

Imperial Blunder

A famous cricketer breaks the rules, with dire consequences.

There was once a famous cricketer, Peter Vigna was his name, a batsman better even than Donald Bradman or Virat Kohli. At a very young age he was selected to open batting for the Australian Test side, and routinely made a century or two in each innings. It was not long before he was chosen as captain of the Australian cricket team in the great test matches that were the pinnacle of this imperial sport. But on February 21, 2019 there occurred an event at the Melbourne Cricket Ground that will go down in history as a huge turning point in the story of Western Civilization, and brought into stark relief just how important had been the imperial reach of Great British Culture in Australia and all former and current British colonies in every corner of the globe.

For those readers who do not have a background or did not grow up in a country where this imperial sport reigned, here is a very brief sketch of the classic qualities of cricket, that is to say, its sacred rules. Without this knowledge, it would be very difficult, if not impossible to appreciate the significance of that event in 2019, and the shattering aftershocks that followed it.

In general terms, one must understand that the game of cricket represents all that is good in an ordered society, especially one that has received it from its founding country, England, now part of the United Kingdom. In the heady days of imperialism, English and European countries expanded their reach to many countries around the world, driven initially by the search for riches. And in return for the riches they reaped, they gave those countries the essential elements of a civilized society, none better than the game of cricket.

Cricket is a game in which detailed rules are sacrosanct, demanding unquestioning respect for the order of the game, which, in the great test matches that last for up to five days, is supreme. The pitch is 20.12 meters long and 3.05 meters wide. At each end is a set of three stumps (three thin poles hammered into the ground spanning 22.86 cm wide). Or, to put it in simpler language before Napoleon imposed the metric system on Europe, the pitch is 22 yards long by 10 feet wide. The bowling crease

(where the bowler's leading foot must not step over when he releases the ball) is five feet from the stumps at either end. The pitch is composed of carefully crafted tough turf, rolled down very hard.

The bowler is strictly limited to bowling the ball "over-arm" but he must not bend his elbow when tossing the ball. Throwing the ball like in baseball would be a foul and definitely cause for one of the two umpires at each end to discipline the bowler. The batter at the other end of the pitch has to hit the ball with his specially crafted wooden bat (usually a particular type of willow) that has a round narrow handle and a broad flat area for hitting the ball. The basic idea is for the bowler to bowl the ball and the batter to hit the ball away so that it does not hit the stumps, in which case he is called "out." There are eleven players on each team. Like in baseball, there are innings, in a test match two for each side. There are two batters batting at a time, one at each end. The bowler gets to bowl an "over" of six balls, then another bowler in his team bowls the next over. When all batsmen are called "out," the innings is over and the opposing side takes up the bat. The batsman strikes the ball and the batters then decide whether to run or not. If the ball goes far, they run to each end (1 run) and back (2 runs) and must make it to their respective creases before the fielders (all 11 of them) throw the ball to hit the stumps before the batter at either end makes it back. In this case he would be "out" and another batter come in. A batter may also be called "out" if the ball he hits is caught by a fielder before the ball has hit the ground. There are a myriad of other situations in which a batsman may be called out or make runs, but these are the basics and hopefully they give a reasonable picture of this game of rules.

In this story, however, we are concerned with one rule that applies to the ball, the composition and surface of which are crucial to the game. The ball is traditionally made of a cork core, bound tightly by string and covered by a red leather case with a slightly raised seam where the two halves of the cover are sewn together. The spin and swing of the ball can be managed by the bowler, but the surface of the ball, especially the seam, can affect its behavior considerably. There are therefore very strict rules as to what players may do to the surface of the ball. They may polish it on their clothes after each ball, but they may not pick at it in

any way. Those who know baseball may wonder about this. In general, the idea of cricket is for the bowler to bowl a ball that bounces first before the batsman hits it. Thus, the extent to which the ball may both swing and bounce at an angle not expected by the batter is the crux of the game. If the ball is tampered with, its bounce can become less predictable by the batter.

