

Test Match Sofa – The alternative cricket commentary

<http://www.testmatchsofa.com>

Introduction

Test Match Sofa is a live, alternative, audio, ball-by-ball, cricket commentary service covering selected international matches available to anyone in the world with an Internet connection.

“ . . . the team assembled on the sofa is possibly the best thing that has happened to sport broadcasting since Roy and HG called the gymnastics at the Sydney Olympics in 2000.”

Peter Lalor, The Australian

(<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/sport/the-new-sounds-of-summer/story-e6frg7mf-1225896300595>)

“There are lot of special and very unique things that they can do what [sic] normal TV commentary can't do. . . They are very funny and knowledgeable at the same time . . . best of all, you can tweet or e-mail them while they are doing this so instantly you can be in touch with them. It's like hundreds of people from around the globe who are watching, enjoying cricket and being in touch at the same time. They can also mimic few cricketers, commentator [sic] as well. Very talented commentators. They even connect many cultures. Peace.”

Comment from a listener posted on a recent Cricinfo feature on Test Match Sofa.

(<http://www.cricinfo.com/magazine/content/story/480852.html>)

Overview

Test Match Sofa has been broadcasting since July 2009 and now has been on air for over 8.5 hours x 200 broadcasting days.

It is unique in the world media as the only international, non-territory based and truly interactive audio cricket commentary service in existence.

The Sofa has received multiple positive press coverage from around the world including the UK, Australia, India and the Middle East.

Test Match Sofa commentary is now syndicated, via a transferable audio player widget, to 40 websites around the world (with more in the pipeline) including –

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/expat/>

"I discovered Test Match Sofa's excellent cricket commentary in March 2010. They have been both a pleasure and very professional to work with. Their radio show is welcome content for my website and is very popular with our users."

James Flint, Editor

www.telegraph.co.uk/expat

Statistics

Between September 14th and October 14th 2010 Test Match Sofa enjoyed 178,000 unique visitors including a daily average of 18,000 absolute unique visitors for the last three days of live broadcast (the conclusion of the 2nd Test between India and Australia October 11th to 13th 2010).

This is a 900% daily average increase since July 2010 and a 100% daily average increase since September 2010.

The main territories for October 2010 are the US, the UK, India, Australia and Canada accounting for 78% of traffic with 164 countries in total accessing the service.

Upcoming PR and marketing

Feature and ongoing column in Yahoo India planned for November 2010.

Working with an established PR company in Australia and have already secured a feature in Alpha magazine (<http://www.alphamagazine.com.au>) and a follow-up feature and player syndication in The Australian (<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/>) late November.

Working with <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/expat/> in a joint marketing venture to target English ex-pat communities and businesses (500+) around the world to be launched with their Best of British awards November 15th 2010.

Targeting all major cricket fan forums around the world for player syndication and have already secured one of the biggest <http://www.planetcricquet.net/forums/cricket-discussion/>.

Press release outlining the Internet sensation Test Match Sofa has become to the world's media early November to enable press coverage and further audio player syndication.

Facebook campaigns.

Viral marketing campaigns matching edited archive cricket video content with Test Match Sofa's comedic cricket commentary style to be released on YouTube, DailyMotion and Metcalfe.

Conclusion

Test Match Sofa is about to cover the Ashes (November 2010 to February 2011) followed by the 10th ICC World Cup (February 2011 to April 2011). These are the blue ribbon events in the International Cricket Calendar and are most the popular in the key markets of the UK and Australia. Interest in cricket is going to be at its highest in the next 6 months.

Test Match Sofa's unique market position, highly positive partner / press / listener feedback and recent escalating organic growth coupled with significant ongoing PR / Marketing activity and ever expanding audio player syndication ensures that the Test Match Sofa audience will continue to increase and increase quickly.

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Appendix

Enclosed press coverage of Test Match Sofa:

- Guardian Sports Blog July 2009
- Telegraph Expat January 2010
- MSN May 2010
- Cricinfo October 2010

A different kind of commentary

Tired of the clichés you get on television? Test Match Sofa offers an entertaining alternative

Andrew Miller

October 11, 2010

Irreverence is an underrated asset in punditry, and it's an increasingly under-represented trait in the mainstream sporting media. The growing influence of the "former pro" on TV, radio and in the newspapers has hastened the demise of the professional commentator - the type of person whose opinion was valued not because he was any good at playing the game, but because his love of his chosen subject had armed him with enough fingertip facts and anecdotes to while away the most interminable of rain breaks.

It was partly as a reaction to being fed a diet of clichés during their regular hours of cricket-watching - but more realistically as a consequence of being made redundant at the height of the global financial crisis - that Daniel Norcross and Tom Clark, two entrepreneurial types from South London, set about creating themselves a niche in the cricket market that is fast becoming a phenomenon. Their brainchild was [Test Match Sofa](#), the "alternative cricket commentary" to quote its self-styled tagline, which began life (quite literally) on a sofa in Tooting, but is now (metaphorically speaking) brushing off the crisp crumbs and contemplating a brisk jog around the block.

