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Penguins Stopped Play

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Extract

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I

Antarctica

I AM IN ANTARCTICA. I am standing at Cape Evans, a promontory on the western side of Ross Island, a rugged, solitary slab of rock that thrusts through the clean lines of the Ross Ice Shelf. Or, to be more precise, I am standing nine miles out to sea from Cape Evans, on the iced-over surface of the ocean. My weight is supported only by a membrane of frozen sea water. It is a gorgeous, windless day, the sky an impossibly perfect cornflower blue. Or, to be more precise, it is a gorgeous, windless night, for, despite the sunshine, the time is half past three in the morning.

The scene that presents itself is one that instinctively commands hushed respect. Behind me tower the massive, smoking bulk of Mount Erebus, a 13,000-foot active volcano smothered from top to toe in creamy snow, and the harder black wedge of its lieutenant, Mount Terror. Ahead, the Olympus range of the Transantarctic Mountains stretches to the northern horizon, the serried peaks riven only by gigantic frozen waterfalls of ice: the Wilson Glacier, the Oates-Piedmont Glacier, the Nordenskjöld Ice Tongue. This is an almost entirely white world. Even through my sunglasses, the brilliant glare of sun on snow lances effortlessly into my streaming pupils. The silence is absolute.

In the distance, a man in a bright vermilion cagoule is running towards me, picking up pace as his thermal boots grip the ice. He is a teacher from New Zealand, and his name is Craig. I blink my eyes dry and try to focus intently on the tightly gripped fingers of his right hand. When he arrives at

a spot approximately twenty-two yards away from me, he leaps high into the air and releases the object in his hand at speed in my direction. It is a cricket ball. I am holding a bat. I am doing what any right-thinking Englishman should be doing at times of hardship and adversity: I am playing cricket. The silence is absolute because, of course, it is rank bad manners to carry on chattering once the bowler has begun his run-up.

Well, of course, it wasn't a real cricket bat. It was an oar. And the wicket was really a purple rucksack. But the ball was real enough – trust a Kiwi to pack a cricket ball in his luggage on a trip to Antarctica. The match was New Zealand v. The Rest of the World, and I was opening the batting for The Rest of the World – the only time in my life that's ever going to happen. Craig's first ball kept low and skidded harmlessly past the purple nylon of my off stump. Cricket balls don't actually bounce a great deal on ice, in case you're interested. No? Oh, very well then. Back to the match. His second ball did much the same; but the third was on target. I jabbed hastily down on it, and it squirted down to long leg for what looked like an easy two. As I turned for the second run, however, I beheld an extraordinary sight: the long-leg fielder was being attacked by a gigantic seabird. It was an enormous skua, all beak and talons, and it had evidently arrived at the erroneous conclusion that the ball was a big, succulent red egg. Fielder and ball were locked in a whirling dance of brown feathers and Day-Glo nylon.

Now, there are those who would argue that sport should always follow a clear-cut moral code. In the late eighties, for instance, the football team I support, Everton, were banned from European competition because of the violent activities of certain Liverpool supporters. Nick Hornby, a better man than I, delivered a well-argued homily in *Fever Pitch* to the effect that any decent, upstanding member of the human race could only concur with the decision. I, on the other hand, couldn't help feeling that it was a monstrous injustice. And so it is with no little embarrassment that I must confess, here and

now, that whereas others saw a man being attacked by a giant bird – a fellow human being in distress, let's face it – I saw only the opportunity to steal a third run. And what's more, what was even better, to turn a streaky inside edge into an all-run four.

By the time the bird had finally been driven away using various nautical-looking pieces of wood, and I was several runs to the good, it was clear that our hushed and deserted white world was about to undergo a profound change. Some fifty yards away was the ice edge, where our tour vessel, a robust little Russian scientific ship that had been tossed about like a cork on the way down, now lay moored. Behind was the deep, cerulean mirror of the Ross Sea itself. Suddenly the surface was broken, the light scattered like stars, by a pod of killer whales which porpoised the length of the jagged ice edge. Next, rearing out of the water, a glistening humpback whale followed suit. Thunderstruck with excitement, we stopped to watch. Then, when the whales looked as if they would porpoise off into the distance, they all performed an about-turn, and back they came, bounding in and out of the water as they passed by a second time. The humpback, I swear, even cocked its head to one side, to get a better view of us. They were watching us watching them. It was quite incredible. Never before had I seen this many spectators at an amateur cricket match.

