

The Big Bat Affair

A Cricket Controversy

By

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Excerpt

THE BIG BAT AFFAIR

CHARACTERS

The Commentators

Mr Henry Slip

Mr Jonathan Point

The Chertsey Team

Mr Thomas White

Mr Edward 'Lumpy' Stevens

Mr John Wood

Mr Thomas Quiddington

Mr John Edmeads

The Hambledon Team

Mr Richard Nyren

Mr Thomas Brett

Mr John Small

Mr Ton Sueter

Mr William Hogsflesh

The Star and Garter Club

Duke of Dorset

Sir Horace Mann

Mr Henry Rowett

THE BIG BAT AFFAIR

A sublimely English scene. A field with trees. An area of flat short grass. A coloured tent on each side of the stage. A wooden bench between. Music plays as the lights come up. William Boyce.

This is a field in Laleham Burway, by the River Thames in Chertsey, Surrey.

The year is 1771. September.

In one of the tents a man in period cricket attire, rises and talks to the audience as the music fades. This is THOMAS WHITE.

WHITE

Good morrow friends. My name is Thomas White and I have a tale to tell. It is a tale of dering-do. Of David against Goliath and of the Summer Game.

The year is 1771 and the game of cricket is still in its formative years. The Dilshan Scoop has yet to be seen and the Jos Buttler ramp shot is the faintest glimmer in the distance. We have never heard of KP and as for the Big Bash, well.....

Now, as with any story which takes place in the mists of time, this one cannot be guaranteed in so far as accuracy is concerned. What you may see is fiction, characters have been invented, the story interpreted and adjusted for dramatic effect. Please, we seek not to offend any descendants of those who actually took part in the story, myself included. What is important though is that the main thread of this tale is based on contemporary reports and subsequent writings. So please, indulge us and we will do our best to entertain.

A word to the wise, if you are not interested and intrigued by the game of gentlemen, please do not leave your seats and seek sanctuary in the nearest hostelry. Sit back and witness one of the biggest controversies in the history of cricket.

The Big Bat Affair!

As the lights change. WHITE leaves and from either side of the stage, two men enter wearing period day wear walk towards each other and shake hands and stand in front of the central bench. These are HENRY SLIP AND JONATHAN POINT

SLIP Well good morning everyone. My name is Henry Slip and....

POINT My name is Jonathan Point and we are your commentary team here at this splendid cricket ground at Laleham Burway in the County of Surrey.

SLIP It is 23 September 1771 and we are here to witness a tussle between Chertsey, the home team, and the team from Hambledon in Hampshire. Looks like the weather is going to stay fine doesn't it Jonathan?

POINT It certainly does Henry and this is an important match with a rather attractive prize for the winners.

SLIP Yes, indeed, £50 will be awarded to the winning team and that is certainly not something to be sneezed at.

POINT Goodness me no.

SLIP Indeed not, but before the players take to the field, we have a few moments just to give viewers and listeners a little background on this great game of ours.

POINT One question I am continually asked is where the game of cricket originated.

SLIP Well Jonathan as you know, that's not a very easy question to answer and we only have a short while before we get underway, but many people think it first saw the light of day in Anglo-Saxon times when shepherds played with a crook and a ball of wool. The crook was called a 'crice'.

POINT Ah but then you have the game played on the continent with a small three-legged stool called a 'krickstoel' – that's Flemish by the way.

SLIP Or what about the game of 'criquet'?

POINT Is that your actual French?

SLIP Yes, French cricket!

POINT It's alright ladies and gentlemen, we can assure you cricket is not French.

SLIP Except the version one plays in the garden or at the seaside with the bat held in front of your legs.

POINT Indeed. But cricket is English. Make no mistake! Not Dutch, French or, God forbid, American!

SLIP Where?

POINT Good question.

SLIP America won't be discovered for another five years, so it can't be there.

POINT Well as long as we are clear about that we can continue with the story.

SLIP Now the game has come a long way in a short time.

POINT A game of gentlemen of course and played in a gentlemanly spirit.

SLIP But there were still only 2 stumps and a single bail.

POINT The ball was red though.

SLIP Not white or pink,

POINT Or even blue as seen in women's cricket in the late 19th Century.

SLIP But that's all for the future.

POINT The ball was still bowled underarm.

SLIP Overarm bowling not becoming legal till 1835.

POINT That was the end of the grasscutter.

SLIP Until Trevor Chappell revived it's use in 1981!

POINT Indeed, but time now to visit the teams as they prepare for the match.

SLIP The Chertsey team made up of workers, labourers, gardeners and innkeepers.

POINT And the Hambledon players made up of Gentlemen of London. Posh.

SLIP Very posh!

Lights change and there is a seamless link between scenes with music as the Chertsey Team come into one of the tents. They are THOMAS WHITE, EDWARD 'LUMPY' STEVENS, JOHN WOOD, THOMAS QUIDDINTON and JOHN EDMEADS. They are preparing their kit and drinking and smoking pipes etc.

WHITE Well here we are again.

STEVENS We need this win.

QUID Five jars and a large pork pie

STEVENS Mike Gating eat your heart out.

WOOD Laxatives in their tea?

EDMEADS Apparently corn cockle seeds work.

WOOD Really?

EDMEADS So I hear.

QUID Well I've got news for you. Corn cockle seeds also have another effect.

EDMEADS Aphrodisiac?

QUID Not quite. They are an effective poison though!

WHITE Ah! Dead end.

STEVENS I don't think mass murder would help us win.

EDMEADS Well, there's nothing in the laws of cricket against it!

Laughter

WOOD There's nothing in the laws about running the opposition through with a sword, but you're not going to do it. Are you?

WHITE Well we don't seem to be any nearer a solution to our current dilemma.

QUID Fundamentally, I suppose we could just play better.

WOOD Good Lord. Never thought of that!

STEVENS Deeply insightful!

EDMEADS What about substituting the ball for one of the explosive variety?

WHITE Brilliant.

QUID Ever tried picking up a cannonball? Let alone bowling with one.

WOOD Murder is off the agenda Edmeads, whether you do it with poison, rapier or incendiary.

EDMEADS Maybe not my best ideas.

STEVENS You're not kidding.

Laughter