

College Students' Perceptions of the Popularity and Growth of Cricket in America

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ABSTRACT

Cricket, the world's second most popular sport, originated in southern England during the late 16th century. In the U.S., the sport has experienced fluctuating levels of interest since its introduction in 1844. This study examined cricket's historical development and its potential for growth in America, especially following the U.S. team's surprising and landmark victory over Pakistan in the 2024 T20 World Cup and the sport's scheduled return as an Olympic event at the 2028 Games in Los Angeles. Research on Americans' perceptions of cricket is scarce. The purpose of this study was to investigate the potential for cricket to become a popular sport in the United States by examining American college students' awareness, interest, and willingness to engage with the sport. This study utilized a mixed-method exploratory design involving survey responses and qualitative interviews with college-aged sports enthusiasts. Using responses from 152 college-aged participants, the researchers explored interest levels, viewing intentions, and ticket price expectations. Results showed that most participants had limited knowledge of cricket (regarding game rules and star players) and only moderate interest in learning to understand the game, participating in the sport, and watching/attending the events. Overall, journalists may be overly optimistic about the sport's potential popularity in America. While media optimism remains high, the findings underscore the need for greater outreach to make cricket mainstream in the U.S.

INTRODUCTION

Despite being the world's second most popular sport, cricket still experiences challenges in growing its participation and viewership in the United States (The Economist, 2022). In a country where the professional team sports market is highly saturated, sports such as soccer and women's basketball have struggled to gain media attention, secure sponsorships, and grow their fan bases. Often, Olympic hosting countries introduce or reintroduce sports to boost awareness and attract fans. Thus, the Olympic Games provide an opportunity to showcase new or lesser-known sports for the host nation. The U.S. will have that opportunity to introduce cricket in 2028 Olympics to be held in Los Angeles.

While cricket is somewhat of a novelty in America, there appears to be a growing trend toward promoting and expanding the sport. After defeating Canada and then a stunning upset against cricket powerhouse Pakistan in the 2024 T20 World Cup, reporters and commentators began to claim that U.S. is the new frontier for cricket (Bull, 2024; Kaul, 2024; Klawans, 2024). Is the recent surge in cricket's popularity merely a fad, or is it a sign of lasting potential? Can cricket really surpass pickleball and lacrosse in participation and viewership among Americans? This study explores the issue by examining college students' perceptions and understanding of cricket. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) What is the level of awareness and understanding of cricket among U.S. college students? (2) To what extent are they interested in learning about and consuming cricket? and (3) What is their willingness to pay for attending or viewing cricket events?

Understanding consumer perceptions of an emerging sport such as cricket has direct implications for the business of sport including sport marketing, sponsorship strategy, media rights valuation, and market entry decisions. Prior research suggests that emerging and niche sports must differentiate themselves through value propositions, fan engagement strategies, and accessible consumption experiences to gain market share (Greenhalgh et al., 2011; Trail & James, 2001). Therefore, this study contributes to the broader literature on sport market development by providing exploratory evidence on consumer perceptions about cricket.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. First, a review of the relevant literature is presented, followed by an examination of the current status and development of cricket in the U.S. and globally. Next, the methodology is outlined, and the results are reported. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion, limitations, future research directions, and managerial implications.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

History of cricket: Development and Playing Formats

Cricket originated in the rural areas of southern England during the late 16th century, though its exact beginnings remain unclear. It became organized by the 18th century with the establishment of the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) in 1787, which also codified the laws of cricket (Birley, 1999). Originally, there was only test cricket, where matches lasted up to five days and tested the endurance and skill of players. However, over time, new formats such as One-Day Internationals (ODIs) and Twenty20 (T20) have been introduced, catering to the fast-paced nature of contemporary sports consumption (Lashbrook, 2024; Prakash & Bhalla, 2021).

The T20 format has transformed cricket into a new global spectacle. Naha and Malcolm (2021) projected that cricket would become a dominant sport in the twenty-first century due to the rise of T20 format, shifts in the political economy of the game, and culturally specific manifestations. Table 1 summarizes the key characteristics of the different formats of cricket.

