

## Cricket versus Baseball as an Engine of Growth

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Until the pioneering work of Solow (1956) forced growth theorists to focus on things such as savings rates and capital accumulation, economists searched far and wide for engines of economic growth. One of the seemingly eccentric streams of the literature considered the relative effectiveness of sport in spurring economies along. Marshall (1889) was the first of the classical economists to suggest that the character-building aspect of sport may play an integral role in harnessing the capacities of an economy towards productive ends. His thoughts on the issue are best highlighted by a now-obscure lecture he gave on a 1891 visit to Yale University,

*It is with very little doubt that I now propose to you that the pursuits of sport and commerce are inextricably linked. A country whose sporting activities create a productive and useful labor force is a country that will see its material well-being achieve its maximum level.<sup>1</sup>*

At the time, Marshall proposed that the sports that would best serve as an engine of growth were those that "involved the carrying, and sometimes the tossing, of a ball; and the frequent collision of opposing bodies."<sup>2</sup> Subsequent research naturally looked towards gridiron football in the US, and rugby football in the UK.

Marshall's case for gridiron and rugby did not last long. In a footnote to a theorem on the existence of irrational numbers in  $\sigma$ -dimensional lattices, Russell and Whitehead (1908) found an error in Marshall's result. Russell and Whitehead had stumbled onto something would keep economists at odds for nearly fifty years. They found that the necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for a sport to be an engine of growth are (1) that it uses an ash implement to strike a round object; and (2) that at any time the majority of players spend their time standing idly in an expanse of grass, or sitting on a wooden bench doing nothing. Within months of this result becoming public, opposing schools of thought developed, separated, as they often are, by the Atlantic Ocean. Cricket and baseball very quickly became the centers of growth theorists' attention.

Cricket's proponents soon became known as the Marylebone School (although some refused to call it anything but the Surrey School), and baseball's proponents were confusingly referred to as the Polo School.<sup>3</sup> As one can imagine, the intellectual fight was tinged with cultural tension, and was fought with equal fury by both sides. As if the debate was not hot

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<sup>1</sup> Marshall (1892), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Marshall (1892), p. 210.

<sup>3</sup> This is because the most successful baseball team of the early part of the century was the New York Giants, who played at the Polo Grounds.

enough, a previously-unknown Canadian mathematician with mixed feelings about the debate would nearly set it afire. Pierre MacDonald (1927) proved that the number of sports that can satisfy the Russell-Whitehead conditions, *and* create economic growth, is exactly one. Even more alarming, his fourth corollary states that there are some sports that can satisfy the Russell-Whitehead conditions, but, if adopted, would actually tend to cause economic *contraction*. Thus, only one of the schools could be right, and the other could be dreadfully wrong.

Given that the statistical techniques of the time were insufficiently sophisticated to provide an empirical solution to the problem, the debate raged on. The end result of the rage was a hodgepodge of ad hoc theories. One prominent view was that economic growth is based on having a labor force that is capable of working long hours for days on end at the most tedious and seemingly-pointless of tasks. Although cricket and baseball can be said to provide the appropriate conditioning for this type of activity, it was argued that cricket did so in spades. Baseball's proponents countered that cricket may have the advantage of matches strung out over five days, but the fact that they could also end in draws should more than compensate. It was argued that because a baseball game continues until there is a winner, the objectives that it instills in a labor force are more conducive to the rough and competitive world of economic activity.

Cricket, the Marylebone School countered, required that players take the long view, resulting in the sound long-term strategies also required for sustained economic growth. On the other hand, the Polo School argued that because a single day of rain will make a five day match pointless, such long-term strategies provide the wrong lessons for the economy. What baseball provides is a series of interlinked short-term strategies that are only temporarily sidetracked by acts of God.

The debate raged until the entire field fell into disrepute in the early 1950s. The backlash began with attacks by the French economist Maurice Le Point. As a Frenchman, Le Point could not see any point in cricket nor in baseball, and failed to see how either could have anything at all to do with the economy. His most biting insight, which purportedly came to him while attending a St. Louis Browns baseball game, roughly translates as "there is a fine line between playing baseball and standing in a pasture dressed like an idiot."<sup>4</sup> Although aimed at baseball, this certainly rings true for cricket as well. The Polo and Marylebone Schools were devastated. Le Point's comment struck like a rapier through the hearts of their positions. They were never to recover. So powerful was Le Point's attack that nearly all traces of the two schools have been purged from the economics literature. The early works began to disappear from libraries, and later editions of Keynes (1936) do not include the original twenty-fifth chapter on the role of cricket in ending the Great Depression.

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<sup>4</sup> Le Point (1952), p. 56.

The purpose of the present paper is to revive and answer this long-forgotten question. With today's statistical techniques and the availability of data for a large number of countries, the question of cricket versus baseball can be addressed once and for all. My results clearly indicate that economists were too quick to dismiss the role of sport in economic growth.

I estimate the following equation using data from 95 non-communist, non-OPEC countries, compiled from the Penn World Tables of Summers and Heston:

$$g = \alpha + \beta_c D_c + \beta_b D_b + \varepsilon;$$

where  $g$  is the growth rate of real per capita income between 1960 and 1990, and  $D_c$  and  $D_b$  are dummies to indicate cricket and baseball-playing countries. The cross-section OLS results are summarized by Table 1 and the empirical appendix.

Table 1  
*Regression Results*  
Dependent variable, real per capita  
growth 1960-90

Intercept	103.9 (15.09)
Cricket Dummy	-43.0 (41.44)
Baseball Dummy	80.3 (39.92)

Standard errors are in parentheses

As reported in Table 1, countries that played neither cricket nor baseball tended to grow 104% in real terms over the period of 1960-1990. Cricket-playing caused the rate of growth of cricket-playing countries to be pushed to 43% *lower* than this. However, this effect of cricket on growth was not statistically significant. Most strikingly, baseball-playing caused countries to have growth rates that were 80% *above* what they would have been if the countries did not play baseball, and 123% above what they would have been if they instead played cricket! This large estimated positive effect of baseball on growth is statistically significant at the 5% level.

The empirical results speak for themselves. For emerging countries without a history of cricket or baseball, baseball instruction and subsidies should be an immediate priority. With the help of international institutions like the World Bank and the IMF, baseball aid should flow from the baseball powers, the US and Japan. The difficult problem is in devising a plan to eradicate the cricket-induced malaise of the cricket-playing countries. Clearly this is a task of Herculean proportions, rivalled only by the economic reform of formerly-communist countries. Like communism, years of cricket have polluted the very souls of these countries, and we need to measure the pace of reform in decades, not merely in years.

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