Peter Vigna was a boy who grew up very quickly, mainly because of his natural talent with a bat. From the very first day he played cricket on the sand at Torquay (the one in Australia, not England), at the age of 3 or 4 or 5 (the pundits never got it quite right; it was as if he were born with a cricket ball in his mouth), his future as a world star of cricket was cast. Otherwise he had a normal upbringing. His mum and dad doted on him, gave him every opportunity to play cricket with bat and ball, but from the very start, it was the bat that he took to. The ball was simply a means to the bat. His father, a quiet man devoted to his family, taught mathematics at the local high school, and his mother was a recent immigrant from England. So it was an easy choice that, once his talent became obvious, he eventually went to England to play club cricket at the tender age of seventeen. And it was inevitable that one day he would be selected for the Australian Test team, and that happened in 2012, selected as a bowler, of all things (very important to our story, though). But his batting soon caught the eye of selectors as he made century after century. They loved him, and he soon took over as captain of team Australia. What more could a young and talented man want?

The answer is simple. He wanted to win, for that is what drives all those who play team sports, or any competitive sport for that matter. Ask them why they do it, what drives them. And they all answer without any hesitation: "I love to win, and I really hate to lose." This is commonly said with a deep emotional thrust. Would they do anything to win? By this one means, would they break the rules to gain an advantage over their opponent? Or maybe not exactly break the rules, but bend them a little? To do that, though would not be playing fair. The drug scandals in the Olympic games, and many if not all international sports (bicycle racing for example), are legion. But it is not just drugs. Consider what young gymnasts will do to their growing bodies in order to

win. For such talented people, winning drives them with the same power as does any human instinct.

So now, we already understand why Peter Vigna was all set up to win at any cost. All it needs is the temptation and opportunity. One might say that cheating is an occupational hazard for highly talented athletes.

There is a difference between cricket and other sports. Cricket has a grand and sacred history. And to repeat, English history. And to repeat again, imperial history. It is a game that was transported to all of the colonies of then Great Britain. All those countries (or nearly all, at least the most progressive of all) that were colonized by once Great Britain continued to play the game even after they were decolonized or gained a measure of independence. (There are some inexplicable exceptions, Canada being one of them, but we can put that down to its degradation by its neighbor, the United States.) If you doubt this assessment, just consider that, when Australia's Test Cricket team captain Steve Smith and his collaborators were accused of ball tampering, none other than the Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull publicly denounced the cheating and demanded that something be done.

It was ball tampering in which Peter Vigna was involved. As captain of the Australian Test side against India in 2019, he was caught on camera along with a couple of his colleagues, rubbing the surface of the ball or picking at the seam with his fingernails that had been strengthened by a secret substance, or possibly attachment, that made them as sharp as a knife's edge. The investigation never did determine how the scratches to the surface of the ball and slight roughing of the seam were achieved. In fact, similar to the case of the notorious Bancroft scandal of 2018, the umpires did not detect any unusual scratches or damage to the ball, and did not prescribe the penalty of five runs against the offending team, as was their prerogative. Nevertheless, vigilant commentators examined and re-examined video of Vigna rubbing and scratching the ball in ways that looked like he was trying to scratch the surface, against the rules of cricket, according to these ever vigilant commentators, some of whom, of course, were themselves former cricket heroes.

The public outcry, more accurately the media frenzy, over the sin of Vigna's alleged violation of the rules, led to an inquiry

by Cricket Australia and threats from various politicians that the Australian Government had a duty to step in and regulate the sport. But the search for Vigna's collaborators under way for almost two years, found none. And it is now claimed that the collaborators will never be found because of a code of silence that has arisen within cricket teams around the world, a lesson learned from the Steve Smith scandal. In any event, Vigna was fined one year's salary (a few million dollars), demoted from the captaincy forever, and barred from playing top class cricket for two years. Further, he had to admit his wrongdoing in public on Australia's national radio and television the ABC, and to apologize to the nation for his wrongdoing. They wanted to call it "sin" but the government communications specialists thought that such language would violate the separation of church and state, a fiction in Australia, copied from the USA.

And so it happened. At the opening of the first Test match between Australia and England on December 26, 2021, both sides assembled as though they were to remember a famous colleague who had died. The teams lined up in two columns starting at the entrance. Vigna entered the oval and walked as though through a gauntlet. The crowd erupted in boos and hisses and many yelled awful derogatory remarks, some of them racist. Facing the stand that contained all the media people and the officials of the Cricket Australia Board, Vigna dropped to his knees, clenching his hands together in front of his breast. Cricket Australia had given strong instructions to the camera operator and his director to do as many close-ups of Vigna's face as possible, especially when he cried, which Vigna, after some arm-twisting, had promised to do.