Table 1: Key Characteristics of Major Cricket Formats

Format	Duration	Overs per Team	Style/Focus	Audience Experience
Test Cricket	Up to 5 days	Unlimited	Endurance, patience, technique	Slow and strategic; can end in a draw
One-Day (ODI)	1 day (≈ 8 hours)	50 overs	Balance of strategy and action	Moderate pace; steady scoring and tactics
T20	≈ 3 hours	20 overs	Fast, aggressive, entertainment	High energy; quick scoring; TV-friendly

The formation of organized clubs and first international cricket match took place between the United States and Canada in 1844. The game was especially popular in New York and Philadelphia. During the 19th century, cricket gained popularity throughout the United States, with organized clubs and competitions emerging. The establishment of the New York Cricket Club in 1845 marked a significant milestone in the sport's institutionalization (Ellis, 2014). By the late 19th century, however, cricket began to wane in popularity, largely due to changing social dynamics and the rise of domestic sports that were more aligned with American cultural identity (Kaufman & Patterson, 2005; Naha & Malcolm, 2021). Unlike India, South Africa, and Australia, the U.S. broke away early from British cultural and imperial influence. Combined with the dominance and rise of other sports such as baseball and American football, cricket's popularity declined significantly in the first half of the 20th century (Bernays, 2009; Kaufman & Patterson, 2005, Malcolm, 2013).

Current Situation and Development of Cricket in the U.S. and the Rest of the World

While not yet mainstream, cricket has recently experienced a surge in popularity in the U.S., with participation increasing among both youth and adults. This growth is fueled by increased awareness, the influence of multicultural communities, and the co-hosting of major international events such as the 2024 T20 World Cup with the West Indies. Several reports suggest that the potential growth and popularity will accelerate following the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028 and could sustain momentum for 20 years building on the national team's recent success in the T20 World Cup (Hills et al., 2024; Kaul, 2024; O'Neill, 2024). In addition to the upset victory over Pakistan in the T20 World Cup, the increasing presence of immigrants from cricket-dominant regions including India, Southeast Asia, and the West Indies, together with the establishment of the Major League Cricket (MLC) further strengthens the prospects of cricket's long-term growth in the American market (Bhargava, 2024; Hill, 2024; Hills et al., 2024).

Globally, the International Cricket Council (ICC) achieved the largest social media presence among international sporting bodies in 2024 with a total of 106,519,541 followers across Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Threads, TikTok, YouTube and X (formerly Twitter) (Salguero, 2024). Cricket is often described as a sport that blends skill, strategy, and construction of social identity. In addition to the excitement and joy brought by participation, scholars have also argued that participation in cricket fostered

a sense of manhood and masculinity, particularly among male players (Alexander, 1961; Toms & Fleming, 1995). The sport's global resonance is also reflected in the massive popularity of its leading figures, both from India: Sachin Tendulkar and Virat Kohli, whose social media followings exceed those of many prominent American athletes (ICC, 2024).

The Indian Premier League (IPL) is widely regarded as one of the most prominent sporting franchises in the world and is valued at \$18.5 billion (Times of India, 2025). It is the world's second most valuable sports league on a per-match basis, generating approximately \$16.8 million per game, second only to the NFL (Reuters, 2025). It also surpasses other major global competitions such as the English Premier League, Major League Baseball, and the NBA (Reuters, 2025). Given this context, scholars and practitioners have increasing interest in how the United States might get into this rapidly expanding sport economy.

Unlike professional athletes in the United States's "Big 4" leagues (NFL, NBA, MLB, and NHL), Major League Cricket (MLC) athletes are largely semi-professionals who do not hold multimillion dollar contracts. Instead, many maintain full-time jobs and play cricket part time (Hills et al., 2024). College cricket participation is mainly driven by enjoyment of the sport, social interaction, and community involvement rather than rewards (Trail & James, 2001; Wann, 1995). According to Hills et al. (2024), there are now more than 400 organized leagues across America, with over 200,000 players and continuing to grow (Kaul, 2024; Klawans, 2024). The co-hosting of the Men's T20 World Cup in 2024 in the U.S. has served as a great motivator inspiring more Americans to play cricket (Hills et al., 2024; Klawans, 2024).

