

Thursday, May 16

Sports and Spectatorship

Being a spectator for a sporting event is both entirely similar and totally different from being one at the theatre. Both are occasions for leisure in spaces that distinguish playing from watching. There is drama and unknown outcomes at both; but at sporting events, the athletes are as unaware of the outcome as the spectators. Even if the outcome is predictable, the steps taken to get there are still uncertain. A play will have a certain number of acts; a sporting event will have a certain number of innings or quarters or halves; a play will have lines spoken by actors; a game will have rules followed by athletes. Characters in a play face conflict; opposing teams are in competition.

The most significant difference is in spectator's expected behaviors. At the theatre, we tend to sit quietly in the dark. At sporting events, we are more active; we clap and cheer for our favorite players and teams; we complain at officials who we determine have made bad judgements. Sometimes we sing together or execute a wave across a large stadium. We eat, drink, and carouse merrily!



Our first sporting event will be cricket at Lords, which is somewhat astounding as it is considered the “spiritual home of cricket.” And because we will be in the general stands, there isn't a dress code, there is a dress code for the club attended by members and it's very, very British. (Just to be safe, dress casual, jeans with no holes, that sort of thing). According to ESPN.com, the stadium was opened in 1814 “and soon became the major venue as cricket became the world's leading sport in the 19th century. While cricket has been overtaken by other international events, and the game itself has become overtly commercial, Lord's has retained its place as the spiritual home.”

Cricket is the summer game played in the UK, like baseball in the U.S. In fact, it's been described as “360 degree baseball with no foul balls.” But we might also think of it as a bit more polite than baseball—less spitting and booing more “good show, old chap!” Essin's husband Jeff actually plays cricket, but sadly won't be there to explain the rules to all of us (he said he'd type up a handout, he's tried—and failed—to teach me so many times...).

That being said, don't worry too much about the rules; remember, we are studying spectatorship. And we are attending on the UK Armed Forces 20/20 Cricket Day, the “highlight of the military cricketing calendar.” Expect to see many military families rooting on their loved ones who serve in the Royal Navy, Royal Army, and Royal Airforce. A women's match begins the day, followed by two men's matches. While the focus is on cricket, the military also uses the event to stress the



importance of good mental health and the way that sports like cricket can help soldiers reacclimate and heal after combat.

Be sure to download the [Lord's app](#) so we can send you your ticket.

Stay for a couple of hours, and after that, as long as you like. Lords allows guest to bring food in with them as well as a bottle of wine or two cans of beer/cider. There is also food/drinks for sale in concessions. While you are there, think about who is there with you and why/how they are watching:

- How are these spectators different from other spectators you've experiences this past week?
- How are the behaviors of spectatorship different at a sporting event vs. theatre? At a cricket match vs. another sport you might attend in the US like football, basketball, baseball, etc.?
- What are the signs that cricket is part of a century's old tradition in this venue and in British culture?

#UKinMay assignment:

- Post an image that captures the essence of spectatorship as a sporting event, or the essence of watching cricket at Lords.