This is what he said, in a clear, shaky voice, a special microphone set up to catch even the tiniest of whimpers:

"To the proud people of the Commonwealth of Nations, I express my deepest apologies for bringing our wonderful game of cricket into disrepute. I accept full responsibility for my actions of tampering with the cricket ball at the MCG on February 21, 2019 in the test against India, I made foolish choices and I am ashamed, so ashamed..."

Vigna bowed his head and tears trickled down his face. The media were not pleased with this, as his bowed head hid the tears from the cameras. The director tried to signal to Vigna to hold up

his head, but as it happened, this was not necessary. Suddenly, Vigna raised both hands and lifted his head, his eyes wide, staring at the dark clouds above. Still on his knees he cried:

“I ask forgiveness! I have given my life to cricket, and will not be able to live with myself ever again! I am so sorry, so sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry for breaking the sacred rules of cricket in such a careless manner! Please, I beg you, accept my deepest heart-felt apologies for this cricket crime of the century!”

The crowd once more erupted into boos and hisses. The camera quickly drew back from his face and scanned the crowd. It had turned into a huge angry mob, fists shaking, mouths twisted in hatred and disgust. This was a media sensation. Many millions, perhaps billions around the world witnessed this drama. And after the noise of the crowd died away, Vigna stood up slowly, and bowed to the crowd all around the stadium. His team mates, even the English took small steps toward him and then a few patted him on the back, trying to console him. He withdrew to the stand along with his team. He would not be opening as he used to. But he would be batting. Australia was to bat first. And Australia won that test match, Vigna making a total of 265 runs, over both innings. In fact, without his performance, Australia would have lost. The Cricket Board was jubilant. Vigna received many accolades. But it was not to last.

The media was not finished with Vigna yet. In the match reviews, various cricket greats from the past, some of them media personalities themselves, were brought before the public and asked what they thought of Vigna’s return and especially his apology. There were mixed reactions. Of course, his fantastic batting could not be criticized. He was no doubt a genius of a batter. But a number of former captains and others expressed some concern that what Vigna had done was irreparable. He had besmirched the entire game. “Was there nothing he could do to repair that?” asked the media pundits. The answer seemed to be “no” and some insisted that the punishment was not severe enough. Though others, usually those not as old as the former greats, mused that maybe the punishment was too severe, especially as the umpires had not penalized Vigna’s team when the offense was reported to them, and no damage could be discerned to the ball that might have affected the outcome of the

game in any way.

The Australian Cricket Board was well aware of these views. Indeed, some members of the board thought that there should have been no punishment except a reprimand. But the chair of the board, Sir Douglas Pinster was adamant. The very basis of the game had been insulted and broken. Besides even the Prime Minister had expressed his concern on behalf of Australia. And the Queen woke from her afternoon nap and gave a brief public address to express her concern to all her subjects.

The saga might have ended there, the media growing tired of it, always looking for something new, except that Australia almost lost the second Test Match, even though Vigna once again performed in a way that showed just what a talented and gifted player he was. He even made two fabulous catches that, combined with another two centuries, clearly demonstrated to the Board that he was an essential player to the team. Without him, the team would lose. And to lose to England was always the height of humiliation.

We have said very little about the coach. Let us just say that he was a kind of amateur psychologist, like most coaches of team sports in the 21st century. Of course he was a former test cricketer, an outstanding wicket keeper (the “catcher” who stands behind the wicket and fields the fast balls as they whiz by the batter). His name was Clive Brown and he was an incessant talker, again like most coaches. Almost all his conversations with the players were in the form of speeches derived from his notes taken in coach’s class to which the Cricket Board demanded all coaching staff attend. But on what was about to occur he had no quick speech. He was dumbfounded at the insolence and sheer disregard for others, lack of respect for him, the coach. Yet that was not at all what Vigna intended. He simply wanted to be made whole again. He wanted true forgiveness for which he had groveled and pleaded in his public apology.

“Coach, can I have a quiet word?” asked Vigna after he stepped away from the practice net, bat still in hand.

Coach Brown, a short thin fellow, raised his head and looked him in the eye. “Of course. I am always available for any concerns or suggestions you may have,” he answered with a big, patronizing smile.

“Coach that’s always good to hear. I have been thinking about this since the day of my apology.”

“Thinking? About what? I hope you have not been worrying or brooding. That’s not good for one’s mental health, you know. It can affect your game too.”

“Yes and no. It hasn’t affected me so far, has it?”