In general, fans tend to love and watch a sport due to factors such as entertainment, community belonging, social connection, drama (unpredictability), and athleticism (Kuenzel & Yassim, 2007; Trail & James, 2001; Wiid & Cant, 2015; Wann, Schrader, & Wilson, 1999; Wann et al., 2008). Do Americans really care about cricket and watch the game both in person and through media channels? During the 2024 ICC Men's T20 World Cup, 2.7 million USA-based users visited the ICC website and app, which represents a 370% increase compared to previous tournaments (Bhargava, 2024). Attendance also revealed promising trends: both matches in Nassau County, the Pakistan-India match on June 9 and U.S.-India match on June 12, 2024, each attracted more than 34,000 live spectators (ICC, 2024). Globally, the Pakistan-India match drew more than 400 million viewers, which is more than three times the audience of 2024 Super Bowl (125 million) (Kaul, 2024). Ticket prices indicated the market demand for the India-Pakistan match, with general admission seats ranging from \$170 to \$400, and VIP sections were priced between \$2,500 and 10,000 per seat (Bhargava, 2024). Unlike mainstream American sports, cricket broadcasts were not available on ESPN, but a unique broadcaster, Willow TV provided coverage with a \$9.99 monthly subscription paywall (Bhargava, 2024). Corporate interest suggested the sport's commercial potential as both Microsoft and Adobe expressed interest in sponsoring future ICC T20 events (Hills et al., 2024).

METHODOLOGY

Participants

To examine the awareness of cricket and level of interest, this study used a mixed-method exploratory design with a purposive sampling approach (Patton, 2015). The study sample consisted of 152 students (68 males, 45% and 84 females, 55%) from a public regional university in Appalachia. Participants included three major groups: Sport Management majors, student-athletes, and non-athlete students. The authors' original intent for examining this topic was to specifically target Sport Management students and student-athletes as participants, because they tended to exhibit strong interest in sports and prior background in athletic participation. These students' unique experiences and interest in sports made them ideal participants for exploring sport-related attitudes (Patton, 2015). To expand the sample size, the authors further recruited additional non-athlete students to respond to the survey. Non-athlete students' perception of cricket could also be further compared to the responses of the previous two groups.

Ninety-three participants (61.2%) identified themselves as avid sport fans, who are defined as individuals who consumed more than one hour of sports programs daily in this case (Cameron, 2025). Most participants identified as White/Caucasians (80.3%), and the two largest ethnic groups among the remaining individuals were mixed-race (6.6%) and African Americans (6.6%).

Instrumentation, Procedure, and Analysis

This study started as a case study that was introduced to Sport Management majors in a Sport Marketing class. Students were used as a focus group to express their understanding and genuine interest in cricket. After learning about the recent success of the U.S. team in the T20 tournament, students were prompted to express their willingness and interest in either watching or playing cricket. They were asked to estimate an acceptable ticket price if they are willing to attend a cricket match at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. Participants were also asked to estimate the maximum price they would be willing to pay. A brief interview was conducted with the focus group with seven questions structured like a survey. The questions covered key elements: (1) awareness, perceptions, and attitudes about cricket and its growth in the United States, (2) willingness to learn about the sport and watch the matches, (3) expectations regarding ticket pricing and motivation or reasons for attending a cricket match, and (4) two demographic variables. These elements were generated based on the constructs of sport fan motivation, news reports, and editorial comments about the future and development of cricket in America, and discussions with colleagues (Funk et al., 2009; Hills et al., 2024; Klawans, 2024; Salguero, 2024; Times of India, 2025; Trail & James, 2001; Wann et al., 2008).

Participants' understanding and awareness of cricket were identified with a 5-point Likert scale item (with 5 = Very familiar, 4 = Somewhat familiar, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Not so familiar, and 1 = No clue). A fixed-choice item with three choices (yes, no, or maybe) helped solicit participants' willingness to watch or play cricket. Three open-

ended questions allowed participants to provide motives or reasons for attending a cricket match and to express acceptable ticket price ranges.

