"Our own paper": Evaluating the impact of *Women's Cricket* magazine, 1930-1967

The past 30 years has seen a proliferation of research into gender and sport by both historians and sociologists. Much of this work has focused on the variety of ways in which sportswomen have been portrayed by the mass media across historical periods and within different societies. It is striking that studies of content analysis from a variety of different time periods, across the Western world, have tended to reach similar conclusions about the methods by which the media, through both a lack of quantitative coverage and the construction of female athletes in feminized ways, have undermined the status of women's sport.[i] As Jennifer Hargreaves argues in her study of British sportswomen:

> The construction and marginalization of female sports [by the media] provide a hidden, but very powerful, message that they are less important than men's sports and that men are keener to participate and naturally better suited to do so.[ii]

However, as Michael Messner earlier recognised, the female body is a "contested ideological terrain".[iii] Though the media have evidently helped to constitute and perpetuate the idea that women's sport is less important than its male counterpart, and that women are less naturally suited to sport than men, such discourses have at times been actively resisted by sportswomen. Hargreaves acknowledges that in recent years female athletes have been "creating images which are radically different from previously stereotyped ones of women in sports", by for example their public displays of female power.[iv] From an historical perspective, the more recent work of Fiona Skillen argues that increased female participation in sport during the interwar period both altered and demonstrated resistance to discourses surrounding the weaknesses of the female body. Female

participation in certain physically demanding sports in these years caused the creation of “counter-discourses” whereby women simply chose to ignore ideas about the “masculine” nature of certain sports and, by demonstrating their ability to participate in such sports, helped to highlight the inaccuracy of such views.[v]

Nonetheless, though acknowledging the importance of the media in creating and sustaining such discourses, neither Hargreaves nor Skillen consider the ways in which the British women concerned responded to the media coverage surrounding their activities. In fact, much current literature implies that female athletes have tended to ignore and/or to passively accept negative coverage of their activities in the press. Joyce Kay, for example, in an article on postwar British women's sport, argues that “in many instances women just 'got on with the job', paid little heed to outdated attitudes and opinions” and “competed without reference to public opinion”.[vi] This, though, ignores the fact that many sportswomen have actively sought to contest inaccurate portrayals of their activities by the mainstream media, not least via alternative methods of self-representation.

Indeed, much more attention needs to be paid to the methods by which female athletes have attempted to alter the press coverage which surrounds their activities. Certainly in the British case, many amateur women's sports organisations ran their own periodicals; such alternative publications, written and edited by the sportswomen themselves, continually attempted to alter the negative discourses which surrounded female participation in sport, through their emphasis on positive, detailed and accurate coverage of women's sport.[vii] How did these women seek to portray themselves in such publications? And how far might the self-images put forward in female-penned publications have contributed to the alteration of discourses surrounding women's sport?

This paper examines one such publication: *Women's Cricket* magazine, the “official organ” of the

Women's Cricket Association, which was the governing body of women's cricket in Britain from its formation in 1926. The paper was published throughout the cricket season from 1930 until 1967, between May and September, initially monthly and then, from 1948, fortnightly. Given that the magazine was being sent to cricketers across the world, including women in South Africa, Kenya, America, France, Holland, Australia, New Zealand, Shanghai, Canada, India, Holland, Ceylon, China, Turkey, Somaliland, Egypt and Germany,[viii] an analysis of its contents can also contribute to our understanding of how similar negative discourses surrounding female participation in cricket were being challenged internationally.

The article is split into three main sections. The first analyses the discourses surrounding female participation in sport, and in particular cricket, in Britain from the 1930s to the 1950s, and provides a sample of the kind of press coverage which women's cricket received in these years from the mainstream media. This provides the context for the discussion which follows in the second section, which considers key aspects of the content of *Women's Cricket* magazine, including Editorials, instructional articles, the news pages, and historical articles, demonstrating how these resisted the stereotypes present within the popular media. The final section examines how successful the editors were in their attempts to use the magazine to promote their favoured image of women's cricket to the wider public. Throughout, *Women's Cricket* is used as a case study to evaluate how far female athletes could themselves contest and alter discourses surrounding their participation in sport. As such, it provides a counter-argument to the current notion that women provided very little resistance to the representations of their sports within the mainstream media.

“Women cricketers always have been... targets for the cheap press”: media coverage of women's sport

The Women's Cricket Association (WCA) was formed in 1926, the brainchild of a group of hockey players who wanted a team game to play in the summer months. As the first governing body of women's cricket in Britain, the sport quickly flourished as a pastime for middle-class women under its guidance: by 1938 there were 105 affiliated clubs and 20 county associations in existence.[ix] Its creation was part of a broader rapid expansion of women's sport in the interwar period: by 1939, for example, 2,100 clubs and schools were affiliated to the All England Women's Hockey Association (AEWHA).[x] The Women's Amateur Athletics Association (WAAA) was formed in 1922, the first competitive events having been held during the First World War by munitions workers; and in 1926 the All England Netball Association (AENA) was formed at a meeting of the YWCA in London, with 160,000 women playing in affiliated netball clubs by 1939.[xi]

In short, the interwar period was, as Skillen has convincingly argued, a time of massively increased opportunities for women to participate in physical activities: she highlights the expansion of women's sport across several different "sites", including in schools and the workplace.[xii] As more women began to participate in sport, the opposition towards female athleticism which had been so potent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries began to erode. As Hargreaves points out, the feats of several famous sportswomen, including Suzanne Lenglen, were so well publicised that "a changing popular consciousness about women in sports" developed, alongside an alternative discourse which acknowledged and accepted that female participation in sport had come to stay.[xiii]

Nonetheless, opinion was still not entirely favourable. Even in 1950, it was possible for the editor of the *Sportswoman's Manual* to summarise the situation as follows:

> It has been established that a woman may play games if she chooses, just as she may go into

> Law, Medicine or the House of Commons....But now that we need no longer struggle we must take stock. Some people look with alarm at women playing strenuous games. It is unladylike, it is unattractive, it stops them having children, and the rest of the century-old arguments are still with us.[xiv]

The England cricketer Walter Hammond wrote in 1952 that: “There are still a great many people who wonder whether feminine players are likely to do themselves harm if they try to play really hard. I must say that I myself do not like to see schoolgirls playing cricket, and I believe many doctors will agree that serious and permanent damage can easily be done at that age...There are some games women can play, in general, actually better than men, but the muscular differences of the sexes prohibits cricket from being one of them.”[xv]

The media both helps to create and reflects public opinion; an analysis of press coverage of women's sport can thus be seen to reflect the uncertainty surrounding female participation in sport during the interwar years. For sports such as hockey and lacrosse, public matches and international tours were taking place for the first time, which ensured a greater quantity of coverage than previously: during the 1930s the *Morning Post*, *Evening News*, *Times*, *Observer* and *Daily Mirror* gave regular space to cricket and hockey in particular. Yet, as Mike Huggins points out in an article on cinema newsreel coverage of women's sport, “coverage was projected as part of a marginalised separate sphere, disjunctive from the main focus on male achievement. Women's sports were sometimes introduced with phrases...such as 'and now for the ladies'”.[xvi] There was also a continued focus on the appearance of female athletes, typified by the *Daily Mirror*'s 1924 “Sports Girls Beauty Competition”. Entrants were invited to send in photos of themselves and a selection were published.”'Many girl athletes who have represented women in international sports are entering the contest. One of them gives evidence of her femininity by stating that she is waiting until a new

frock arrives before having her photograph taken", wrote the editor.[xvii]

This, then, was the context in which women cricketers operated within the early years of the WCA's existence. An analysis of the type of press coverage granted to women's cricket in these years also supports the idea that it was, throughout its early days, subject to scrutiny as to its suitability as a "feminine-appropriate" sport. An article published in 1930, for example, stated:

> Women seriously betaking themselves to the greatest of all British games? Why it is a sacrilege! It is tempting the gods themselves to rise in their wrath...a direct insult is thus hurled at the heads of those who call themselves men. If this attack is not 'nipped' in the proverbial bud, we predict a rapid decline in the noble art of cricket, a decline which will be merited if this movement is allowed to proceed. Now, once for all, a 'truce to this foolery.' Men will not invade the work-basket and the feminine domain of the kitchen, but, we beseech you – let us have this one sport to ourselves...we may conclude with an earnest prayer that women will never gain admittance to the pavilion at Lord's.[xviii]

In the 1930s, the argument that women had no place in the masculine domain of cricket was fairly common, as was the criticism that the average female had no genuine interest in cricket but merely "goes to the ground to eat strawberries and be admired".[xix] Hargreaves highlights that as women's cricketers staged public matches, rendering the sport increasingly visible, "antagonists became more vociferous".[xx]

As well as negative coverage, women's cricket also faced other problems within the media. Firstly, as Jack Williams' analysis of these years indicates, most newspapers still gave proportionately very little coverage to the women's game.[xxi] Secondly, representations of female cricketers were often

overly focused on their appearance, and could be very patronising in tone. Netta Rheinberg, England manager on the 1948/9 tour of Australia, wrote:

> Why are reporters from the Press assigned to our games inclined to try and find other news value in us rather than in our cricket? They look for the marriage angle, the children angle, the dress angle, the beauty angle, but, alas, in many cases the cricket angle is just a side line, or, if it is to be written about, then it is done with condescension.[xxii]

A frequent tactic adopted by tabloid newspapers of the period was to include “information” about women's cricket in “gossip columns”, which Marjorie Pollard, one of the WCA's founders, wrote her own imitative response to:

> Darlings, Have you heard? Women's Cricket is dead, slain by no less an authority than the Lady Sports (or was it Beauty?) Expert of a Sunday Newspaper! It seems that the dear creature, all beautified, 'pallid and feminine', penetrated to the wilds of Beckenham the other day and found herself surrounded by a dreadful horde of 'Amazons' wearing simply ghastly garments with sleeves, my dears, and cotton stockings that positively wrinkled at the knees!...these unfeminine creatures laughed and ate chocolate (milk) in the pavilion, while discussing the game in technical terms, so indelicate – and 'horreur' – referred to each other by their sur-names instead of as Susy, Katy and Lucy, or even Fluffy, Dinky and Sweety... Now do take my advice, Duckies – Rouge the knees, play something gentle in one of those too, too charming buttonless, sleeveless, seamless, backless and nearly frontless frocks.[xxiii]

As Rheinberg recognised: “It is always obvious that the authors of these articles know nothing whatsoever of the subject on which they are writing...Women cricketers always have been and, I

believe, always will tend to be targets for the cheap press."[xxiv]

Negative comparisons with men's cricket also featured in the British press. In 1951 the *Daily Graphic* printed two photographs side by side: the first Godfrey Evans of Kent taking an excellent diving catch; the second Margaret Rosewarne, the Kent WCA wicket-keeper, who in an attempt to run out an opponent had missed the ball entirely. The caption read "Same idea – but differing style", with the clear implication that women's cricket was simply not of the same standard as men's.[xxv]

Though there has been a distinct lack of research conducted into women's cricket internationally, the situation appears to have been broadly similar for women cricketers in other Western countries.[xxvi] Rheinberg's diary from the 1948/9 tour, on which she was England manager, highlights this; on one occasion she was interviewed by the *Sunday Sun*, an Australian tabloid newspaper, and when she read the write-up, she wrote:

> I found a simply awful article on me...I recognised in it about 4 remarks I'd actually made to the reporter – and the rest was pure fabrication![xxvii]