It wasn't just the whales. A leopard seal, perhaps the most fearsome predator of the southern ocean, hauled itself up on an ice floe to take a gander. Ignore the 'seal' bit – think 'leopard' here. These creatures are twelve feet long, with evil little heads and wicked jaws. Imagine the head of Ridley Scott's Alien atop the body of Mike Gatting after a particularly hefty tea. One of them recently killed and ate a wet-suited British research scientist who was swimming in the Ross Sea. Luckily for us, the leopard seal has a top speed of about 2 m.p.h. on dry land (the Mike Gatting comparison becomes ever more relevant). If it was indeed eyeing us up

with a view to a tasty snack, it was clearly out of luck. That is, as long as the ice beneath our feet held firm.

Clearly, our thundering footsteps on the ice sheet had echoed into the very depths of the Ross Sea below, and had brought a whole David Attenborough-documentary's worth of wildlife up to take a look. It was not long before the first penguin hopped out of the water, wandered across, and stood there on a length, facing me down as I brandished my oar. The game halted. We gazed at each other, our eyes locked. Hell, I wasn't scared. He was eighteen inches high. I knew everything there was to know about his breeding habits, gestation period, feeding habits and moulting timetable. The fact was, I knew a hell of a lot about penguins. He, on the other hand, was a relative novice when it came to cricket. I had the advantage, both physical and intellectual, and I think he could sense that.

I should explain at this juncture that if you choose to holiday in the Antarctic you have to spend five days on a boat, being battered by gales for the first two of them, then grinding slowly and agonizingly through hundreds of miles of pack ice for the remainder of the trip. The daylight being constant, you soon stop going to bed, and resort to catnaps instead. You are up for nearly twenty-four hours a day, with nothing to do but eat, read, play cards or listen to music on headphones. To fill your time, the expedition naturalists lecture you constantly about penguins. By the time you get within spitting distance of the South Pole, you have learned more about penguins than the entire staff of London Zoo. I knew everything there was to know about the king penguin (the one on the biscuit wrapper – coloured chest), the gentoo (red feet), the rockhopper (Denis Healey eyebrows), the emperor (fat bastard), the royal (looks like Michael Winner after a few drinks) and many, many more. So I knew by its black face and white staring eyes that the penguin now before me was an Adélie, named by the early French explorer Dumont d'Urville after his wife. As to what had prompted that romantic gesture –

whether his wife had an especially beak-shaped nose, or had smelt of fish – history sheds no light. Suffice to say that the Adélie, being named after a French *girl*, is one of the more effeminate penguin species. So, in strict defiance of the Antarctic convention that prohibits the disturbing of wildlife, I hustled the little fellow away.

The game lurched on. The next ball was fast, short and wide – the bowler was a Kiwi, not an Aussie – so I had a speculative welly at it. For once, I connected. As so often when I've hit a ball as hard as I can, the ball didn't actually go anywhere, as all the power seemed to flow backwards from the impact, into the bat. In this case the oar actually shattered, into a trillion pieces. It had spent the night out on deck, and was frozen solid: wicketkeeper and slips alike were showered with tiny, glassy shards of frozen wood. Again the game had to be halted, while another oar was fetched.

The delay was an open invitation to the penguins. They came in waves, hundreds of them, crowding across the outfield, mingling with the slips, poking around at silly mid-off, blocking the bowlers' run-up, and invading the wicket itself. Antarctica is famous for its immense penguin colonies, million-strong bird cities that reassemble every spring in the same spot, year after year. Here it appeared that we were about to found a brand-new colony. Naturalists would one day be confounded as to its origin. One penguin on its own I could bully, but against wave after wave of inquisitive little monochrome invaders we were all helpless. Before long there was a vast crowd of them, filling the space between myself and the bowler, peering up in confusion. Waving the splintered handle of the oar to keep back the dinner-jacketed hordes, I felt like the conductor of the LSO at a particularly drunken staff party. Already, many of the outfielders had run back to the ship to grab their cameras. There was only one option open to us. For the first time – surely – in history, a cricket match would have to be cancelled because penguins had stopped play.