"We were just sick and tired of the cliché-driven commentary already out there," said Clark. "I appreciate if you've played 80 times for England you're very qualified to talk about cricket, but why does that make you the best cricket commentator? When you're young and outrageously talented, you're likely to spend all your time honing your own skills and trying to hit the ball perfectly. You're unlikely to waste your youth in the way I did - by either watching or reading or talking in abstract about cricket."

And thus the seeds of a business plan were formed. It helped that the two men had worked together before - some years earlier, they had produced a film called *Point of View*, "a catastrophic venture" in Clark's opinion, which had left them both hideously in debt, not least - ironically - because they had neglected to spend enough money on decent sound equipment and so none of the dialogue could be heard properly. But the experience had at least taught them how to drum up a crew on the cheap, and for a project quite as tantalising as watching cricket for a living, that aspect was as easy as whistling up the stairwell of their block of flats.

"Luckily the bloke upstairs was a web designer called Nathan, and so he did all that part," said Clark. "Dan worked with a guy called Dev, who did the research and worked out the logistics of streaming it over the internet, and he also played cricket with a left-arm spinner called Nigel, who did the sound for us. We actually put the whole thing together for a few hundred pounds. We got our equipment off eBay, and a sound desk for next to nothing, then shoved it all under the bed in Tooting and plugged it in on a broadcast day."

The sofa first went on air during the opening day of the 2009 Ashes in Cardiff, and it was even gifted 5000 early listeners when Stephen Fry magnanimously tweeted about the venture. However, all but a handful of those fled as soon as they encountered an ill-advised pay-wall (even £1 was too much to ask of the skinflints in cyberspace) while the remainder encountered a plethora of technical problems that meant the site kept crashing throughout a problematic first day.



Test Match Special it ain't: Test Match Sofa has few clichés, and a fair bit of swearing © Getty Images

[Enlarge](#)

"At first it was disastrous," Clark conceded. "Technically we were very poor, and the structure of the show was rubbish, but in terms of the actual commentary, we were encouraged by how easily the words had come. Beforehand we'd all been worried about it, but all of us had spent years listening to TMS on long-wave under the duvet, and we found there are so many phrases that are just ingrained on the brain. As soon as we accessed them, we found it was as easy as breathing."

The technical issues were gradually sorted out by improved web-hosting and better equipment, but it wasn't until England's tour of South Africa in November 2009 that the show found its structural niche through the medium of Twitter, which enabled real-time feedback, which in some cases drove the agenda of the show. "Rather than conventional broadcasting, with a number of experts lecturing their audience, what we are creating is a bunch of people talking to each other," says Clark. "On radio you'll get your post-match phone-ins once it's all over, but this was a chance for us to become performing monkeys for our listeners."

Test Match Sofa is not designed to be all things to all listeners. It is partial in the extreme (and takes a particular delight in mocking all things Australian), and can be jarringly unstructured on occasions, not least at the fall of a wicket when a prolonged yelp of triumph or dismay tends to take over from considered analysis. And then there's the fruity language. "We try not to swear, but sometimes we do," says a prominent disclaimer on their website homepage, "so if you are offended by strong language there's always the BBC."

"It's fairly obvious that some of our commentators swear for shock effect, whereas with others it just slips in occasionally," says Clark. "But really, our main aim is to recreate that feeling of sitting around with a bunch of mates in the pub, or in the stands or on the sofa, and let's face it, people do swear in those situations. We're trying to remain a collective, with no one person making the rules, but at the moment, the only word we never use is the c-word."

Whenever a new batsman comes out to the middle, they are accompanied by a comedy "jingle", which is less than respectful, to put it mildly. Jonathan Trott is treated to a South African reworking of the *Dad's Army* theme tune - "Who do you think you are kidding Mr Zuma, if you think I'll play for you..."

For anyone of even a remotely liberal persuasion, however, it's unquestionably amusing to hear a well-placed curse thrown into an otherwise sanguine slab of commentary - somewhat akin to hearing a live version of Billy Birmingham's *Twelfth Man* tapes (minus the Richie Benaud impersonations, of course) - and at times it can be refreshingly to-the-point. Take the potentially decisive dismissal of the great Sachin Tendulkar on the final morning of the thrilling Mohali Test last week for instance:

"A terrible shot from Tendulkar! The great man has failed. That one was short and at the body, and he's cut it straight to Hussey. It was too close to cut, really, he had enough time just to drop his wrists and let it go, but it has unnecessarily brought Australia back into the game... and that's what really pisses me off - whenever Australia win. Someone always makes a f***ing stupid mistake and lets them back into the game."

"We don't have to interview these players at the end of the day, so we don't have to respect them in the same way," explains Clark. That's especially apparent in the cruel treatment of Shane "Watto" Watson, whose nickname, according to the sofa, has acquired an extra "t". What is more, whenever a new batsman comes out to the middle, they are accompanied by a comedy "jingle", which is less than respectful, to put it mildly. Tim Bresnan emerges from the pavilion to the strains of "food glorious food", for instance, while Jonathan Trott is treated to a South African reworking of the *Dad's Army* theme tune - "Who do you think you are kidding Mr Zuma, if you think I'll play for you..."

