they could of the game, and Wilky saying he ain't playing unless he is captain, and Eric saying he ain't playing unless he get pads because one time a cork ball nearly break his shin-bone, and a fellar name Chips pull a cricket cap from his back pocket and trying it on in front a mirror.

So everything was arranged in a half-hearted sort of way. When the great day came, Algernon had hopes that they might postpone the match, because only eight of the boys turn up, but the English captain say it was a shame for them to return without playing, that he would make his side eight, too.

Well that Saturday on the village green was a historic day. Whether cold feet take the English side because of the licks the West Indies eleven was sharing at Lord's I can't say, but the fact is that they had to bowl first and they only coming down with some nice hop-and-drop that the boys only lashing for six and four.

When Algernon turn to bat he walk out like a veteran. He bend down and inspect the pitch closely and shake his head, as if he ain't too satisfied with the condition of it but had to put up with it. He put on gloves, stretch out his hands as if he about to shift a heavy tyre in the factory, and take up the most unorthodox stance them English fellars ever did see. Algernon legs wide apart as if he doing the split and he have the bat already swing over his shoulder although the bowler ain't bowl yet. The umpire making sign to him that he covering the wicker but Algernon do as if he can't see. He make up his mind that he rather go for LBW than for the stumps to fly.

No doubt an ordinary ball thrown with ease would have him out in two-twos, but as I was saying, it look as if the unusual play of the boys have the Englishers in a quandary, and the bowler come down with a nice hop-and-drop that a baby couldn't miss.

Algernon close his eyes and he make a swipe at the ball, and he swipe so hard that when the bat collide the ball went right out of the field and fall in the road.

Them Englishers never see a stroke like that in their lives. All heads turn up to the sky watching the ball going.

Algernon feel like a king: only thing, when he hit the ball the hat went after it and nearly knock down a English fellar who was fielding silly-mid-on-square-leg.

Well praise the Lord, the score was then sixty-nine and one set of rain start to fall and stop the match.

Later on, entertaining the boys in the local pub, the Englishers asking all sorts of questions, like why they stand so and so and why they make such and such a stroke, and the boys talking as if cricket so common in the West Indies that the babies either born with a bat or a ball, depending on if it would be a good bowler or batsman.

"That was a wonderful shot," Charles tell Algernon grudgingly. Charles still had a feeling that the boys was only talkers, but so much controversy raging that he don't know what to say.

"If my bat didn't fly out my hand," Algernon say and wave his hand in the air dramatically, as if to say he would have lost the ball in the other county.

"Of course, we still have to see your bowling," the English captain say. "Pity about the rain — usual English weather, you know."

"Bowling!" Algernon echo, feeling as if he is a Walcott and a Valentine roll into one. "Oh yes, we must come back some time and finish off the match."

"What about next Saturday? the captain press, eager to see the boys in action again, not sure if he was dreaming about all them wild swipe and crazy strokes.

"Sure, I'll get the boys together," Algernon say.

Algernon say that, but it wasn't possible, because nine of them wanted to go back after batting, frighten that they won't be able to bowl the Englishers out.

And Charles keep reminding Algernon all the time, but Algernon keep saying how the boys scatter about, some gone Birmingham to live, and others move and gone to work somewhere else, and he can't find them anywhere.

"Never mind," Algernon tell Charles, "next cricket season I will get a sharp eleven together and come down your way for another match. Now, if you want me to show you how I make that stroke . . ."