★

So what the hell was I doing there, in Antarctica, facing up to two hundred untamed Adélie penguins with only the handle of a frozen oar to defend myself? Why had I travelled fourteen thousand miles to play this game? Why had I braved the heaving seas of the Roaring Forties, the Furious Fifties and Screaming Sixties? (I didn't name the latitudes in question – that really is what they're called – but, believe me, there's nothing camp about a forty-foot wave.) Well, it was all the fault of Captain Robert Falcon Scott, RN, leader of the failed Antarctic expedition of 1911–12. Cape Evans was his base, and Shackleton's before him. A long, long time ago – more than a quarter of a century ago, in fact – I and a few friends had begun a cricket team, which we named after Captain Scott, that most splendid of runners-up. Inevitably, books and videos about the Captain had followed, presents from well-meaning relatives. I had stored up a modicum of useless knowledge about polar exploration as a result. Many years later, when I developed an enjoyable sideline as an occasional travel writer, it seemed entirely logical for a national newspaper to suggest that I travel a mere fourteen thousand miles to see a hut – the hut where Scott, Oates, Evans, Bowers, Wilson and Co. had overwintered before their last, fatal journey.

We'd already stopped at Shackleton's hut on the way down: it was an incredible place, freeze-dried by the Antarctic cold at the exact moment that Shackleton and his men had abandoned it, running down to the shore to board their relief ship. Here was a veritable polar *Marie Celeste*: Shackleton's own filth-encrusted socks hung rigid above his reindeer-skin sleeping bag; his boots stood to attention on the floor below. A half-read copy of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, offering discounted Eton collars, lay unfurled on a half-made bunk; uneaten hams hung from roof-hooks; the shelves groaned with tins of tripe and onions, Bird's egg powder and Heinz India Relish. Scott's hut promised more of the same on a grander scale, tinged with the desperately sad knowledge that – unlike Shackleton, who was to survive a series of remarkable escapades – Scott and his men

had walked out of there to their deaths, beaten to the Pole by Amundsen and caught by ill chance in one of the worst blizzards in Antarctic history on the return journey.

As our little vessel headed south in glorious sunshine, nosing optimistically around Cape Evans, we were met with an unpleasant sight: sea ice, nine miles of it, thick and unseasonal, clogging the shore. Our ship was not an icebreaker. It seemed we had reached the end of the road: 13,991 miles was to be our limit. There was nothing we could do to force a passage. I was utterly downcast: after all those years of being bombarded with polar literature, Scott's hut had taken on an almost spiritual significance. It had become the Kaaba at the heart of my own personal Mecca. (That, and the awkward fact that I was being paid to write an article about it.) Refusing to be beaten, I bearded Rodney Russ, the expedition leader, in his den. Russ was a genial Kiwi who put me in mind of Sir Les Paterson, if Sir Les had gone three years without cutting or combing his hair. Such setbacks were part and parcel of Antarctic life for an experienced old campaigner like Rodney, but, incredibly, moved by my predicament, he agreed to my suggestion that we mount a ground assault. Why, it was only an eighteen-mile round trip. We could actually see Scott's hut in the distance, taunting us, a little wooden rectangle on the tip of Cape Evans: it didn't look that far away.

We set out across the sea ice in the small hours – not that the Antarctic summer makes any distinction between the small hours and the middle of the afternoon. The slippery surface and the extraordinary glare aside, it was easy going. Bravely, Rodney decided that he should forge ahead, ten yards out in front of everyone else. We fell in behind. After five miles of pleasant Sunday stroll, reality kicked in when Rodney suddenly disappeared. A small dark hole in the ice marked the spot where he had last been seen. Milliseconds of utter panic followed, then waves of relief as he spluttered to the surface, shivering fit to burst but otherwise all right. Thankfully, it appeared that there had been no leopard seals in the vicinity. He was fished

out, and items of dry clothing were donated. Ruefully – and very gingerly – we made our way back to the ship.

A pall of disappointment hung over our little camp. The whole day had been set aside for the visit to Scott's hut. There was nothing else on the menu, nothing to do.

'I've got a cricket ball in my bag,' said Craig the teacher.

A score of faces – Australian, New Zealand and English – lit up.

But why Captain Scott, I hear you ask? Why a turn-of-the-century failed explorer, who to my knowledge played a great many games of polar football, but never even dreamed of a game of Antarctic cricket? The answer to that lies in another snowy landscape and a cold college room warmed by a single spluttering gas fire in the deep, icy winter of 1978.