“That’s for sure. But it’s still important to be mindful of the dangers of too much thinking,” advised coach Brown.

Vigna, not quite sure what the coach meant by the word “thinking” shifted on his feet and swallowed a little saliva. There was a brief silence, while the coach looked him up and down, a frown appearing, but then a big smile as well. This was enough encouragement for Vigna to continue. “I want to be captain again,” he said.

Coach Brown’s jaw dropped and the frown appeared again. His tongue made a nervous little dart out of his mouth and back again. “That’s not going to happen,” he said quietly, always like that when he said no to something his players wanted.

“Wait, I haven’t finished what I wanted to say,” Vigna quickly replied.

“The answer’s still no. You heard the crowd. You copped the Cricket Board demand for punishment. Leave it alone, or it will get worse.”

“But I did a full apology and I really meant it. And I asked for forgiveness. Isn’t that enough? Shouldn’t the punishment be ended?”

“Don’t! Don’t do this. You will only harm yourself. It’s the whole game that needs to be rehabilitated, not just you.” Coach was getting upon his high horse.

“And you’re doing it through me,” muttered Vigna.

“I suppose so, in a way. But you brought it all on yourself. You shouldn’t have broken the rules. I thought you understood that,” lectured the coach.

“I do. I do. Believe me I do. That’s why I have another request to make, actually it’s another way of asking for the captaincy back.”

The coach looked around to see if anyone else was listening. Probably not. He leaned in closer to Vigna. He wasn’t a bad fellow really. He felt sorry for him, but the Board had spoken. And there

was the fact that no actual damage had been done to the ball and the umpires never announced a penalty during the match. “What is it then? If reasonable I will go back to the Board. But I can tell you. They’re going to say no.”

“My public apology I now know was not enough. But I truly want to be forgiven so I can start my life over. The only way I can see that I will be forgiven is to be punished really and truly in public, before the crowd in the stadium.”

“But we already did that. You did a great job. The media loved it.”

“Please coach. I don’t want to suffer for the rest of my life with this burden of my apology not being accepted.” Vigna wanted to grab his coach and give him a good shake. Of course he held back.

But the coach said, resisting the urge to put his arm around him, “there’s nothing else you can do. You have to accept your guilt. I can arrange counseling, if you wish, to help you overcome it all.”

Immediately Vigna blurted it out. “I want to be whipped in public in the Melbourne Cricket Ground.”

“What? This is no joking matter!” exclaimed the coach.

“It’s no joke. I really mean it. Twenty lashes, more if they like. It’s that, or I quit right now and the team will have to do without me.”

Rarely lost for words, Coach Brown stepped back speechless. Vigna continued:

“And I want to be whipped by one of the media personalities of past cricket fame. Preferably a fast bowler who will have a big swinging arm and will be able to lay on the strokes.”

“You’re mad!” cried Coach Brown.

“Maybe. But I am convinced it’s my only way to get back my life. Surely if the fans see me actually get punished, they will accept my apology. It’s the only convincing way I can think of that shows absolutely that I have been punished, paid for my sins, and with every scream in pain as each stroke is laid on, that will be enough surely to show that I am so sorry for what I did.”

“I can’t go to the Board with this crazy request. I’ll be a laughing stock, and they will probably fire me.”

“Are you not prepared to take that risk? It will save the team

from a big loss. I will quit, I tell you. I will quit if they will not do this. I want my life back at any cost.”

Coach Brown called for an emergency session of the board. Sir Douglas was outraged to be called away from his annual coastal retreat and golf week. But coach did not want to go down in cricket history as having lost a test match to the pommies (English) by such a big margin, which is what would happen. And just in case, he brought Peter Vigna with him. They met in the MCG legends room, a huge room that looked like any modern hotel dining room, big round tables covered with blindingly white table cloths, a massive bar running all the way down one side, and on the other side facing the oval, huge windows giving a view of the entire pitch. But today, Sir Douglas had the curtains drawn across the windows. The lights were turned down, he wanted a somber atmosphere, no hint of celebrity. And no beer or anything else alcoholic. Just jugs of water spaced out around the table and glasses in each place. There were ten of them, representing the executive board. There was no need for a full board to meet on such a trivial matter as a disciplinary action. The board took their seats, leaving two vacant directly opposite Sir Douglas. Coach Brown took his, but Vigna held back. Coach tugged at his sleeve. They were both dressed in their Melbourne Cricket Club blazers of course.