Later in the tour, while being interviewed on New Zealand national radio, Rheinberg reported that she and another player were "immediately convulsed by being asked whether we bowl underarm!! When we say no [the interviewer] says she thought overarm bowling deformed women's shoulders!"[xxviii] Coverage of this tour also indicates that, though the touring team attracted significant press coverage, much of it portrayed them as women first and foremost, and cricketers second. One Brisbane newspaper wrote:

> Surveying the English and Australian women cricketers in their pretty evening frocks on

> Saturday, when they attended a dinner party at the Hotel Carlton, it was difficult to believe that these were the same girls who a few hours earlier had been dancing down to the wicket to deliver the 'googly' or the 'slow break' or to meet the attack with a neat leg glance, drive or square-cut...Miss M Taylor, called the 'Larwood' of the English team, chose a frock in palid effect, in yellow and black on a white ground, and featuring a black scarf drapery right to the neckline in front and falling in long ends at the back.[xxix]

The situation for women's cricket, then, reflected that of other sports being promoted for women in the 1930s: sportswomen, though more broadly accepted than they had been in the early years of the twentieth century, continued to face uncertain messages in the media surrounding their activities, and faced difficulties in trying to gain the serious press coverage which would promote their activities to the general public. How, though, did those involved in pioneering sport for women respond to this treatment by the media? The next section considers this question.

“Striving to enlighten them”: the launch of *Women's Cricket*

In 1929, in recognition of the formation of the Women's Cricket Association (WCA) three years earlier, the editors of *Hockey Field and Lacrosse* magazine dedicated three editions to women's cricket. Marjorie Pollard, an England hockey player, followed this experiment with interest. When it proved a hit with readers, she decided to launch her own *Women's Cricket* periodical. At the WCA's 1929 AGM, members discussed her idea for the launch of a magazine:

> The following suggestions were made and approved: That forms be printed for sending up

> match results. That the names and addresses of newly affiliated clubs, schools and members be printed monthly. That a special feature of interest to schools be included.[xxx]

The first edition appeared in May 1930, and was warmly received by all within the Association. By the end of 1930, well over 500 copies had been sold.[xxxi]

The magazine was published right up until 1967 (with a break during the war years). Subscribers in 1930 paid 6d per issue; this rose to 1 shilling per issue in 1946 and by 1954, they were paying a 15 shilling seasonal subscription. Throughout its history, there were three main editors: in 1950 Nancy Joy and Netta Rheinberg, both WCA stalwarts, took over the reins from Marjorie Pollard. Though the magazine was not directly controlled by the WCA, the majority of the content related to the WCA and its affairs.[xxxii]

At its inception, therefore, it was thought that the function of the magazine would be the sharing of news, match results and other information of interest between female cricketers, in particular clubs and schools affiliated to the Association. However, Pollard was a journalist by trade; during the 1930s, she wrote for the *Morning Post*, the *Times*, the *Observer*, the *London Evening News* and the *Guardian*, and by 1948 she was running her own publishing company. She was therefore very familiar with the kind of coverage which women's cricket tended to acquire in the mainstream media, as the above faux-gossip column piece demonstrates. Indeed, it would have been clear to any woman who participated in cricket in the interwar period that their sport was not uncontroversial in some circles.

Thus it quickly became evident to Pollard, as editor of *Women's Cricket* and an astute journalist, that part of its role would be to counter the widespread ignorance and patronising coverage which

the game was faced with in the mainstream media. An article from 1931 by Pollard simply quoted several reports on women's matches from different newspapers (“Merry girls they all are, with milkmaid complexions”) under the title “The Press, and what it *can* say”.[xxxiii] The implication was that *Women's Cricket* would provide a corrective to this. Once she realised the potential of the magazine as an advertising tool for the WCA, Pollard exploited it to the full. It was sold at women's Representative and England matches throughout the 1930s and beyond, and at some point Pollard began to send free copies to the editors of the newspapers she worked for, and others, too; a legacy that was taken up by her successors from 1950. *Women's Cricket* therefore arguably became crucial in presenting an image of women cricketers which challenged the prevailing discourses discussed above.

Editorials

Different components of the magazine served different purposes in the attempt to tackle both the problem of negative and trivialised coverage, and the lack of coverage which women's cricket gained in the sports media. Firstly, every edition of the magazine began with a page-long editorial. Rheinberg wrote in 1964 that without editorials, Women's Cricket would “become simply a 'White Paper' or a Hansard, so to speak, of the Association...its personality would vanish overnight”.[xxxiv] It is certainly the case that in expressing themselves, the editors were direct, outspoken, and often polemical; over 90% of editorials in the 37 years the magazine was published featured instructional content.

Pollard, for example, continually focused on the idea of “decorum”. Many of her editorials articulated and attempted to provide a rationale behind the rules outlined by the WCA, which was run along strictly amateur lines. “There will never be any thought of County Championships and

League Tables", she wrote in August 1930. "Such suggestions...are all beyond the point and to us ludicrous".[xxxv] Laziness, lateness and the kicking of the cricket ball in the field were other bugbears of Pollard. Rheinberg's editorials continued the themes of playing in the "right spirit", showing proper politeness to opponents, and the extolling of amateur cricket as the purest form of the game.

