

6 of 1783 DOCUMENTS

THE TIMES

The Times (London)

October 6, 2008 Monday

Test players step up to plate but get taken out at whole new ball game

BYLINE: Josh Chetwynd**SECTION:** SPORT; Pg.64**LENGTH:** 717 words

* Trescothick's team strike out in Taunton

A few years ago USA Today claimed that hitting a baseball was the hardest thing to do in sport (the newspaper listed stopping a penalty in football as the ninth hardest). Was the statement American hubris or a fair assessment?

On Saturday the claim was put to the test as a team of cricketers, including Marcus Trescothick, Ashley Giles, Geraint Jones and Charl Willoughby, gave baseball a try, taking on the Great Britain team in Taunton as part of Trescothick's benefit year.

Ian Chappell, the former Australia captain, who is probably the only person to represent his country in cricket and baseball, once said that the idea of a team of cricketers playing a baseball game "wouldn't be worth it". He added: "There would be no contest, absolutely no contest. Cricket's batsmen would struggle to get bat on ball, never mind hitting a home run."

As a member of the Britain baseball team for ten years, I was hoping that Chappell would be proved right and that Trescothick and his crew would struggle to transform themselves from batsmen to batters and bowlers to pitchers. On paper at least, Chappell appeared to be correct in his assessment. The Britain team, who won the silver medal at the European Championships in 2007, won the game 21-1. The cricketers committed six errors to the baseball team's zero and the national baseball squad tallied 21 hits to the cricketers' four.

Cricketers have dabbled in baseball before. In 1986 and 1987, Ian Pont, who was a medium-fast bowler for Essex, attended pre-season workouts with the New York Yankees and the Philadelphia Phillies.

Ed Smith, a batsman for Middlesex and England, gave baseball a go with the New York Mets in 2001, but his efforts were less serious and more for the purpose of a book he was writing. In 2006 I gave Andrew Flintoff some pointers on baseball as part of a piece for Cricket AM, the Sky Sports programme, and while his form was rough, his athleticism allowed him to perform admirably, considering he had no experience.

But nothing had occurred like the event at the weekend at the County Ground, which had been transformed into a baseball diamond. The cricketers showed the skill sets necessary to succeed at baseball, but the nuances of the sport were elusive. While Flintoff might have hit a few balls well in batting practice,

Test players step up to plate but get taken out at whole new ball game The Times (London) October 6, 2008
Monday

Trescothick's team (dubbed the "Bangers" after the Somerset batsman's nickname) were forced to learn which bases to throw to and such baseball specific rules as the "force out" or the "sacrifice fly".

In cricket, fielders have decisions to make when throwing the ball but unsure how to reconcile their instinct with a foreign sport, Trescothick's men rushed throws to incorrect locations. "When we play cricket we know the percentages when we throw it in from the field," Giles said after pitching two innings and conceding 11 hits and 14 runs, although many of those runs were caused by defensive miscues. "It's different with baseball."

Stephan Rapaglia, the Britain coach, said after the contest: "The deficit is in the knowledge of the game. Many of these guys are capable based on arm strength, fielding ability and hand-eye co-ordination and could be pretty good at baseball after ten or 15 games."

Trescothick, who notched three of his team's four hits, was not as certain about a smooth transition. "The batting is quite different," he said. "It would take a long time to get up to your boys' standard." As for USA Today's claim for hitting a baseball, Trescothick's Bangers did strike out ten times in eight innings, but they also made sturdy contact a number of times. Giles did not address the American newspaper's claim directly but did acknowledge that in baseball "hitting is a difficult skill".

While that proved true for the baseball neophytes in Taunton, Trescothick and his team-mates showed an enthusiasm that suggests that some may be willing to take another crack at the sport. And, unlike Chappell's admonition, I think it would be a worthy endeavour.

As well as representing Britain, **Josh Chetwynd** played at the highest level of collegiate baseball in the US before a brief professional career. His second book, *Baseball in Europe: A Country by Country History*, is published by McFarland & Co.

LOAD-DATE: October 6, 2008

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper

JOURNAL-CODE: tt

Copyright 2008 Times Newspapers Limited
All Rights Reserved