2

Oxford

THE WHOLE CAPTAIN Scott obsession was down, in the first place, to Robert. Marcus, an old school friend whom I'd known since I was ten, had arrived at the same university at the same time as me, and had fetched up on a landing in Worcester College with two other first-years, Terry and Robert. Marcus, Terry and I had experienced roughly similar north-London upbringings of an almost sublime uneventfulness: reciting passages from the previous night's *Monty Python* or discovering that there was arctic roll for lunch had usually been the highlights of our school day. Robert, however, was different. His life had been *exotic*.

Robert was dapper and good-looking, with the clipped tones of Empire. He had grown up in Penang, in northern Malaysia, and had boarded at Repton. His father had been an executive with Standard Chartered Bank, but had also served as Belgian consul in his spare time – which was something of a mystery, as there was by all accounts nothing remotely Belgian about him. The family had also briefly been posted to Iran, where Robert's beloved brother 'Pickaxe' had been conceived. The nickname derived from his sibling's majestic aquiline nose, the result, Robert assured us darkly, of an illicit liaison between his mother and a high-ranking Persian. Robert and Pickaxe's had been a thoroughly colonial childhood, cosseted by servants and swathed in luxury. Their garden was so huge, Robert informed us, that David Attenborough had once filmed part of a wildlife documentary there. His family's life was straitjacketed by the unwritten

laws of colonial society. His father, said Robert, would never even contemplate going to work without first breakfasting on Frank Cooper's Oxford Marmalade. On one occasion the great man had presented himself at the breakfast table at six o'clock sharp, as was his custom, only to discover a different marmalade before him, which he had refused to touch. Upon being informed that the house, and indeed the whole town, had run out of Frank Cooper's, he had simply sat at the breakfast table, unmoving, while the servants were dispatched to neighbouring houses in search of a jar. Not until roughly midday had any Frank Cooper's been located, enabling breakfast finally to proceed.

All Robert's heroes were like this: inflexible Empire eccentrics, men whose code of conduct took priority over any hardships, real or perceived. He absolutely adored Captain Scott, whose clipped refusal to surrender his manners or his dignity in the face of an icy death thrilled him to the core. Another hero was Cecil Rhodes, simply for the words of advice he had given: 'Remember only this, that you are British, and in the lottery of life you have won first prize.' Then there was R. C. Edwards, who had entered the record books as the only first-class wicketkeeper to lose all his luggage, including a full set of *Wisdens*, on an expedition to Uzbekistan. Robert found it hilarious, as we all did, that anyone should consider a full set of *Wisdens* to be vital expedition luggage. Of course Robert possessed his own set of *Wisdens*, and had practically memorized every statistic therein. He loved cricket, and was himself a graceful and elegant batsman in the Ranjitsinhji mould.

Robert's personality was both intoxicating and a little mad. His relationship with cricket, particularly, verged on the erotic. He frequently went to bed wearing cricket equipment, and had mysteriously managed to wear out the thumb and index finger of his right-hand wicketkeeping inner. He had changed his middle name to Viv, after Viv Richards. At school, he had once accepted a bet which involved tiptoeing

into his housemaster's living room, past the armchair in which said housemaster slumbered, across to the fridge, and stealing therefrom a six-pack of beer. All of which had to be accomplished – and was – stark naked, except for cricket pads, gloves, spikes, a bat and his first-eleven cap. Alcohol, incidentally, was to Robert as prayer is to a Muslim. It would not have surprised me to see him genuflect in the direction of Thresher's. He could easily knock back a whole bottle of gin or vodka at one sitting, without – apparently – suffering the slightest effect, although as an impecunious student he had earmarked Martini as the most economical pence-per-proof option.

One of the first things that Robert did at Oxford was to rebrand Terry. Neither of his two Christian names – Terry or Darren – would do, so he was renamed Terence. He was a Young Conservative – bizarrely, he became William Hague's running mate in the student elections, where he did spectacularly badly – but that too was discouraged. Robert did not approve of the Young Conservatives. Sartorially, however, Terence was deliberately left to tread his own extraordinary path. He had giant Hank Marvin spectacles (he was amazingly short-sighted) perched above an enormous nose. He had bought a job lot of fluorescent-orange synthetic shirts with vast aeroplane collars and brown, flapping flared trousers from Wembley Market in 1973, and was grimly determined to wear them all out before buying any more. Unfortunately, they were utterly indestructible, being made of that stuff they insulate the Space Shuttle with, and I believe he still has them. In the heyday of punk and new wave, while the rest of us struggled into drainpipe trousers and jackets with impossibly tiny lapels, Robert and Terence made the oddest pair, the one dressed like a 1930s bank manager in a suit, tie, waistcoat and watch chain, the other looking like a reject from a Slade audition.