Both Pollard and Rheinberg were also heavily preoccupied with the idea of correct dress; the WCA laid down by-laws on dress from 1928, and by 1937 regulations stated:

> Official WCA teams must play in white and wear long stockings. Dresses, divided skirts or tunics must not be shorter than four inches from the ground when kneeling. Coloured jerseys and sleeveless dresses are not allowed.[xxxvi]

The following quote from Pollard provides an insight into this mindset:

> On cricket fields this season we have seen ankle socks with bare legs, knee-length stockings with bare knees and the usual white stockings...the fight we had to get cricket established on good and first class grounds and to get ourselves accepted as cricket players was based on certain simple principles – dignity, circumspection, caution and submission to public opinion...When cricket uniform becomes compatible with 'buckets and spades',...then bang will go decourousness and dignity, and with it some of the pleasing plateaux on which we play.[xxxvii]

Pollard recognised that an important part of the acceptance of women's cricket by the general public was the WCA's emphasis on playing cricket in a socially acceptable, "feminine" way. Ultimately, Pollard believed that cricket did not "belong" to the WCA: "we only play it, and in playing it we

must most certainly offer it decency and respect".[xxxviii] If through the magazine she could provide a correction to the idea that women did not respect cricket, this might well help to increase support for women's cricket amongst the general public.

Instructional articles

Heavily linked to this were the many article series' which focused not only on the development of particular cricketing skills but contained advice on correct cricketing etiquette. This continued throughout the magazine's history. Betty Snowball's 1954 article series "Custom, Tradition and Courtesies" provides a good example of the types of advice given:

> Have true respect for a cricket ground and conduct yourself accordingly...
>
> Be meticulous about your uniform and equipment, having them scrupulously clean at the start of the match...
>
> Avoid sitting in front of the pavilion with your feet up on the rails or on the seat in front, since it shows expanses of leg – if nothing worse.
>
> Do not roll your stockings down or indulge in any other form of sun-bathing when sitting out. The official uniform of the WCA is knee-length stockings, and, being uniform, should not be abused...
>
> Eschew headgear of the manly or floppy type.
>
> If the backing-up batsman leaves his crease before you bowl, it is quite legal to run him out, but it is only sporting to warn him the first time...[xxxix]

Snowball was an England player and heavily involved with the WCA. Her comments reinforce the belief of the editors and many others within the Association that the spirit in which cricket was

played was of equal importance to the development of actual batting, bowling and fielding skill. The aim appears to have been to demonstrate that women's cricket was being played in accordance with the correct traditions and spirit of the game, a correction to some popular perceptions.

Numerous historians have highlighted the importance of playing sports in the “right” way as particularly important for sportswomen during these years. Williams writes that the WCA were actively attempting to “ensure that cricket played under its auspices met with the approval of the male cricket world”.[xl] Skillen suggests that sports such as golf and cricket were not played in trousers due to their “masculine connotations”: emphasising their femininity while playing cricket was one way in which to stave off opposition to women's cricket amongst the general public.[xli] Yet the editors of *Women's Cricket* appear to have focused on “decorum” at least partly to combat the image prevalent within the tabloid newspapers that female cricketers simply did not take the sport seriously. Many photographs which appeared during the 1930s showed women playing cricket in bathing costumes, or short frilly frocks – both of which were clearly unsuitable for cricket. An early article in *Women's Cricket*, written anonymously and accompanied by a photograph from the *Sunday Chronicle* of a woman batting, dressed only in a bathing costume, complained of such photographs:

> How necessary these pictures make it for those who really try to play cricket, to play in something that is above criticism...If we are going to play cricket on good grounds, in respectable and tradition haunted places – then this clothing question must be given much more attention.[xlii]

As more women's cricket matches were played publicly, in accordance with the WCA rulings on

dress, this kind of image became less prevalent in national newspapers, yet it did not die out completely. This is evident from one 1954 editorial, written by Rheinberg:

> In the tittle-tattle column of various provincial papers...one often finds in quite large print reference to a certain so-called woman cricketer; she is an obnoxious character, always wears too little, shows off too much, and plays badly – without gloves, often without pads, and she is obviously not one of us. It is evident to me, from many cuttings coming my way, that this woman still prefers to play teams of men who bat left-handed and have their legs hobbled by a piece of string tied to their ankles so that they cannot make more than a two-foot stride. The persons who report these stunts cannot know anything about cricket as it is normally played by girls and women.

Rheinberg went on to state that "It is to be hoped that any readers of this magazine will strive to enlighten them in any area where they find such spectacles are arranged".[xliii] *Women's Cricket* was clearly aiming to correct the idea, still readily prevalent in some circles, that women playing cricket was a bit of a joke, and that even the women participating in the sport did not take it at all seriously. The fact that the regulations demanded that players wear all-white confirms this impression: though the WCA wanted to emphasise their femininity, they also wanted to appear smart and business-like on the field of play.

Historical articles

Another way in which the magazine attempted to legitimise women's cricket was in its publication of historical articles. The main point of these seemed to be to demonstrate that women's cricket went back much further than readers, or indeed the general public, might have thought. In 1933, for

example, Pollard quoted from a document held at the Bodleian Library, dated 1344, “in which a female figure is bowling a ball the size of a modern cricket ball to a man who is raising a bat to strike it...behind the bowlers are figures male and female evidently waiting to catch it”.[xliv] Later Gerald Brodribb, founder member of the Cricket Society and a famous cricketing historian, and Gerald Martineau, a prolific cricket writer, contributed article series' which focused, respectively, on “Some Cricket Authoresses” and “Women in the history of cricket”, covering subjects from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[xlv]

Antony Bateman has argued that from the nineteenth century onwards, the process of literaturisation was used to provide men's cricket with a “veneer of antiquity” and a justification of its “ongoing existence” and cultural centrality. Literaturisation involves the retrospective selection of a variety of historical texts featuring cricket to demonstrate the depth of its importance in English history and culture.[xlvi] The editors of *Women's Cricket* were attempting a similar process with the women's game. As Bateman suggests, the creation of a cricketing canon is an important part of the literaturisation process; in May 1950, a comprehensive “Bibliography of women's cricket” was produced in the magazine and the perusal of the texts by readers recommended.[xlvii] These served to legitimise the existence of women playing cricket, the acceptability of which was still subject to some societal dispute, even by the 1950s. Literaturisation would also, hopefully, help to overcome any lingering doubts within the press that playing cricket might “masculinise” women.

