

# 'Sportsmanship dead' after cricket controversy

When the ball nicked Stuart Broad's bat in a vital moments of this week's Ashes match, the old cricketing code says he should have walked. He did not. Is this the end of honesty in sport?



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It's one match down, four to go in this year's Ashes series of test cricket – and the first roller coaster epic has left fans gasping for air.

England batted first, and limped to a miserable total of 215 before bowling out most of the Australian team for even less. But up stepped little-known newcomer Ashton Agar to score a heroic 98 runs and propel his team to a convincing lead. England, hosts and favourites, needed a strong second innings to catch up. The game hung in the balance.

Then came the moment that for many defined this match: Agar's spinning ball took a blatant deflection off the bat of Stuart Broad and flew comfortably into a fielder's hands. One of the top English batsmen was clearly out. Yet the umpire ignored Australia's frenzied appeals – and so, crucially did Broad himself. The lucky batsman survived and helped England to a healthy innings, which ultimately won them the match.



'THE HAND OF GOD'



THE UNDERARM BOWL



NOT QUITE A MARATHON



SCHUMACHER'S 'ACCIDENT'

**Sport's hall of infamy (clockwise):** Diego Maradona, Australia 1981, Michael Schumacher, Rosie Ruiz.

Most English people greeted the result with exhilaration. But some feel that any glory was seriously blemished by Broad's failure to admit when he was out. 'Grotesque,' said *The Mirror*, and 'embarrassing'. 'This howler has buried sportsmanship,' said a newspaper from Perth. And British scientist Richard Dawkins was so disgusted that he publicly switched his allegiance to Australia, calling Broad a 'revolting cheat'.

Why all the fuss? Because according to cricketing conventions, a batsman who knows they have been caught out is expected to own up.

Before video replays were introduced to cricket umpiring, the responsibility of 'walking' would often rest with the player. But in big matches today, opponents can request a video review of controversial decisions. The only reason this technology was unavailable for Australia was because they had used up all their appeals.

So was Stuart Broad's refusal to walk a failure of moral responsibility? Or simply a failure of refereeing?

## NOT CRICKET?

Of course Stuart Broad didn't walk, say pragmatic types: as a seasoned professional, he is within his rights to seek victory at any reasonable cost. To hijack his team's efforts in the name of some outdated ideal of honour would have been pig-headed and absurd. Upholding the rules is the umpire's responsibility – the players' job is simply to win.

That, respond romantics, is exactly the sort of cynicism which is destroying sport. The greatest sporting moments are not just moments of individual triumph: they showcase the triumph of grace and honesty even amid the heat of ferocious competition. This 'win at all costs' mentality is a selfish, legalistic philosophy that would never have been tolerated in a more honourable age.

## Q & A

### Q Cricket? I've barely even heard of the game.

**A** It's a fairly niche sport in some countries, but for many English and Australian fans The Ashes is the highlight of the summer. But this debate over cheating is relevant in other sports too.

### Q Like what?

**A** There's diving and overacting in football for a start: is it straightforwardly wrong, or should we just accept that players will always try to influence the referee? And should a tennis player own up when they're sure a ball has been wrongly called out in their favour?

### Q Who cares? It's only sport.

**A** A fair point – ultimately, little in sport matters much. But there's an interesting

broader debate: are we within our rights, for instance, to pay as little tax as we legally can? Or should we all be totally honest and avoid exploiting loopholes?

## SOME PEOPLE SAY...

*'I would prefer to fail with honour than to win by cheating.'* Sophocles, Ancient Greek poet

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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### WORD WATCH

**Ashes** – A series of five cricket matches lasting five days each contested between England and Australia once every two years. The tradition began in 1882 when Australia won on English turf for the first time, leading the British press to pronounce cricket dead: ‘The body will be cremated and the ashes taken to Australia.’

**Bowling out** – To get their opponent out, the fielding team must either hit the wickets or catch

a ball before which has come directly off an opponent’s bat. A batsman who obstructs the wicket with their body can also be called out.

**Innings** – A period of play in which one team bowls and the other bats. In test cricket (the longest and toughest version of the game), an innings lasts until the batting team is either bowled out or voluntarily decides to end it. A test match consists of two batting and two fielding innings for each side.

**Umpire** – Cricket’s equivalent of a referee or judge.

**Appeals** – Fielders can call on the umpire to send a batsman from the pitch when they believe a catch has been made or the wickets hit or obstructed. In the modern game, this can include a video review – but each team can only make three wrong appeals every innings.

**Richard Dawkins** – Perhaps the most famous and divisive biologist in the world, Dawkins is a champion of genetics and Darwin’s theory of evolution. He is also a ferocious atheist and (apparently) a rather puritanical cricket fan.

### YOU DECIDE

1. Would you rather win a gold medal or a fair play award?
2. Is upholding the rules of a game the players’ responsibility, or just a referee’s? Does this apply to society’s laws as well?

### ACTIVITIES

1. As a class, conduct an open vote on whether you would have walked if you were in Stuart Broad’s position. Then have another vote by secret ballot. Is the result the same?
2. People often refer to the ‘Corinthian spirit’ of amateur sport. Research what this means and write a brief description. Should we bring it back?

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