Sir Douglas coughed loudly to bring the members to order. “I hereby announce the opening of a special session of the executive board of the Melbourne Cricket Club,” he said.

There was a muffled noise of chairs being pulled into place. The large table seated twelve. However, immediately, there was a problem because Vigna refused to sit and insisted on standing behind the chair next to Coach Brown.

“Take your seat, young man,” harrumphed Sir Douglas.

“I don’t deserve to sit at the table with you illustrious gentlemen,” mumbled Vigna, head bowed.

Coach pulled at his blazer sleeve. “Sit down you silly bugger,” he whispered.

Vigna stepped back, head still bowed.

Sir Douglas coughed yet again and looked around the table. “All right then. Let’s get down to business. Coach Brown, please

explain the problem. We thought we had already dealt quickly and fairly with this embarrassing matter.”

“Sir Douglas and honorable members, I am honored to speak to you today. Peter Vigna, who is our only hope of winning this test series against England, has requested that he be allowed to be made whole again.”

“Made what?” asked Sir Douglas in consternation. The rest of the board wriggled in their seats, signaling their agreement.

“Made whole. He feels that his life has been ruined and that even though he has been punished for his offenses, and has publicly apologized for them, he has not been forgiven, people still boo and hiss at him when he comes onto the field.”

Sir Douglas sat back in his chair and twiddled the pointy end of his mustache. “Coach Brown, what more can we do? Besides, if the fans will not forgive him, that’s up to them, don’t you think? We have done our part. We punished him fairly and reasonably.”

Vigna looked up and took a step to stand against his chair. “That’s just it, sir,” said Vigna raising his voice, I need to be punished more, so they, and you too,” he looked around the table, “will be convinced that I really am sorry for what I did.”

“More? What else can we do? Stop you from playing forever? We could do that...”

Coach Brown interrupted, “but it would have dire consequences for our team, not to mention destroy Peter’s life.”

Leaning on the back of his chair, Vigna blurted out, “I want to be publicly whipped! Whipped till I cry, only that will convince the fans that I’m sorry. Only that will convince all of you that I have paid for my sins and can become captain again. Made whole.”

The board members stirred in their chairs and muttered to each other.

“You are joking or course,” said Sir Douglas with a frown, trying to keep a straight face.

“He’s not joking, Sir Douglas, he’s dead serious,” put in the Coach.

At that moment the door opened behind them and a tall man entered the room, perfectly groomed, carefully shaven face and clipped hair. He looked like he had makeup on. It was none other than Ian Church, the all-time cricket great, Australian legendary

spin bowler who bowled out the entire English side in the final Test match against England in the 1974 series for just 36 runs. He was now a media favourite and commentator. He was also followed by another individual, rather over weight, a full head of hair, a short, heavy set young man of around forty. His presence made everyone stir, especially Peter Vigna. For he was Fred Cousins, Vigna's agent.

The two men, looking a bit like Laurel and Hardy, stood behind Vigna. Coach Brown didn't like anyone standing behind him, so he stood and offered his seat to Church, who gratefully took it. Fred the agent, started to walk around the table, one hand in his pocket jiggling his phone.

"This is most irregular," complained Sir Douglas.

Cousins, always the agent, took over. "I demand that you restore Peter's full privileges and status as a member of the cricket team of this important series, and appoint him back to his rightful place of Captain. Furthermore, since he committed no specific offense that actually affected the game as it played out—the ball was not damaged—you must declare him innocent."

The board erupted with angry complaints and epithets. Exactly what Cousins wanted of course.

"If I may?" asked Vigna. "I want to be publicly whipped, enough to make me feel the pain of the accusations against me. I accept the guilt. I want to be rid of it. I want all the fans to see me suffer."

"But you have already suffered," insisted Sir Douglas.

"Obviously, it's not enough," interjected Church. "What is needed is a public spectacle. I suggest that he be stripped naked and receive twenty lashes in front of a full crowd in the middle of the pitch at the Melbourne Cricket Ground!"

"That's OK with me," said Vigna, his head bowed once again.

Cousins the agent spoke up. "Ten lashes and nothing more, plus he gets his captaincy back immediately."

"And TV Channel 7 gets full exclusive rights," added Church.

Sir Douglas banged the table with his open hand. It stung. "That's enough. This is beyond the pale of decency. I will not allow such degradation!"