News Pages

As well as attempting to shape press coverage in positive ways, *Women's Cricket* also aimed to increase the amount of coverage which women's cricket received. As noted above, this was always relatively small; and given the newsprint shortage during and after the Second World War, it

remained an issue into the 1950s. Reflecting on this state of affairs in August 1947, Pollard wrote:

> The brave new world seems no different for women than it did in the battling days of 1926. In fact it seems to be that we have a sterner struggle ahead of us now, for recognition and status, than we had 20 years ago. Then we had some of the National Daily Press with us...Now newspapers go back to four pages and who are we to compete for space with Football...Racing and what have you?[xlviii]

It was on this basis that Pollard made the decision to publish *Women's Cricket* fortnightly, instead of monthly, a decision which lasted until the magazine's demise in 1967. For, if the newspapers would not publish women's cricket news, “we must use to the full our own paper”, she wrote.

From the beginning, each edition of *Women's Cricket* featured several pages devoted to news from around the various clubs and counties, as well as the WCA's own “Official News” page. Clubs and counties provided information on membership, subscription levels, where they practised, who their major opponents were and records of matches won and lost. The WCA's news page, meanwhile, featured match dates and the announcement of touring teams. Sharing news was obviously important to the readers of the magazine, as it allowed them to keep up with other cricketers around the country. However, these news pages also served as a method of keeping the press informed about when tours would be taking place, and who the key players might be: a means of sharing useful information, in an attempt to make it easier for the media to cover international and Representative matches.

In the years after *Women's Cricket* was first produced, women's associations began to form around the world: in 1931 in Australia, in 1934 in New Zealand and Holland, and in 1953 in South Africa.

As mentioned above, many of the subscribers to *Women's Cricket* lived abroad, and though it can safely be assumed that some of these were expatriates, it is also clear from the letters pages that at least some were playing women's cricket in other countries.[xlix] The content of the magazine grew to reflect its international readership: most issues featured items of international news, in particular from New Zealand and Australia, as well as articles written by international cricketers. During New Zealand's 1954 tour of England, for example, Ina Lamason, the New Zealand captain, wrote a "London Diary" which was published in serial form in that season's *Women's Cricket*.[l] Similarly to the WCA's own news pages, much of the information which the magazine provided about international women's cricket served to educate the British media about the similar problems which were cricketers abroad were facing: in particular, the difficulties faced by women who were attempting to hold down full-time employment, play cricket, and finance international cricket tours. This was an important corrective to the widespread ignorance surrounding women's cricket in other countries.

Overall, therefore, each aspect of the magazine's content – editorials, instructional articles, historical pieces and news pages – contributed towards the attempts by the editors to transform press coverage of women's cricket in positive ways. The extent to which this was achieved will be considered in the next section.

"There is no doubt that the magazine has attained its small place in the cricket world at large": the impact of *Women's Cricket*

By the 1960s, much of the opposition which had existed towards female athleticism in the interwar period had disappeared. Skillen's examination of the discourses surrounding women's sports in

these years suggests that even by 1939, “[t]here was a shift in public opinion regarding women's sports...The number of women taking up sports, combined with press coverage and advertising drawing on this...helped to 'normalize' women's participation”.[li] Richard Holt and Tony Mason, in their discussion of the postwar period, suggest that this normalization continued after the war.[lii]

Media coverage of women's sport by the 1960s is one indication of this shift in public opinion. Recently, Kay has suggested that coverage in the immediate postwar period was largely positive, did not trivialise women's sport, and objectified female athletes far less than at any time before or since.[liii] The example of women's cricket appears to partly support this conclusion: there was a marked improvement in the tone of press coverage of women's cricket in the years between 1930 and 1967 (the same period in which *Women's Cricket* was published). By the late 1960s, the following piece from the *Evening News* during England's 1968/9 tour of Australasia had become far more typical:

> Women's cricket may once have been a ripe subject for smug male abuse, but not now! Today's play in the second Test here in which England declared at 254-8 was highly sophisticated. In one important respect it was what men's cricket once was – a briskly moving game...
> Heyhoe excelled on the front foot while Barker, who is also a good driver, forced the ball through the offside with wristy timing off the back foot with a force many males might envy...
> Women's cricket is something to take very seriously and something well worth watching.[liv]

Coverage could still be patronising, with a tendency to focus on the appearance of female

cricketers, rather than on the cricket. Kay argues that this only occurred in tabloid newspapers, but the broadsheets could at times be equally culpable. Terry Coleman wrote in the *Guardian* in 1966 that “11 girls, all dressed in white, make prettier patterns against The Oval outfield than most of the Surrey teams I have seen. And their cricket skirts are a lot less mini than the going length in the King's Road, Chelsea”.[lv] The *Daily Telegraph* reported on Rachael Heyhoe's century during the 1966 Scarborough Test against the New Zealanders with the headline “Housewife enlivens day's play”, with their correspondent concluding: “it was a sign of the life and hard times of the batting fraternity that the day's only century should have been scored by a woman”, comparing her “aggressive contribution” with that of an anonymous housewife who interrupted the Essex men's county game on the same day by refusing to hand the ball back which had just broken her window.[lvi]

Again, the implication here was that women's cricket was inferior to its male counterpart.

