

THE BIG SPLIT?

The North-South Divide by Duncan Robinson

Coming from London in the south of England, and living in Huddersfield in the north of England for three years, I have noticed a significant difference in the popularity of cricket as I crossed the north-south divide.

In much the same way as rugby league is a lot more popular in the north than the south, cricket seems to be both played and watched more in the north.

It is seen by many southerners as a 'northern sport'. This puts many of them off as they do not want to be seen as associating with northerners and they like to keep their own southern identity!

Down south cricket is also seen as a sport to be played by the more upper market, 'posh' people. Because it does not get a lot of coverage people do not get to see what it is really about.



Croydon CC in Yesteryear

Amateur clubs such as Augustinians Cricket Club seem to get more exposure than equivalent clubs in the south. For example, my local amateur cricket club, Croydon, does not get much coverage. Augustinians, and the league they play in, get much more coverage in the *Huddersfield Examiner* than Croydon and their league do in the *Croydon Advertiser*.

Another reason for the lack of interest in cricket in the South could be explained by people not being able to really relate to the county teams. This is particularly true of people living in London because there is no real county team to support. Although Surrey play in South London, Londoners find it difficult to follow them because they do not actually live in the county.

It is still strange, however, that cricket does not generate the same interest in the south as it does in the north. Most schools teach cricket to children from a young age in the summer when the football season is over. The fact that football is so popular should not have an effect on the popularity of cricket because they are played at different times in the year.

One man who has helped to give the game more credibility in the south is former England international all-rounder Ronnie Irani, a Lancastrian by birth but he moved down south and became captain of Essex. He said of the move,

"I completed my transformation from naughty northerner to sexy southerner! I soon noticed the exchange-rate difference between north and south but the people are lovely and it's been great for me so I'm now a pure Essex boy."

Irani's success and the fact he was so popular when moving down south shows that the potential is there for cricket to become as big in the south as it is in the north. The introduction of 20/20 cricket could help to smooth the transformation.