To further expand the sample size, the authors posted the exact survey questions on Google Forms to collect responses from non-athlete students. They were recruited from common campus areas including the library, hallways, the cafeteria, the wellness center, as well as other public areas. Students typically needed fewer than seven minutes to answer the questions. Data collection occurred between late September and early November 2024. All participants provided informed consent by agreeing to complete the survey, and ethical approval was obtained from the university's Institutional Review Board. Although the survey was relatively short, the authors assumed that the open-ended responses given by a considerable number of individuals (over 150) would provide information regarding participants' opinions on motives or reasons for watching or participating in cricket. The collected qualitative information was reviewed by all authors. With the assistance of an Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool (ChatGPT), the authors categorized the written responses according to keywords and themes. The authors then reviewed the responses within each identified theme and quantified the responses in numbers and percentages. The authors extracted the top 5 reasons why individuals chose to watch or play cricket. After analyzing the open-ended responses, the authors were able to communicate with the focus group in the class once again, allowing them to elaborate on their understanding of cricket and the barriers to watching or attending the matches.

RESULTS

In terms of the participants' perception and understanding of cricket, about 74% ($n = 113$) reported being not very familiar or having no clue about the sport. About 68.4% of participants ($n = 104$) indicated a positive intention to learn about cricket either through direct participation (yes or maybe) or through watching matches. In contrast, 31% of participants expressed no interest in viewing or playing cricket at all.

Regarding what drew people to watch or attend cricket matches, participants identified 10 reasons (themes) based on their 116 open-ended responses. The top five reasons included: (1) understanding of the game (rules, structure) (30%), (2) increased media exposure and accessibility (25%), (3) social experience (friends, atmosphere) (20%), (4) incentives (free/cheap access) (10%), (5) curiosity and novelty (10%). The remaining 5% of the responses reflected themes such as national identity, entertainment value, star power, gambling, and no interest.

Participants provided both their ideal ticket price and their maximum ceiling price. A total of 152 responses for both ideal price and ceiling price were collected. With the support of an AI tool, these responses were grouped into six tiers. Table 2 presents the price range of each tier and percentage of responses. The maximum ideal price and ceiling price were found to be \$500 and \$1,000, respectively. However, the majority (approximately 35–40%) indicated that the ideal ticket price should be kept within the \$21–\$50 range. Simply put, over 50% of participants preferred tickets under \$50. Interest declined significantly beyond the \$100 threshold, with less than 9% of

individuals willing to pay premium prices of \$200 or more. About 10% indicated that they would not pay to watch cricket matches or believed the events should be free.

The findings of this study highlighted a relatively low-price tolerance compared to established U.S. professional sports, where average ticket prices can often exceed \$100. Therefore, the authors proposed three ceiling price ranges: (a) Budget tier, (b) Mid-tier, and (c) Premium tier, which reflected the paying capability of various tier groups based on the suggested ideal prices.

Table 2: Participants' Perceived Ideal and Ceiling Price for Olympic Cricket Matches

Tier	Ideal Price Range	% of Responses	Ceiling Price Range
1	Free / \$0	10–12%	Budget tier: \$0–\$50
2	\$1–\$20 (Very Low)	12–15%	
3	\$21–\$50 (Low / Affordable)	35–40%	
4	\$51–\$100 (Moderate)	18–22%	Mid-tier: \$51–\$100
5	\$101–\$200 (High)	10–12%	Premium tier: \$150+
6	\$201+ (Very High / Premium)	8–10%	

Although the conversation with a small focus group may not be a strong representation for how young Americans viewed the sport of cricket, this group of sport enthusiasts may still offer some unique insight about the receptiveness and popularity of cricket. Despite the continued rise in cricket's popularity and participation levels in America, participants who claimed to have a basic understanding of the game could only describe it with comments such as: (a) the sport is like baseball, (b) it involves a club like golf, (c) it is popular in Asia, and (d) it is played on an oval-shaped field. Several admitted that they did not know the number of players required on the field and were also unable to identify the playing positions, either. Notably, none of the participants were aware of Major League Cricket (MLC), the newly established professional cricket league in the United States (Klawans, 2024). Only 12 participants were able to correctly describe how scoring occurred or name the key terms like "bowler" and "wicket". Eight individuals specifically expressed their willingness to try playing any sport because they are sport enthusiasts. This could be an encouraging sign for the promoters of cricket; after all, sports enthusiasts are widely present. Some sport enthusiasts may be willing to try cricket because of curiosity and novelty. Overall, the responses given by the focus group and surveyed individuals showed limited knowledge and awareness of cricket among American college students.