Yet the quantity of press coverage which women's cricket was receiving certainly increased during the 1960s – and much of what was written does appear to have been serious, factual copy. In the wake of the 1963 Australian tour of England, for example, the WCA concluded

> We have hammered at the doors of the national press and broadcasting authorities for years...and now our efforts have borne fruit. There has been a volume of comment and factual reporting, and a wealth of pictures...Every important daily paper has had something to say about us, and mostly it was sensible comment.[lvii]

Both the *Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* followed the entire tour with their own correspondents.[lviii]

Does this point to the success of *Women's Cricket* as a publication? It is naturally difficult to assess

the impact *Women's Cricket* had on altering the discourses prevalent within the mainstream media regarding female participation in the sport. However, evidence does suggest that the publication's role in overturning negative stereotypes was an important one. Firstly, there was huge potential for the magazine to reach beyond its core audience of female cricketers to the general public at large. The correspondence Pollard received makes clear that the contents of *Women's Cricket* were from the start consumed by a wider audience than just female cricketers. Women wrote to her indicating that their husbands were equally vociferous consumers of the publication; men contributed copy; and male-penned letters were often published in the "correspondence" section.[lix]

Additionally, famous men in the cricketing world freely contributed articles to what they must have felt was a well-respected publication: Learie Constantine wrote about the 1951 Australian women's tour of England, Walter Hammond penned an article on WG Grace's mother - "the shadowy figure of a young woman in crinolines, flushed and pretty with excitement" at the great successes of her son – and Denis Compton the finest batsman of his day, happily confessed that thanks to his attendance at female matches, "any remaining illusions I might have had regarding cricket being only a man's game have entirely disappeared".[lx] As the publication gained respectability and more male cricketing names felt able to contribute articles, so the potential grew to validate women's cricket as a serious and important pastime, worthy of male attention.

By 1960 Rheinberg was able to tell the AGM of the WCA that "*Women's Cricket* is well-known by the newspaper men and women, many of whom take news from it for publication".[lxi] Three years later she reinforced this message:

> There is no doubt that the magazine has attained its small place in the cricket world at large; it is surprising, for instance, how useful the Press find it (the National Press are all sent

> complimentary copies) and its outside reading public is wider than one would imagine.[lxii]

There is an implication here that the mainstream press were, through *Women's Cricket*, not just made aware of the facts surrounding female participation in cricket, but altered their own coverage accordingly. Other evidence supports this; in June 1930, for example, Pollard wrote the following:

> I have in mind a criticism [of women's cricket] I saw in a paper not long ago. The Editor had seen a picture of girls presumably playing cricket, and on the leg side, quite close to the batsman, were three fielders. The whole thing looked silly and was silly. I ferreted the matter out and found that the photographer had asked square leg to move in and two players from the slips to go over and so make a better picture.
>
> This was done – with the ultimate result that Women's Cricket was held up to ridicule in that paper. I have since cleared up the matter with the paper concerned and a good and proper picture has been published, and I believe there is goodwill between us.[lxiii]

The editors of male cricket periodicals were also sent copies, and John Armitage, the editor of *The Cricketer*, was clearly a vociferous consumer of the publication. He wrote to Pollard in 1935 saying: “I have been twice to the Oval this year to watch women's games and...I feel I should like to thank you, and through you all those concerned, for the very great pleasure I have derived from my two visits”.[lxiv] The publication may well have influenced Wilfred Brookes, the editor of *Wisden*, too; in the preface to the 1938 edition he wrote: “I found a good deal of support for the suggestion that some space should be given to Women's Cricket and for the first time this has been done”.[lxv] By 1970, in the wake of the 1968/9 tour of Australasia, *Wisden* carried a full page feature on Enid Bakewell, which celebrated her achievement of scoring over 1,000 runs and taking more than 100 wickets on a single tour; this depth of coverage in the “cricket Bible” was a first for women's

cricket.[lxvi] The fact that both *The Cricketer* and *Wisden* offered coverage of international women's cricket from the 1930s onwards supports the idea that *Women's Cricket* was influential in the world of male-driven media coverage.

Nevertheless, the editorial preoccupation with decorum did not always sit well with readers of the magazine. In 1967, in response to yet one more editorial criticising players for such misdemeanours as the wearing of trousers and the drinking of alcohol after matches, one player wrote to the editors in disgust:

> If slacks and beer are so appalling to the sight of so many, they don't have to behave like sheep and follow suit. They need not mix with people like myself who have this dreadful scourge of being a beer drinker and also a slacks wearer. Anyway, I have yet to go to a 'big match' where the thousands of spectators have walked out in disgust because they didn't approve of the 'image' of the WCA. Come off it you lot, we live in 1967 not 1867...What a load of old rubbish!...I think the whole case of the bad 'image' has been conjured up in the minds of a few 'old hands' who refuse to move with the times and twitter on for the sake of twittering.[lxvii]

Yet the emphasis on playing cricket in decorous ways, and in particular in skirts, not trousers, was clearly successful in terms of gaining male support for women's cricket. Neville Cardus, the famous cricket writer, became a staunch supporter of women's cricketer after attending the 1949 women's Test match at Sydney, and published numerous positive articles during the 1950s. He was just one of many who stated that he was completely won over to the sport once he realised that: “The main point about women's cricket is that none of its exponents wishes to compare it with men's”.[lxviii]

Another mark of its success is that *Women's Cricket* spawned imitators in other countries where women's cricket was being played. As noted above, the magazine was being distributed in other countries throughout its history, and it seems that female cricketers abroad felt its production was worthwhile enough to contemplate publications of their own. *Australian Women's Cricket* began in March 1938, retailing at 3d, and edited by sports writer and secretary of the Australian Women's Cricket Council Dot Debnam.[lxix] By 1960, the Nederlandse Dames Cricket Bond had begun their own magazine, "De Cricketster". One Dutch cricketer, Fifi Brandenberg, wrote a letter to *Women's Cricket* outlining their initiative:

> I feel I ought to let you know that we are in the process of starting an "Official Magazine", which I hope will strengthen our Association by making our members feel that we are one big family...The first copy will be sent all over the country for reasons of propaganda and publicity.[lxx]

