

St. Moritz CRICKET ON ICE



This was the third year of the event, and the organisation was faultless. No one wanted a repetition of last year's famous David Gower Vanishing Car Trick, either. It had disappeared through ice in the course of the proceedings.

Out there in the middle was a strip of green matting, carefully nailed to the surface. The sparkling outfield had been swept so that it was no more uneven than many a village ground on which football is played for half the year. Last year, apparently, the firmly struck ball had a habit of disappearing into a thickish covering of snow. Fours had been hard to come by.

And this year the pool of players had swelled: Mossy and Bouche and Turbo, Kipper, Finch and Millsy, Dog (or was it Hog?), Rupe and Charlie? of

the Daily Express, and any number of others not to mention Chris «Cow» Cowdrey, and Mark Nicholas were ready to make a game of it. Most aspects of the British game, from the talented and elegant to the brawny and basic were represented. I come from the latter school.

The management did not exert quite the same team discipline as the English team suffered under in Australia. Curfew was about 4 am, and training sessions were conducted ruthlessly in the bar of the Hotel Steffani or the King's Club or the Dracula Club. It was only when it came to team selection that there was any resemblance to England's senior side. It was ad hoc at best.

Dress: two pairs of socks, cricket boots, blue tracksuit trousers, two pairs of under pants, jockstrap, white

shirt, two sweaters topped with a blue sweatshirt emblazoned with the words St. Moritz Winter Cricket Club, one pair of skiing gloves and dark glasses.

There were two games, both of a 50 over nature – that is 25 overs per side. On the Saturday there was a curiously relaxed joust between the St. Moritz Club and the Cresta Run Team. The Cresta Run Team may have been suffering the loss of a few key players through injury, and, in spite of an extremely stylish innings from the Expressman and a gallant 4 for 40 by Chris Cowdrey, ran up the white flat a few runs short of the St. Moritz total.

Sunday's game for the Charles Heidsieck Trophy was an altogether tougher, tighter, family affair. One team was led by the redoubtable 9 foot tall Simon Daggart, the other by his ebullient, more normal sized



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cousin, Richard. If there was a needle match, this was it. The players assembled at about 12.30 for a 1.00 pm start, snow tans barely disguising the grey of night club fatigue beneath.

For the ardent cricket watcher there was much to admire. The mat wicket produced a remarkably even bounce, on the whole, and a degree of turn for the spinners. The occasional flier fizzed past the batsmen's ear, and sensibly, no one bowled off their long run. There was some flashing stroke play, and keen fielding as fielders scrambled to keep their feet on the frozen surface.

From time to time the frozen lake would emit a great creak or sharp crack, livening up both spectators and players. Para-skiers drifted like huge exotic butterflies down over the pitch, skidding to earth next door. From overhead came the roar of a hot air balloon shaped like a sort of Chinese chalet that drifted in the still air, but which was firmly tethered to a spot just beyond the boundary. Further out on the lake was a grandstand that had been built for the horseracing. Unfortunately this had had to be postponed because the ice was only 40 cm thick, thick enough for cricket and its camp followers, but not, apparently, for St. Moritz racing cognoscenti and the galloping nags. Still, there were a few hardy souls on horseback cantering about, providing the last bizarre detail to the idyllic scene - «Alpine Winter Pastimes» by Jan van Ostade.

Our crowd was a good deal larger than a good many I have seen on the village cricket ground. There was sprinkling of English who came to relish this universal statement of national character. But, for the most part they were Swiss, Germans, Italians and French who did their earnest best to make sense of what was going on. They were clearly more impressed by the oddity of it all, and less by the spectacle. It obviously confirmed why

we were such bad Europeans. But, as the note of explanation provided for the German speakers put it «Diese Zusammenstellung gibt eine Basisinformation über das Spiel, kann jedoch nicht einen Gesamtüberblick über die Vielfalt und die Variationen des faszinierenden und äusserst fairen Spiels umfassend dokumentieren.» (This summary gives a basic idea of the game; it cannot give any idea of the subtlety, variety and cunning of the game, which is uniquely fascinating and fair).

The fascination, variety and cunning dropped off sharply when the temperature plummeted as the sun began to wester behind yonder mountain peak. I was reminded of a basic fact of physics, that cold air sinks, and that a pair of cricket boots, albeit with two pairs of socks is insufficient protection against temperatures which drop to -30 degrees at night. Numbness had reached my knees by the time our gallant effort to make 36 off the last over had foundered. My own contribution had been two overs of mean off spin, which had been treated with the greatest respect by the batsmen on the few occasions that I had managed to get the ball to land on the pitch.

Speeches, champagne. Hillsy won the man of the match and the long weekend in Verbier. Mossy, also in the running, took it in good heart. The sponsors were warmly thanked.

«What about making it a cricket week next year?» someone suggested. «Good idea, what.»

«I think Nicholas's effort was rather dodgy.» said the captain of Kent.

It was about 1.45, and the baffled Italian was watching the captain of Kent Cricket Club and ex-captain of England as he carefully extricated the largest slab of fruit cake on the plate, and tucked it into his mouth. The captain of Hampshire crunched off

over the snow, a glass of champagne in either hand. The drinks break in the Charles Heidsieck Trophy 50 over cricket match on the lake at St. Moritz might well have baffled an even more experienced observer of England's greatest game than the visitor from Milan.

The day was brilliant, all those things that the St. Moritz Tourist Association could possibly have dreamed of, a range of colours immemorialised on a million chocolate boxes - piercing blue sky, dazzling white snow, the craggy rock faces of the surrounding mountains breaking through the sterile covering, the white clad pine trees cascading down the lower slopes to the lakes edge, the bells of the horsedrawn sleighs tinkling merrily in the still air, the massed ranks of Range Rovers drawn up around the boundary carefully marked out in blue dye and yellow plastic, wide meshed netting. Ah, clean, cosmopolitan, commercial Switzerland.

Cricket has been played at St. Moritz since the 1930s, but only in the summer. The possibility of playing it out there on the frozen lake had not occurred to even the bold pioneers of the Cresta Run and the Brabazon Cup. Nor would it have occurred to anyone in their right mind, but the ingenuity of tourist promotion and the subtle persuasion of sponsorship provided the impetus to make men bravely go where men had not gone before.

I, myself, was put in mind of Sir Henry Newbolt's Vital Lampada - «There's a breathless hush in the close to-night - Ten to make and the match to win -

A bumping pitch and a blinding light, An hour to play and the last man

I know what he meant by blinding light. I wonder if Sir Henry thought of equipping his lad with dark glasses?