No matter how much ridicule any garment aroused, however, Terence would never part with it until he actually

needed to buy a replacement, for he was quite staggeringly mean. He always claimed to have no money, and never bought a drink. On one occasion he was manhandled to the ground in a pub, and his wallet was extracted. It contained £70. It was, he squawked, 'all accounted for'.

Robert found Terence endlessly amusing, and played constant tricks on him. He would sneak into his room while he was in the shower, and sellotape his bottle glasses to the ceiling. He decided that Terence was a Russian spy (he was of Russian-Jewish extraction), and left little messages 'from Mr Brezhnev' hidden throughout his room; they were still turning up amid his belongings several years later. On the night before Terence's exams, Robert woke him up at 3 a.m. and refused to let him go back to sleep until he had 'spoken to the Kremlin' via his tormentor's umbrella handle. But, just as Robert's regard for the heroes of Empire was tempered with ridicule, so his constant ridiculing of Terence was indisputably founded on mutual regard. These strange friends of Marcus seemed a lot more entertaining than my own fellow students at Brasenose College, who for the most part spent their days toiling in the lab and their evenings vomiting up lager, so I found myself spending increasing amounts of time with them.

The third member of the trio, Marcus, was weedy, fastidious and amusing – and, it goes without saying, far more normal than the other two. Marcus and I had attended Highgate School, which was run at that time by a headmaster named Roy Giles, a man with all the charisma of a cereal packet. We were both keen on cricket, in theory at least, but the chances of our ever getting a game were nil. Highgate liked to hold back its slower pupils for a year or two, which meant that sport was invariably dominated by bigger boys. Worse still, Giles had put those bigger boys (most of whom bore a disturbing resemblance to Bruce Foxton of the Jam) in charge of their fellows, and therefore in charge of who did what. On any given summer afternoon's games, the slow-

witted elite relaxed at cricket while the smaller, weedier, more academic kids – in a kind of bizarre revenge for their classroom performances – were forced to plough for mile after mile across Hampstead Heath, splashing through bogs, being stung by nettles and scratched by brambles. After seven years there, I had never been allowed even to pick up a cricket bat. It was beginning to rankle.

Consequently, one of the things both Marcus and I had been looking forward to at university was the chance to play a bit of cricket. Unfortunately, we ran into rather similar obstacles. Upon arrival at Brasenose College, I immediately sought out the cricket captain, a burly northerner called Phil Hanley, and made my keenness clear.

'What do you do?' he asked. 'Bat or bowl?'

I was forced to confess that I had never actually played the game. I just wanted to try it. It looked like fun on the telly – it seemed pretty easy, in point of fact. Somebody lobbed a ball in your direction, and you whacked it for miles and miles. Piece of piss.

It was, Hanley explained tartly, out of the question that I be allowed to play. Cricket at Brasenose was an extremely serious matter. Unlike other colleges, Brasenose did not even possess a second eleven, lest their second-rate endeavours scuff up the hallowed turf of the college square.

'I could practise,' I offered, 'and try to learn the game.'

'Look,' said Hanley, 'I'll tell you what I'll do, as a concession. Every year we have a one-off novelty game, where we wheel out a barrel of beer and everyone gets blind drunk, until the players can barely stand up. It's a right laugh. I'll let you play in that if you like.'

'But I want to play cricket, not get drunk,' I protested. 'I can get drunk any time I want.'

'In that case,' Hanley elaborated, 'you can piss off.'

The die was cast. Marcus and I had not been allowed to play cricket by our colleges. Robert was good enough to play for his college, but couldn't be arsed to get up early enough for

the practice sessions. Terence – well, Terence couldn't play cricket either, but he'd happily tag along with the rest of us if we felt like doing something about it. There was only one option open to us. We would start our own cricket team. We would play fantasy village-green cricket against horny-handed blacksmiths, not spotty, serious-minded student cricket. And we would name our team after Captain Scott, because he came second, and because he did so in the right spirit. We would call it the Captain Scott Invitation XI, because anybody – absolutely *anybody* – could invite themselves to play. It didn't matter if they'd never played before, or if they were complete rubbish – just as long as they did their best.

