

# Hypocrisy surrounds international cricket scandal

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The revelation that two of Australia's best-known cricketers, leg-spin bowler Shane Warne and batsman Mark Waugh, took cash from an Indian bookmaker during a tour of the sub-continent in 1994 has provoked bitter recriminations in the mass media. Headlines have included 'Ashamed', 'Sack them' and 'Cricket stars humiliate national game'.

It seems that the bookmaker paid Waugh \$6,000 and Warne \$5,000 for information about the weather and the state of the pitch before the Australian team's one-day games in Sri Lanka and Pakistan during September and October, 1994. Waugh and Warne delivered matching accounts of these transactions at an Australian Cricket Board (ACB) media conference last Wednesday, describing themselves as 'naïve' and 'stupid'.

Until journalists finally broke the story last week, the affair had been covered up for four years by the Australian and international cricketing authorities. In February 1995 the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that Pakistan cricket captain Salim Malik had offered bribes of \$US200,000 each to Waugh, Warne and a team mate, Tim May, to play badly in Pakistan during the October 1994 tour. The next day it was revealed that in Colombo in 1992 another Australian cricketer, Dean Jones, had refused an offer of \$US50,000 to provide information to bookmakers.

When this news emerged, all members of the Australian team, then on tour in New Zealand, were questioned by an ACB official, Ian McDonald, about whether they had been involved with bookmakers. Waugh and Warne immediately told McDonald of their payments from the Indian bookmaker.

However, leading figures in both the ACB and the British-based International Cricket Council decided to keep the matter confidential. Waugh was secretly fined

\$10,000 and Warne \$8,000. Other members of the Australian team were not told. The official silence continued even after Waugh and the Australian captain, Mark Taylor, gave evidence last October 7 to a Pakistani judicial inquiry into alleged match-fixing by Malik and other Pakistan cricket players.

As a numerous commentators have pointed out, the Indian bookmaker's offer to Waugh and Warne was almost certainly intended to be a prelude to wider and more lucrative involvement in match-fixing. If Waugh, Warne and May were approached by Malik just a month later it was hardly coincidental.

Matthew Engel, editor of the authoritative *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack*, has commented that gambling and corruption have become widespread in international cricket. He condemned the authorities for singling out Waugh and Warne for retribution.

Gambling is, in fact, an inevitable outcome of the transformation of cricket, like every other major sport, into a multi-billion dollar entertainment business. Cricket was once regarded as a 'gentlemen's game,' strictly reserved for amateurs. Today, millions of dollars can often ride on the outcome of a game or a series, not just because of the bets laid worldwide but also the television, advertising and sponsorship revenues that depend on continued success. In this arena, everything is for sale, including the players.

In an editorial, Rupert Murdoch's *Sydney Daily Telegraph* accused Waugh and Warne of 'wounding the soul of a nation'. It went on to brand them as greedy because 'they accepted the grubby cash of a criminal'.

Hypocrisy knows no bounds when media barons like Murdoch and Kerry Packer lead a hue and cry about greed. Their companies and others like them have turned athletes--whether their sport is cricket, basketball, football, swimming, boxing or track and

field--into money-making commodities. Murdoch and Packer made their own unique contributions. Packer set up his own televised world cricket competition in the late 1970s and bought the best players in a bid to takeover the official game. Murdoch recently attempted the same in rugby league.

As a result of these processes, Waugh and Warne, two of the finest cricketers in the world, have become highly profitable marketing tools. *Business Review Weekly* estimates that Warne was paid \$1.1 million last year, with most coming from sponsors like Nike, Just Jeans, Oakley Sunglasses, Melbourne's Crown Casino (so much for the moralising about gambling!), Nicorette, Sony Music and Gunn & Moore cricket bats. He also works for Packer as a sports commentator on Channel Nine. Even so, he ranks only number 18 on the list of Australia's top sports money earners.

When Warne's sponsors, led by Nike, declared that they would retain his services in advertising campaigns despite the perceived tarnishing of his image, their calculations were purely commercial. As Ian Dresner, managing director of the Rebel Sports chain, made clear, sports stores were concerned that the adverse publicity would hurt the Christmas sales of products that Warne had endorsed. In the end, the sponsors estimated that the affair had not severely damaged his marketability and selling power.

No doubt, the cricket officials weighed up similar factors when they covered up the affair in 1995. How would the scandal affect their commercial revenues? This is a social milieu and an economic system that reduces every human relation to one of money.

Hypocrisy has also abounded on the question of gambling. Most media pundits have declared it to be an uncontrolled problem in India or elsewhere in the so-called Third World. Yet sizeable proportions of the state budgets of the Kennett and Carr governments, in office in Victoria and New South Wales respectively, are now drawn directly from the human misery created by poker machines, casinos, lotteries and a myriad of other forms of gambling. NSW alone has 10 percent of the world's poker machines.

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of the affair is the anxiety expressed by media barons and politicians alike about the damage done to the so-called national spirit. 'Whether you're a cricket fan or not, the game is our national sport,' wrote one of Murdoch's columnists,

Miranda Devine. 'In a way it has represented all that was good about Australia--sun-blessed, clean-cut, languid, sportsmanlike and victorious. Now our pleasure in the image of Australia that cricket projected to the world is ash in our mouths.'

Prime Minister Howard also felt compelled to comment. He claimed to 'share with millions of Australians an intense feeling of disappointment' at the revelations. 'Australians love their cricket and anything that looks as though it is knocking cricket off its pedestal is something that does deeply disturb Australians.'

Clearly, much is at stake here. Cricket and other sports such as swimming and football have often been used to divert people's attention away from social crises and to promote a national ethos. Only several weeks ago, a triple century by Mark Taylor in Peshawar, Pakistan was greeted with headlines comparing him to the great batsman of the 1930s, Sir Donald Bradman. The *Australian* commented that Taylor's innings could rally the nation in the face of adversity in the same way that Bradman's feats did during the Great Depression.

Historically, the Australian ruling class has lacked a national ideology of substance. It is difficult to claim legitimacy from a heritage of massacring Aborigines and seizing their land, fashioning a 'White Australia' policy to exclude the Asian masses and exploiting post-war immigrants as cheap labour. Over the past century, sport, combined with the glorification of wartime sacrifices, has become central to the cultivation of a semi-official Australian national identity.

The underlying issues are by no means confined to Australia. Worldwide, sport has become a means of whipping up nationalism, while promoting all manner of illusions in the prospects of ordinary youth to achieve financial success through sporting prowess. Sport has become synonymous with flag-waving and patriotic fervour, combined with hero-worship of athletes who have become marketing icons. Gambling and corruption, as well as other features such as drug-taking by aspiring sports stars, are the intrinsic results.



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