

DO RIGHT-HANDED CRICKETERS LIVE LONGER?

By MALCOLM FERGUSON, NICK NEAVE, BOB KENTRIDGE
& JOHN AGGLETON

In recent years there has been much debate in the media and in scientific circles over the longevity of left and right-handed people. Evidence that there may be a difference comes from the finding that the proportion of left-handers among the elderly is lower than that among younger people. There are, of course, a number of possible explanations for this finding, but the most intriguing is that left-handers tend to die younger. We decided to investigate this possibility by comparing the life-spans of first-class cricketers.

Using the *Who's Who of Cricketers* (Bailey, Thorn, and Wynne-Thomas, 1984) as our reference source we noted the birth and death dates of all of those deceased players for whom bowling hand was specified or could be determined (e.g. if described as "leg-break" or "off-break"). This gave a sample of 3165 players. Bowling hand was used as it is known to be a much better indicator of handedness than batting hand. We did, however, also record the batting hand of the same players, as well as the cause of death when noted (typically if it was regarded as unusual or, when known, in the case of a player who died young). Four players who could bowl with either hand were excluded. Finally we recorded the year of birth of all of those players (2314) born before 1951 but still alive at the time of book publication (1984) for whom bowling hand was specified.

According to their bowling hand the 3165 deceased players could be divided into 585 left and 2,580 right-handed cricketers, a ratio 1:4.41. The average life-spans of the two groups of deceased cricketers were: 63.5 years left-handed and 65.6 years right-handed. Statistical tests showed that this difference of 25 months was highly significant. An indication of why the left-handed players might have a lower life-span was provided by examining the cause of death. Of 147 players specified as dying of unnatural causes (including transport accidents, drownings, players killed in action, but excluding suicide). Forty two were left-handed and 105 were right-handed. This proportion of left:right-handers dying of unnatural causes (1:2.5) was very much higher than that in the overall population of deceased players (1:4.41). By removing all 147 players specified as dying of unnatural causes it was found that the average life-span difference dropped from 25 to 11 months. Further evidence that, barring accidents, the two groups reached equivalent ages comes from the ratio of left to right-handers reaching 90 years or more (15:71) which closely matched that in the overall population.

Arguably a more appropriate measure of life-expectancy is to compare survival rates rather than mean age at death. We therefore examined the numbers of deceased and surviving right and left-handed players born between 1880 and 1950. The year 1950 was selected as only two subjects from the entire sample of deceased players were born after that year. The percentage of surviving right-handers (66.2% from a total of 2845) was significantly higher than that of the surviving left-handers (59.5% from a total of 725).

In a final series of analyses we just considered the subject of players who used the same hand for both bowling and batting (to produce the strongest predictor of handedness). The average age of the left-handers was 62.3 years (from a total of 264) whilst that of the right-handers was 65.8 years (from a total of 2209). Once again, right-handedness was associated with a significantly longer life-span, and this difference was reduced (by approximately 14 months) when all of the subjects who were known to have died in accidents or in warfare were removed from the sample.

The pattern of results clearly indicates that left-handers may have a shorter life-span on average, and that an important contributing factor is premature death from unnatural causes. In order to confirm that the results do not simply reflect changing ratios in left:right handers across the time of the sample and that, for example, there was not an usually high proportion of left-handers at the times of the First and Second World Wars, we considered the entire population of cricketers born before 1951 (total 5479) for whom the bowling hand was specified. Comparisons in the ratios of right to left-handed players grouped by birth year revealed much minor variation but no consistent overall change. No evidence could be found to support the notion that left-handed players just happened to be more frequent when life expectancy was short.

In summary, it was found that for a large sample of 3165 first-class cricketers those who used their right hand lived on average about two years longer than their left-handed counterparts. There was also clear evidence that an important part of this difference was due to an increased vulnerability to both accidental death and death during warfare. Furthermore, as the ratio of right to left-handers remained quite stable across the time period of the sample it is most unlikely that this result was an artifact brought about by fluctuations in the numbers of left-handers. Although removal from the sample of those known to have died of unnatural causes markedly decreased the life-span difference between the left and right-handers, this difference did not disappear. While this may reflect missing information on unnatural deaths in the *Who's Who of Cricketers*, it might indicate that there are other factors producing a right-handed advantage.

CAMBRIDGE BLUES

by LEONARD JENKINSON

This is a complementary sequel to my recent article *Oxford Blues* (Winter Journal 1992), and follows the same pattern.

Period 1: 1992-1946

Emmanuel has the greatest number of blues, having enjoyed a particularly successful period from 1969 to 1976 when it averaged four blues per year. Magdalene, St John's and St Catharine's also score well. Fitzwilliam enjoyed an unbroken run from 1966 to 1981.

Girton (a former women's college) won its first blue in 1992.

Of the newer colleges Darwin, Hughes Hall, Robinson and Wolfson are all represented.

Homerton has already won twelve blues, the first in 1982.

Clare's most recent blue was in 1966.

King's has not had a blue since 1959 (Henry Blofeld).

Period 2: 1939-1919

Pembroke, which is represented in every year during the period, easily heads the list with nearly twice as many blues as the runner-up, Trinity. Downing is unrepresented.

Period 3: 1914-1827

The dominant college is Trinity, represented in every year over the whole period. Its pre-eminence is even more marked in the years 1827 to 1890 when it provided over 50% St John's enjoyed an unbroken run from 1827 to 1863, but faded away in the later part of the period—only one blue in the years from 1888 to 1914.

Pembroke began very slowly (first blue in 1871) but had a good run from 1890.

Queens' won its first blue in 1899.

Sidney Sussex's first blue in 1878 was its only one during the whole period.

Apart from Sidney, of the old-established colleges Downing, Queens' and St Catharine's have a poor record in this period.

In 1875 A.F. Smith is described as belonging to both Downing and Trinity. Although he

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The batsman in the Winter issue was D. Bennett (Middlesex). He was bowled by P. Spicer of Essex with the slip fielder R. Smith and wicketkeeper B. Taylor being the other players in the picture, in a match at Lord's on May 18th, 1962.