There has been very little research conducted into women's cricket globally; it is thus difficult to reach meaningful conclusions about the impact of such publications, or indeed of *Women's Cricket*, internationally. Nonetheless, Rheinberg (who served as England manager on the 1948/9 and 1957/8 tours of Australasia) reveals in her tour diaries that she actively used *Women's Cricket* while abroad as a publicity tool for the WCA. On one occasion in New Zealand in 1957, she wrote that she had met the President of the (men's) New Zealand Cricket Council: "He is very keen on women playing cricket and would like to see it started in all the primary schools here. He is now a subscriber to the mag!"[lxxi] In addition, coverage of women's cricket in other countries does appear to have improved by the 1960s. Rheinberg wrote in her 1957/8 tour diary that "We are getting wonderful publicity here – much more than in 1948, and so far we've done 7 broadcasts both Commercial and on the National Systems...We've been on the front and back pages of the daily papers and are actually the

subject of the third leader this morning."[lxxii] This did not just apply to Australasian tours, either: the WCA reported that they believed the coverage of the tour to South Africa in 1960/61 to have been very good indeed.[lxxiii] This is impressionistic, but it is certainly possible that female-penned publications had a similar impact on coverage of women's cricket abroad as *Women's Cricket* did in the UK.

Several factors, then, point to *Women's Cricket* magazine as having played an influential role in the increasingly favourable coverage which the sport gained in the postwar years. Arguably, though a variety of factors were at work, Pollard and Rheinberg's commitment to offering an alternative vision of female cricketers as serious competitors who enjoyed their cricket to the full, and to providing the editors of national newspapers with accurate information, appears to have at least partly helped dispel the ignorance surrounding women's cricket, and alter dominant discourses.

Conclusion

In 1967 Netta Rheinberg made the reluctant decision to cease publication of *Women's Cricket* magazine. At the Executive Committee meeting where she announced both her resignation from the Executive Committee and the end of *Women's Cricket*, it was noted that she "had given the matter much careful thought over several years and had come to the conclusion that she was out of touch with the present day affairs of the WCA".[lxxiv] The rise in publication and paper costs in the 1950s coupled with a decline in readership meant that in some years, the paper was actually being sold at a loss. In this struggling market, and having edited the publication for 17 years, Rheinberg seems to have felt that the time was right to take a step back from the Association's affairs.

Arguably, though, *Women's Cricket* had already served its purpose. By the time it ceased publication in 1967, media coverage of women's cricket was unrecognisable from what it had been in 1930, the year it was first published. Serious and informative coverage was now the order of the day, and though many factors contributed towards this shift, *Women's Cricket* magazine certainly had a role to play. This article has demonstrated that it was possible throughout the interwar and postwar years for women cricketers, through the production of their own news publication, to challenge the negative discourses which surrounded their participation in a male-dominated sport.

Numerous other women's sports produced their own periodicals in this period: titles such as *Hockey Field and Lacrosse* (published from 1923) and its successor *Women's Hockey Field*, *Net ball* (published from 1933), and *Lacrosse* (published from 1948) all occupied a place in the market during these years. Future research might usefully focus on the extent to which the women involved in other sports also helped provide a corrective to some of the negative coverage of their activities in the mainstream media. It seems likely, though, that given the growth in serious media coverage of all women's sports in these years, these other publications served a similar purpose and achieved similar success to *Women's Cricket*. As the case study presented here demonstrates, and contrary to some current historiography, sportswomen were not generally content to sit back and allow the media to continue to cover their sport in demeaning and negative ways; instead, they saw media discourses as something which they could attempt to, and in some cases did, change for the better.

---

[i] On media portrayals of sportswomen, see Alina Bernstein (2002) 'Is it time for a victory lap? Changes in the media coverage of women in sport', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 37:3-4; Pamela Creedon (ed.) (1994) *Women, Media and Sport. Challenging Gender Values* (London: Thousand Oaks); Amy Godoy-Pressland and Gerald Griggs (2014) 'The photographic representation of female athletes in the British print media during the London 2012 Olympic Games', *Sport in Society* 17:6; Jennifer Hargreaves (1994) *Sporting females* (London: Routledge); Sheila Scraton and Anne Flintoff (eds.) (2002) *Gender and sport: a reader* (London: Routledge); Jan Wright and Gill Clarke (1999) 'Sport, the media and the construction of compulsory heterosexuality', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 34:3. A recent case study of the way in which the media has covered women's cricket can be found in Angela Burroughs, Liz Ashburn and Leonie Seebohm (1995) '"Add Sex and Stir": Homophobic Coverage of Women's Cricket in Australia', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 19.

[ii] Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, 196.

[iii] Michael Messner (1988) 'Sports and Male Domination: The Female Athlete as Contested Ideological Terrain',

Sociology of Sport Journal 5:3.

[iv] Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, 167.

[v] Fiona Skillen (2013) *Women, Sport and Modernity in Interwar Britain* (Oxford: Peter Lang), in particular chapter 5 and the conclusion.

[vi] Joyce Kay (2010) 'A window of opportunity? Preliminary thoughts on women's sport in post-war Britain', *Sport in History* 30:2, 198-210.

[vii] An example is *Hockey Field and Lacrosse* (published from 1923) and its successor *Women's Hockey Field*, which was also edited by Marjorie Pollard.

[viii] Women's Cricket Association, 'Yearbook', 1930-38, Women's Cricket Associates, http://www.womenscrickethistory.org/ (accessed January 27 2012).

[ix] Jack Williams (1999) *Cricket and England: a cultural and social history of the interwar years* (London: Frank Cass), 95.

[x] All England Women's Hockey Association (1954) *Women's Hockey (from Village Green to Wembley Stadium)* (London: Macdonald and Evans), 11.