Our first task was to recruit some more players, which we did by means of a classified ad. None of the motley bunch that assembled in my college room that wintry night had ever played the game before, except Tom Cairns, a would-be actor in impossibly tight leather trousers, who assured us that he was a rather nifty bowler. Now, when somebody tells you that they're rather good at any sport, it means they're either (a) a five times Olympic gold medallist or (b) utterly useless. We took Cairns at face value – none of us had ever seen trousers that tight before – and it was only when his bowling average sailed past the 100 mark in mid-season that we realized he too was a member of the latter category.

Our first game, against the village of Bladon, north of Oxford, could not have conformed to the pictured idyll more closely: a blazing mid-May day of the kind that comes around once every hundred years or so, a gorgeous wooden-railed pitch at the bottom of a hill beneath the stately bulk of Blenheim Palace, sheep grazing along the boundary, a pond glittering between the trees, and an opposition comprised entirely of gnarled Mummerset yokels. One of our players asked for ice in the pub. 'Oice? For the Captain Scott XI? Har! Har! Har!' The entire pub rocked with laughter. 'No, I really would like some ice,' he explained, whereupon the pub fell

about again, a procedure that was to be repeated several times before he retreated in disarray.

It was only when the game began that it finally dawned on us that we didn't have the slightest idea what we were doing. I made the deeply humiliating personal discovery that my own cricketing ability roughly approximated to that of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. I couldn't bat, bowl or field, let alone captain. Batting, for instance, bore no resemblance whatsoever to the childishly easy activity portrayed on television. If you've never tried it, imagine trying to hit a swerving cherry tomato travelling at 100 m.p.h, wielding a broom handle. After Bladon had declared on a comfortable 250–4 (a huge score for a village match, had we but known it), we proceeded serenely enough to 58, courtesy of Robert and Tom Cairns, who could bat a bit even if he couldn't bowl. Thereafter Robert was given out lbw by Terence (incorrectly, as it turned out, for he hadn't read the rules) and the whole thing fell to pieces. Robert chased Terence into the trees with a cricket stump. The next eight men scored five runs between them. Five of us made 0. I did indeed manage to whack my first ball for miles and miles: unfortunately I did so vertically, and was caught when it finally returned earthward, having disturbed several Russian satellites. We were all out for 63, and lost by 187 runs.

And so the newborn Captain Scott XI went about its business. We quickly became known as the worst team in Oxfordshire, utterly inept in every department. In one match we were all out for 7, in another for 8. I hit every ball I received vertically upward, and by the end of the season had mustered the princely total of one run. My only consolation was that Marcus had accumulated 0. Even our wicketkeeping – this was Robert's job – was a hopeless mess, because Robert refused to collect any ball travelling down the leg side of the wicket, lest the need to scurry across compromised his dignity. Such leg byes frequently accounted for a quarter of the opposition total, usually more than our whole team had managed between

them. Robert was discreetly replaced behind the stumps by Terence, who was no better; indeed, Lot's wife would have been more agile. Terence did however, afford us all some amusement when he took a particularly fast delivery in the testicles, after which it was discovered that he had not been wearing a box. Once he had finished writhing around in agony he was offered one, but declined, as there was only one ball left in the innings, and such a thing was hardly likely to happen twice in two balls. You've guessed it: that is, of course, precisely what happened next. The first time, he had received some rudimentary medical attention. The second time, he was left to roll around in agony by himself, as the rest of us were rolling around alongside him, helpless with laughter.

The Captain Scott XI may have been rubbish, but it did not lack for members. There were plenty of misfits willing to throw in their lot with us over the ensuing years. There was the oddly nicknamed Greenbum, who appeared to be about twelve, and insisted on playing in a tie and brogues, essaying a variety of impressions of famous Test bowlers. There was Bob, a fat northern piss-artist, who stood in the general election as Oxford's Monster Raving Loony Party candidate. Some of the new recruits could even play cricket. One player, by the name of Roly, had even been in the Magdalen College first team, but was now unable to go back. A terrible sufferer from piles, he had been advised by the college doctor that a woman's sanitary towel placed in his underwear would prevent blood spots from seeping through the seat of his cricket whites. The next day, opening the batting for Magdalen, he had set off for a quick single, only to find the field frozen in attitudes of confusion and horror as he ran his bat in. There, in the middle of the wicket, having made its escape via the ankle of his trousers, was a bloodied woman's sanitary towel. He walked over, calmly replaced it in his underwear, allowed himself to be clean bowled at the next opportunity, marched back in the direction of the pavilion, straight past it and on to a passing bus, never to return.