

Cricket, Law and Society

(Elective, Spring 2025)

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Course Description

This interdisciplinary course explores the social and cultural life of cricket in a globalising world. In his celebrated book—*Beyond a Boundary* (1963)—C.L.R. James poses a thought-provoking question: “What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?” This question is central to our exploration of cricket, law and society. We seek to understand cricket not just as a series of rule-bound actions occurring on the field, which can be analysed formally, but also as an activity shaped by politics, history and social contexts. Instead of taking a purely doctrinal approach to sports law, this course uses interdisciplinary perspectives to investigate the relationship between cricket, law, and life.

The course is divided into three interconnected parts. The first part explores the transformative journey of cricket as it travelled from England to the Indian subcontinent. How did cricket—a game that is quintessentially British—become so deeply embedded in Indian culture? We will also examine the significant role cricket has played in shaping cultural and political sensibilities. In many respects, the vernacularization of cricket in India serves as a meta-narrative that reflects issues of caste, religion, and national identity.

The second part of the course explores the concept of law, codes and social norms in cricket. We will discuss what it means for cricket to embody the idea of the “spirit” of the game—a moral and ethical code that exceeds the fixity of written laws. Additionally, we will analyse iconic cases where cricket has been put on trial in different jurisdictions. Often viewed as public scandals (the phrase “it’s not cricket” comes to mind), the complexities surrounding recent issues such as chucking, ball-tampering, match-fixing, and racism reveal that cricket, much like law and life, must be understood as a socially constructed phenomenon with multiple interpretations. Furthermore, the course will examine some of the legal challenges related to the regulation of cricket and its “juridification” in India. We will focus specifically on cases involving the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and its role in governing cricket within the country.

The branding of cricket as a global sport and its increasing commodification in the Twenty20 era have led to heightened ethical and legal discussions. The third part of the course will deconstruct the so-called T20 revolution in cricket. By examining specific examples of T20 leagues, such as the Indian Premier League (IPL), we will explore how these newer formats have transformed cricket in terms of skills, strategies, playing culture, tactics, technology, and broadcasting. In this context, we will also analyse the growing use of technology in cricket adjudication and its impact on the role and authority of on-field umpires. How has technology reconstituted the very nature and meaning of cricket? The final section of the course will specifically address issues arising from the globalization of cricket and its impact on playing culture, law, and the democratisation of the game.

The course *Cricket, Law and Society* will introduce students to a variety of readings and perspectives from different disciplines. Its aim is to explore and reflect on mainstream discourses surrounding sports, law, and society. The course will emphasise how cricket offers various interpretations of rules, fair play, and adjudication, which contribute to our everyday understanding of law, morality, ethics, and justice. Students will be encouraged to document and analyse case studies, allowing them to view cricket as an important space for shaping identity, political discourse, and the meaning of life.

Select References

- Fraser, David (2003), *Cricket and the Law*, Routledge.
Gardiner, Simon (2001), *Sports Law*, Cavendish Publishing Limited.
Greenfield, Steve and Guy Osborn eds. (2013), *Law and Sport in Contemporary Society*, Routledge.
Guha, Ramchandra (2002), *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, Penguin Books Ltd.
James, C. L. R. (1963), *Beyond a Boundary*, Pantheon Books.
Nandy, Asish (1989), *The Tao of Cricket*, Viking Books.
Wigmore, Tim and Freddie Wilde (2020), *Cricket 2.0: Inside the T20 Revolution*, Penguin.