

# LIKE IN BASEBALL, CRICKET PUSHES LIMITS LOOKING FOR AN EDGE

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JUST like their counterparts in baseball, cricket players are capable of devising devious ways of getting some extra movement on a thrown ball.

Cutting, scratching, greasing or even biting the ball are all options that have been employed in the past to help get batters out.

In most cases, it's called cheating, plain and simple. But what happened over the weekend in cricket, the most gentlemanly of all sports, is much more than that. It has brought shame on Australia as a nation.

In South Africa for a series for four test matches, each lasting a maximum of five days, the Australians were caught red-handed trying to scuff the cricket ball with dirt stuck to a piece of yellow tape. The captain of the team, who happens to be the best batsman in the world, confessed to conspiring to cheat by getting a younger player to do the dirty deed.

Steve Smith, the captain, has been banned for the last test match of the series. Cameron Bancroft, the player with the yellow tape, is still available to play.

"This is a shocking disappointment," Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said Sunday, a day after the incident. "It's wrong."

It's also, as they say, just not cricket.

There have been many cases of ball tampering in the past. Like when former Pakistan captain Shahid Afridi bit the ball to rough up the leather against Australia in 2010. Or when England bowler Stuart Broad stepped on the ball with his spikes against South Africa, also in 2010.

In both instances, the point was to disfigure the ball enough so the flight path becomes more erratic and more difficult to hit.

In baseball, there is an equally entertaining list of ne'er-do-wells. There's Gaylord Perry and his vaseline, culminating with a classic ESPN commercial. There's Rick Honneycutt and his thumbtack. And, of course, Joe Niekro and his emery board.

That just wasn't cricket, either.

But one of the reasons why this cricket scandal is such a big deal, or at least a bigger deal than some of the others, is because the cheating was done by Australia, the most successful team in the sport over the last 30 years, on the international sporting stage.

The Australians pride themselves on sports, and cricket is right up there near the top of the list. The importance the country puts on its national cricket team can hardly be understated, dating back to its 150-year rivalry with England and its later independence from Britain in 1901.

It is Australia and England, and only Australia and England, that play for the sport's most coveted trophy, the Ashes.

And, as noted, the Australians have set the benchmark for success in cricket, making them a target for everyone else trying to climb up the rankings.

"You have to remember that this Australia team are so friendless in cricket because of the way they've carried on," former England spin bowler Graeme Swann told BBC Radio. "They've set themselves as this higher than high, this pious team who look down at everyone and set the benchmark for what is right and wrong in cricket, when everyone who's played against them knows that's an absolute joke."

Swann may be right, especially if you look back at one of the most underhanded moments in cricket's long history.



STEVEN Smith of Australia stands during play on the second day of the third cricket test against South Africa at Newlands Stadium, in Cape Town, South Africa.



MINNESOTA Twins pitcher Joe Niekro tosses his glove to home plate umpire Tim Tscida after the umpire stopped the baseball game between the Twins and Angels in Anaheim, Calif.

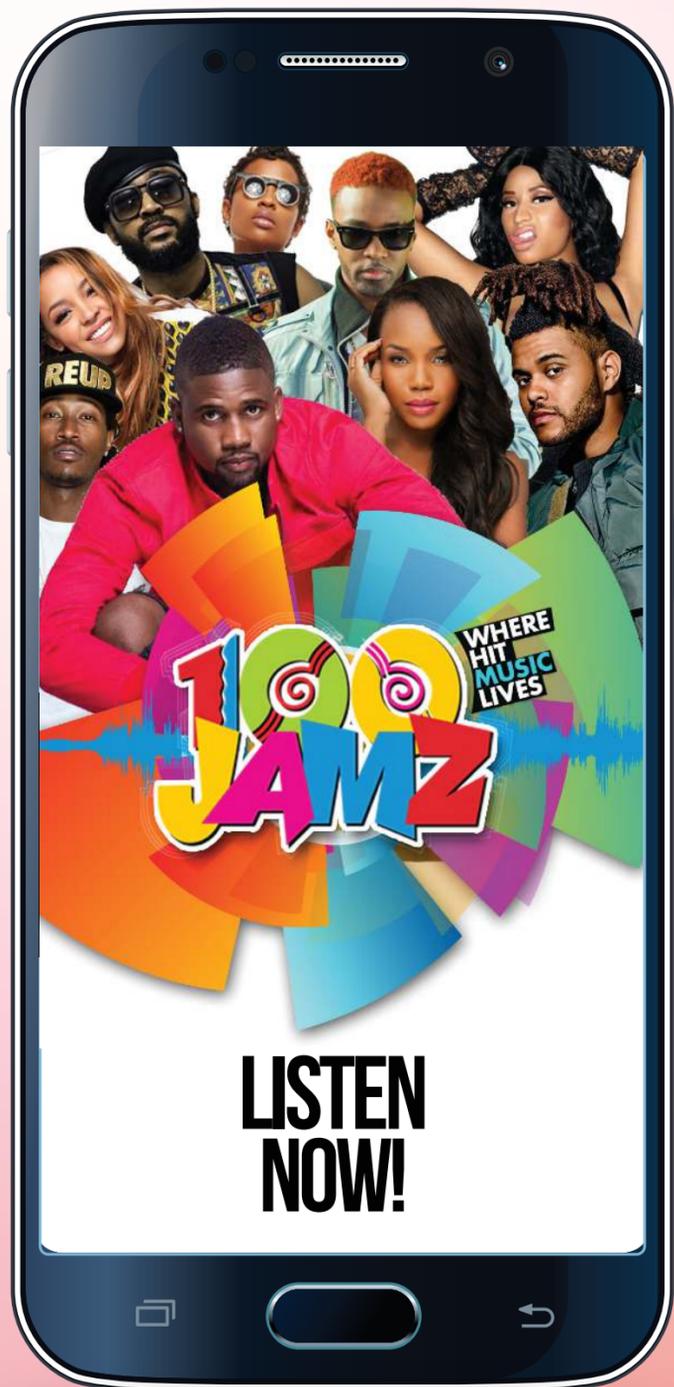
It happened in 1981, with Australia playing New Zealand in a one-day match. With only one ball left to be thrown, then-Australia captain Greg Chappell instructed his younger brother, Trevor, to bowl an underarm delivery to keep New Zealand from scoring

the winning runs. Trevor Chappell rolled the ball along the wicket, a legal move at the time, giving the Kiwi batsman no chance to hit it.

Australia won that match, but didn't win much respect in the most aristocratic team sport in the world.



PAKISTAN's cricket team captain Shahid Afridi.



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