



BARRY NORMAN TALKS TO DON ROWAN

Barry Norman started doing television work on a fairly frequent basis in 1972 and, since then, he has done some broadcasting on radio, mainly the 'Today' programme. Before becoming a television and radio 'star' performer, he had worked on the Daily Mail.

The great thing about journalism Barry finds is that one happens to meet a variety of people and that people say to the journalist "you must always meet such interesting people". As Barry says, "This is true, but quite often the most interesting people you meet are the journalists, because they tend to be marvellous raconteurs with an enormous fund of true stories". In fact, what he misses most about not working regularly in Fleet Street is the conversation with other journalists.

Barry Norman is a busy man*; he still keeps up his journalism, is also resident presenter of 'Film Night' on BBC television and is up early every Saturday morning to introduce 'Today' on Radio Four. Cricket came into his life as a school boy. He says with a twinkle: "Cricket always seems to me to be the nicest way of wasting time that has ever been devised by man".

He continues: "I played at school although I've never really been good at it. I was much better at soccer. When I left school I went to work in South Africa and I didn't play cricket there at all and then I took it up again when I returned to England and moved out into the country. Until 1975 I had played every year for my village team, Datchworth in Hertfordshire. If you can't play first-class cricket and I was never in that league, village cricket is the most relaxing form of cricket to play. I played only twice in 1975 because I simply don't have the time. This year I have got back to playing again. The trouble is it's a maddening game for, if you don't play regularly, form deserts you completely. I remember talking to Jack Bailey, the Secretary of MCC, about this, interviewing him on television, and I said, 'Do you play often?' and he said, 'Well, I don't now because I find that if I don't practise, I play badly and if I play badly it gets me mad and my confidence goes'.

The first first-class game I ever saw was when I was a very little boy in 1945, the Victory Test, England v Australia at Lord's, and Hammond made 85. That was the only time I saw him and I can remember his cover drive now, the most glorious sight that I had ever seen which really hooked me on cricket. After that I used to spend most of my school holidays at Lord's. Denis Compton and Bill Edrich were my heroes in the marvellous 1947 season. I used to sit there with the other kids and shout and yell when they came out to bat.

In those days Middlesex used to get in the region of 400 runs on the board, declare before the close of play and put the other side in. Leslie Compton used to be about the last Middlesex batsman to reach the crease and he would come in at about number 7 or 8. He was always worth seeing; he could thump the ball pretty hard.

Bill Edrich was my hero. Actually in 1975 I played in a match with him, the only time that I have ever met him. It was a game for the World Wild Life Fund at Amersham, a charity match. Bill and Trevor Bailey were the only two well-known cricketers playing. Bill was captain; that was a great thrill; a special occasion for me. I was so overawed that I got a duck; Bill scored one so I didn't feel too bad about it.

Don Bradman I did see once, during 1948, playing against the Gentlemen at Lord's. He scored 150 and then lofted up a catch and, long before anyone caught it, he was on his way back to the Pavilion. He had just decided that that was what he was going to score and that was a moving moment because everybody stood up for him, applauding him (to and from the wicket) because it was his last match at Lord's. Oddly enough, the thing that I remember best about the game was the innings from the Australian opener, Sidney Barnes. He made only 19, but 16 of them were scored from square cuts, and they were like Hammond's cover drives. I have never seen anybody who could square cut like Sidney Barnes; the ball was literally a blur as it hit the fence, a tremendous sight to watch.

When did anyone ever late cut like Jack Robertson or Len Hutton? I've never seen the late cut played like it used to be. I don't know if one always sounds nostalgic, harking back to the 'good old days'. However, I feel that with those faster wickets that they had then, it was possible for those glorious strokes to be used much more than they are now, when the ball comes off slowly.

One advantage of working on Saturday mornings and finishing by 10 am is that it enables me to visit Lord's, after having some breakfast, getting on a bus and spending the day there. When you feel a little tired on a nice warm, sunny day, there is no better way to spend your day than relaxed there in the sunshine."

*Written early in 1976- Editor