[xi] These figures are quoted in Ross McKibbin (1998) *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford: OUP), 368-70.

[xii] Skillen, *Women, Sport and Modernity.*

[xiii] Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, 118. See also Stephen Wagg, '"Her Dainty Strength": Suzanne Lenglen, Wimbledon and the Coming of Female Sport Celebrity', in Wagg (ed.) (2011) *Myths and Milestones in the history of sport* (Hampshire: Macmillan).

[xiv] Susan Noel (ed.) (1950) *Sportswoman's Manual* (London: Hutchinson's Library of Sports and Pastimes), 14.

[xv] Walter Hammond (1952) *Cricket's Secret History* (London: Stanley Paul & Co.), 155.

[xvi] Mike Huggins (2007) '"And Now, Something for the Ladies": representations of women's sport in cinema newsreels 1918-1939', *Women's History Review* 16:5, 688.

[xvii] *Daily Mirror,* 22 April 1924.

[xviii] *Women's Cricket*, May 1930.

[xix] *Daily Mirror*, April 21 1938.

[xx] Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, 124.

[xxi] Williams, *Cricket and England*, 105.

[xxii] *Women's Cricket*, 22 June 1956.

[xxiii] *Women's Cricket*, July 1933.

[xxiv] *Women's Cricket*, 13 July 1962.

[xxv] *Daily Graphic*, 21 May 1951.

[xxvi] The major exception is Richard Cashman and Amanda Weaver (1991) *Wicket Women: cricket and women in Australia* (New South Wales: NSW University Press).

[xxvii] Netta Rheinberg tour diary, 1948/9 tour of Australia and New Zealand, private collection, Lancashire, 5 December 1948.

[xxviii] Ibid., 17 March 1949.

[xxix] Unknown newspaper, December 1934, personal scrapbook, private collection, Lancashire. This point is also made by Cashman and Weaver, *Wicket Women*, 93.

[xxx] WCA AGM minutes 1929, private collection, Lancashire.

[xxxi] Women's Cricket Association, 'Yearbook 1930', Women's Cricket Associates, http://www.womenscrickethistory.org/ (accessed January 27 2012).

[xxxii] *Women's Cricket*, May 1930.

[xxxiii] *Women's Cricket*, September 1931. My emphasis.

[xxxiv] *Women's Cricket*, 1 May 1964.

[xxxv] *Women's Cricket*, August 1930.

[xxxvi] Women's Cricket Association, 'Yearbook 1937', Women's Cricket Associates, http://www.womenscrickethistory.org/ (accessed January 27 2012).

[xxxvii] *Women's Cricket*, August 1936.

[xxxviii] *Women's Cricket*, May 1932.

[xxxix] *Women's Cricket*, 1954, various editions. This type of language was typical; terms like 'batsmen' and 'third man' were seen by the WCA as gender-neutral and used indiscriminately.

[xl] Williams, *Cricket and England*, 101.

[xli] Skillen, *Women, sport and modernity*, 205.

[xlii] *Women's Cricket*, June 1930.

[xliii] *Women's Cricket*, 17 September 1954.

[xliv] *Women's Cricket*, August 1933.
[xlv] *Women's Cricket*, 25 April 1952 and various editions, 1955.
[xlvi] Anthony Bateman (2009) *Cricket, Literature and Culture: symbolising the nation* (Farnham: Ashgate), 5-6.
[xlvii] *Women's Cricket*, 26 May 1950.
[xlviii] *Women's Cricket*, August 1947.
[xlix] For example, the August 1939 issue featured a letter from Ina Lamason (who represented New Zealand between 1948 and 1954) acknowledging receipt of the magazine.
[l] *Women's Cricket*, various editions, 1954.
[li] Skillen, *Women, sport and modernity*, 230.
[lii] Richard Holt and Tony Mason (2000) *Sport in Britain, 1945-2000* (Oxford: OUP), 10-11.
[liii] Kay, 'A window of opportunity?', 199-200.
[liv] *Evening News*, 10 Jan 1969.
[lv] *Guardian*, 9 August 1966.
[lvi] *Daily Telegraph*, 20 June 1966.
[lvii] Women's Cricket Association, 'Yearbook 1963', Women's Cricket Associates, http://www.womenscrickethistory.org/ (accessed January 27 2012).
[lviii] The 1966 tour of the New Zealanders did not receive as much coverage, but this was at least partly because it coincided with England's 1966 World Cup victory, which naturally consumed most sports pages.
[lix] See for example *Women's Cricket*, 17 September 1965.
[lx] *Women's Cricket*, 18 May 1951, 23 May 1952, 14 June 1951.
[lxi] WCA AGM minutes 1960, private collection, Lancashire.
[lxii] Women's Cricket Association, 'Yearbook 1963', Women's Cricket Associates, http://www.womenscrickethistory.org/ (accessed January 27 2012).
[lxiii] *Women's Cricket*, June 1930.
[lxiv] *Women's Cricket*, August 1935.
[lxv] *Wisden*, 1938.
[lxvi] *Wisden*, 1970.
[lxvii] *Women's Cricket*, 28 July 1967.
[lxviii] Nancy Joy (1950) *Maiden Over* (London: Sporting Handbooks Ltd), 9.
[lxix] Cashman and Weaver, *Wicket Women*, 71.
[lxx] *Women's Cricket*, 29 April 1960.
[lxxi] Netta Rheinberg tour diary, 30 November 1957, private collection, Lancashire.
[lxxii] Netta Rheinberg tour diary, 15 January 1958, private collection, Lancashire.
[lxxiii] Women's Cricket Association, 'Yearbook 1961', Women's Cricket Associates, http://www.womenscrickethistory.org/ (accessed January 27 2012).
[lxxiv] WCA Executive Committee minutes, 9 September 1967, private collection, Lancashire.