“But it’s exactly what I need,” said Vigna in a soft voice, “don’t you see? It’s the only way I can convincingly pay for what I have done, or am supposed to have done.”

“Now you’re saying that you might be innocent? That you didn’t necessarily do anything wrong?” complained a board member.

“This is disgusting,” cried another.

“We found you guilty,” said yet another.

Church looked around the table. “Not quite,” he said in his golden voice, “the people, the fans, the media found him guilty. They judged him, found him guilty, and now they want his punishment carried out to the fullest extent. Peter Vigna’s life must be restored to him. Only the public can do it.”

“But to whip him naked is barbaric,” said Sir Douglas, pushing back on his chair, then standing up tall, twirling his mustache.

“Eight strokes with a cat-o-nine tails,” countered Church.

“Shocking!” cried another board member.

“A belting on the bare bottom with a one meter ruler,” offered Cousins.

“That would be childish. I want to be whipped!” cried Vigna, now dropping to his knees. “If naked, so be it.”

“But that would be pornographic,” objected yet another board member, blushing as he said it.

Church smiled. “It certainly would,” he said quietly to himself.

Sir Douglas looked around the table. “Order please!” he cried, then sat back in his seat. He beckoned to a bar tender who stood transfixed. “Bring us a few jugs of beer and a whisky for those who want it. This meeting has become too stressful. We need to settle down and talk this over like civilized adults.”

The beer and whisky arrived. Most went for the whisky. Coach Brown allowed himself a beer, but forbade Vigna from having any alcohol at all. Cousins objected, but the coach held firm. Finally, Cousins bargained for a Red Bull. Sir Douglas, accustomed to being in charge, but now no longer was, downed a few more quick whiskies. In fact, media personality Church had taken over. “All those who agree on half a dozen strokes with a leather strap or belt, say aye.” There were a few ayes and a few grunts. “Then the ayes have it,” he proclaimed.

“Naked or not?” asked a board member, blushing.

“Those in favor of naked, say aye,” said Church. More grunts and ayes in response. “Then the ayes have it.

“Full frontal or not?” asked Cousins.

“He will be whipped on the back, so no full frontal. Besides, that would be almost pornographic. Would it not?” said Church, feigning serious concern.

“That depends,” put in Vigna, “doesn’t it?”

“To hell with it, do what you like!” spluttered Sir Douglas who, like Pilate, had washed his hands of the whole business.

“Then let’s say we will leave it up to the discretion of the video director and Peter Vigna himself,” said Church with authority. He then went on to the next question.

“Should Vigna be restrained or not? He is a willing subject, so maybe restraint is not needed?”

The one member of the board who was a doctor raised his hand. “He should be restrained. When the body feels sudden pain the normal reflex is to withdraw and thrash about. If that happened, the strokes of the belt could hit vulnerable parts of the body.”

“How should he be restrained, then?” asked Church.

“On a cross, of course,” said Cousins, half joking.

This was too much for Sir Douglas, a good Christian man. “That is a blasphemy of the worst order!” He licked his mustache and downed another whisky.

“On our Chanel 7 weekly broadcast of the early history of the penal colony in New South Wales, the whipping triangle was used. The subject is lashed to the triangle, hands tied together at the top of the triangle, legs spread apart and tied to the respective bottom corners. All those in agreement?”

More ayes came this time.

“Then the ayes have it,” proclaimed Church.

Now came the most difficult question. Who would wield the belt?

“This is our most difficult decision,” announced Church, sounding more and more like a clergyman.” I suggest that we break up into small groups of three to discuss this issue then come together in, say, fifteen minutes. All agreed?”

Mutters of agreement.

Church continued. "Then look to the right and left of you, those will be your two group partners. Choose one of the other tables to sit at. Please be mindful not to disturb the settings of those tables. We will reconvene in fifteen minutes."

Of course, Vigna was not included in these discussions. He retired to a corner of this very large spacious room and sat, curled up, hugging his knees to his chest.

Sir Douglas had found himself a stool and sat up at the bar sipping another whisky. He had withdrawn from this disgusting barbarous endeavor. But he was also now rather drunk. And everyone knew that when he got drunk his moods changed suddenly and dramatically, without any warning. He banged his empty whisky glass on the counter and turned to face the barbarians, as he now called them.

"Your attention, bastards!" he called in his feigned Oxford accent. If you must do this, here is what will happen. Listen up!"