DISCUSSION

In America, both women's basketball and soccer leveraged the momentum of Olympic or World Cup success to launch professional leagues, such as Women's National Basketball Association and Women's Professional Soccer (the predecessor of today's National Women's Soccer League). Therefore, it is not surprising that sport leagues often capitalize on national pride and media attention to expand the popularity of a sport. However, success and growth are not always guaranteed or permanent.

Cricket is a novelty for most of the participants in the study. Although the study sample was comprised of a unique group of sport enthusiasts, their understanding of cricket was generally rudimentary. Although more than half of the participants showed their interest in learning or watching the game, participants may hold similar attitudes toward any other unfamiliar sport. Furthermore, most sport management students know that the price for attending a popular professional sport event (i.e., football, basketball or baseball) will easily exceed \$100 in the U.S. (Drayer et al., 2012). As most participants preferred prices below \$60, this suggests that their interest in attending live cricket matches at the international stage may be limited.

Media narratives speculating a rapid rise in the U.S. may therefore be overly optimistic. Sustained growth would likely require repeated international success by the U.S. team, such as duplicating the same level of success at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics as they did in the 2024 World Cup. However, this is indeed a big challenge for a non-traditional cricket nation such as the U.S. Growing cricket from grassroots level requires substantial resources, such as coaches, adequate budget for equipment, and facilities. Moreover, cricket fields are expensive to build, and there are only a few cricket fields available for use (Bhargava, 2024). These challenges can make the development of cricket more difficult.

Many immigrants and descendants from South Asian and Caribbean communities form an important support base for cricket in the U.S. Potential sponsorship from Indian and South Asian leaders in technology and hospitality sectors could also provide additional resources. However, without broader cultural adoption, cricket may remain as a niche activity, competing with entrenched youth sports such as travel baseball, AAU basketball, and flag football. This aligns with prior research showing that niche and emerging sports struggle for market share unless they differentiate strongly on affordability, identity, or experience (Greenhalgh et al., 2011; Trail & James, 2001).

Empirical studies on cricket in the U.S. are scarce. This exploratory study provides preliminary insights into this new emergent topic. We investigated consumer awareness, willingness to engage, and pricing perceptions.

LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study has some limitations. Although the findings provide useful insights into the barriers to cricket's mainstream adoption, they are constrained due to a small purposive, convenience sample, which limits generalizability. There is also potential for selection bias, as participants were sport management students and student-athletes who may possess a higher baseline interest in sports. Furthermore, cricket participation and fandom in the United States are largely concentrated within immigrant and metropolitan communities, whereas the present sample consists primarily of college students from a regional university. As a result, the findings may not fully capture perceptions within established cricket-following populations but instead reflect

awareness and interest among a broader segment of mainstream U.S. consumers with relatively limited exposure to cricket.

Future research should address these limitations and include diverse populations and larger, nationally representative samples to deepen our understanding of cricket and its potential in the U.S. In particular, future studies should include samples from urban and immigrant communities where cricket engagement is more established. Researchers can also examine key constructs such as awareness, interest, and willingness to pay using established measures. In addition, longitudinal studies can track changes in perceptions over time, particularly following major events like the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. Both sporting goods manufacturers and event marketers could benefit from this type of research if cricket continues to gain visibility in the U.S. market. Overall, this study serves as an initial step for more comprehensive research on cricket's growth in the United States.

Our findings have implications for sport marketers and league developers in designing targeted awareness campaigns, pricing strategies, and fan engagement initiatives. We offer several strategies for sport organizations seeking to grow cricket in the U.S. market. These include efforts focusing on increasing awareness through simplified rule education and engaging digital content, improving accessibility by offering free or low-cost broadcast options, and leveraging the social and experiential aspects of sport consumption to enhance fan engagement. Additionally, colleges and universities can also play a critical role in grassroots development by introducing cricket through club sports, intramural activities, and campus events.

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