The groups dispersed and everyone turned to face this icon of the cricket establishment. Church attempted to reclaim the attention he deserved from the groups he had created. "We're still deliberating!" he called out in his best commentator voice.

"Excuse the expression, but shut the fuck up!" came Sir Douglas's reply. He would have his way. His upper lip even stiffened just as it was supposed to. "Here is what will happen. First, the leather belt is not a convincing implement. Looks like a schoolboy thing. It will be a leather whip, cut down into nine thin strips at one end, knots tied in the strips at 10 centimeter intervals. A woven handle. There is one in the museum of Australian slavery. There is also a whipping triangle in that museum."

Gasps from the board members followed, all taking big sips of their drinks. Sir Douglas continued:

"Second, eleven strokes of the lash will be administered because there are eleven team members. The team will line up in single file at the end of the cricket pitch. At the other end the triangle will be erected over the stumps. bails removed of course. Vigna will be tied to the triangle accordingly. He will be naked except for his cricketer's helmet to protect him from an errant stroke, and a jock strap for additional protection. The team will form the line in order of their standard batting order. Each member will run up to the triangle, where an umpire will hand

him the whip. He will step away and have one practice swing. He will then step forward and lay on the lash as hard as he can, aiming for the back. He will then return the whip to the umpire, run back and the next team member will run forward.”

“I take it I can video all this with any angle I want?” asked Church.

“As you wish,” answered Sir Douglas.

“And I will be there with the umpire, with a hot mike, allowed to speak to any of the participants, including Vigna?” persisted Church.

Cousins interrupted. “Wait a minute! What if my client cries out in pain, or uses an expletive?”

“That will all be caught on live TV,” answered Church with much satisfaction.

“You OK with that?” Cousins runs over to Vigna, still crouched in the corner. “Is this all what you want?”

“The more painful, the more dreadful, the better. I must suffer and be seen to suffer,” said Vigna, now standing and straightening up.

It looked as though all were agreed. But then a board member raised his hand. “Just one last question,” he said, “what if a team member refuses to take part? You know, someone, don’t know who, might find whipping against his religion or something.”

“There is no religion on earth that is against whipping the guilty. In fact, many require it to be administered to the innocent,” came a soft voice,

Who on earth had made such an outrageous statement? They all turned to its source.

It was the bar tender.

You may be expecting a deliciously salacious account of the spectacle in the Melbourne Cricket Ground on day one of the Third Test match of Australia against England. Or maybe you are thinking or hoping that it would not occur? But I assure you that the Great Event, as it came to be known, did take place before a record crowd of over 90,000, more than any Australian Football Grand Final crowd. And I would add that you should be ashamed of yourself for eagerly anticipating such a spectacle of one naked former cricket captain whipped by his team mates. guilty or not,

before a half-drunken mob that fully appreciated its carnal florescence, and when they woke up from a deep sleep the next morning, they would feel wholly satisfied, just as Peter Vigna hoped.

Peter Vigna survived the ordeal and was appointed captain of the team immediately after the whipping. He accepted the captaincy, still bleeding, and suffering quite a lot from the added pain of the salt poured copiously into the wounds (though, because of the widely varied accuracy or perhaps will of the team members, not many strokes of the lash actually broke the skin; indeed some hardly touched his naked body).

If only the story could end here. It is true that Peter Vigna went on to score huge victories for his team and his fans. He was seemingly fully restored. But, like his historical forebear, Pietro della Vigna, there would be more. Pietro della Vigna fell out of favor with the court of Frederick II and was forced to commit suicide after being falsely accused of what amounted to be treason. In Dante's Hell, he was turned into a tree that could not bear fruit, its leaves blackened. Peter Vigna the cricket hero was destined to live with the original rejection by the cricket establishment played out through the spectators and his followers who would never forget what he did, the spectacle of his punishment only reinforcing their belief in his guilt, even though they saw that his suffering may even have outweighed the severity of his breaking the cardinal rules of cricket.

Every now and again, when Peter Vigna led his team on to the field, he would hear, or maybe he imagined it, an occasional hiss, boo, or the chant of "cheat!" On the other hand, each time he walked off the field when his team won — and they never lost under his captaincy — the cheers were almost enough to affirm his innocence. Except that, he knew, as does everyone who has lived, affirming innocence does not erase guilt.

Moral: *Without punishment, being sorry carries little weight.*