From an audience of 70 or 80 for the first handful of broadcasts, Test Match Sofa topped 10,000 daily listeners during the summer series against Pakistan, and achieved a further spike of interest thanks to Australia's exploits in India. "We're not trying to make millions out of this," says Clark. "We just want enough money to pay the mortgage." Given the limitless reach of the internet, he might just get lucky in that regard.

Andrew Miller is UK editor of Cricinfo.

 Feeds: Andrew Miller

him

Lee Harvey, Web Producer, MSN Him, 26/05/2010 10:43

Turning a flat into a commentary box



Test Match Sofa

Broadcasting live commentary on your favourite sport from the comfort of your own lounge to an audience of dedicated listeners is the ultimate fan fantasy. One man, ably assisted by a small army of friends, has made it a reality.

Daniel Norcross is, in his own words, the "default captain" of the alternative cricket commentary team Test Match Sofa. Broadcasting live ball-by-ball coverage of England's tests, one day internationals and Twenty 20 clashes since the summer of 2009 from his flat in Tooting, South West London, the Sofa now boasts an average daily audience of 3,500 listeners (and 42,000 unique listeners per month), none of whom seem shy about interacting with Dan's band of mad cricketing enthusiasts.

Unlike the often stuffy atmosphere of the BBC's Test Match Special, the Sofa commentators pull no punches when it comes to poor shot selection or wayward bowling. And if the game starts to drift, they're more likely to tell you what they think about *The Wire*, the latest movie releases, reality TV or the fallout from the General Election rather than the restaurant they patronised the night before or the stodgy cake a listener has sent in.

So, how did Test Match Sofa come into being? Dan explains: "It all started around December 2008. I've got two brothers who live abroad and they often had trouble getting cricket commentary online. I thought 'Why isn't there a place where you can guarantee cricket is on wherever you are in the world?' I wanted to create a universal service that people could rely on.

"I spoke to a lawyer friend who told me there's nothing to stop anybody commentating on what they are watching on TV. I play a lot of cricket, so I drafted in some team mates as fellow commentators".

But what about the technology involved? And the cost? Neither are prohibitive, as Dan explains. "It cost about £1,000 to get the sound desk, mics and server we needed. My friend Nigel (now a fellow commentator), who works as a sound engineer, showed me how to set up audio streams and it wasn't that complicated. I knew two techies who preferred cricket to *Buffy* and porn and they created the site infrastructure, coded the website and set up the servers for us. They're now occasional commentators too."

Trenchant gobbiness and tangents

As for the commentary itself, the team took a simple approach to the huge challenge of filling 30 hours of air time over the course of a five-day test match. Beyond a commitment to commentating on every single ball and ensuring that any new listener must immediately be made aware of the match situation and which batsmen are at the crease, the topics of conversation can go absolutely anywhere.

"Cricket's not like any other English sport, there's so much time. You can either see that as terrifying or turn it into a conversation you'd have with your mates at the ground."

Which is why, between deliveries, you can expect to hear what Dan describes as the "trenchant gobbiness" of his commentary cohorts: Manny's angry rants; Nigel's trademark crudeness; Ben swearing in frustration at England's



Test Match Sofa

Daniel Norcross, default captain of the Test Match Sofa team



Test Match Sofa

The Test Match Sofa essentials: sound desk, a copy of Wisden and a cup of tea

choice of fielding positions; Soph analysing the final of TV show 'Over The Rainbow'; or Zoob wandering off on a tangent about Virginia Woolf.

Social media

The team also rely on the audience to participate in their broadcasts and they've used Facebook and Twitter to good effect. "Our producer Tom was the first of us to get on Twitter" says Dan. "It was during England's tour of South Africa and it made an immediate difference to our listening figures. Tweets are ideal for us as they spark off whole new conversations as we broadcast. It also becomes much easier to commentate once you feel you're talking to actual people."



Test Match Sofa

The team has also begun recording regular podcasts and ex-players like former England paceman Dean Headley and current New Zealand bowler Iain O'Brien have accepted invitations to join them as guest contributors. Aussie journalist Gideon Haigh is also a Sofa regular. They've also asked listeners to help them provide player-specific comedy jingles that get played when a new batsman strides to the crease - the more homemade and incompetent they get, the funnier they are.

The "trenchant gobbiness" of Test Match Sofa in action

Telling it like it is

In terms of their views on the cricket itself, the Sofa team firmly believes in telling it like it is, a policy that often involves harsh, but ultimately fair criticism of the players. So, where a BBC commentator may politely opine that stocky English all-rounder Tim Bresnan is "not having a very good day but he's a fine cricketer", a Sofa commentator will cut to the chase with a forthright "No, you're fat, sunshine! You're supposed to be a professional sportsman."

Talking of England, are there any players in the current set-up who would make a good Test Match Sofa pundit? Dan immediately responds "Swanny (England's garrulous spin bowler Graeme Swann). The more I see of him the more I sense he's right for the Sofa". It's no coincidence that Swann embodies the Sofa's creed that Dan describes as being "informed and interesting without ever being pompous and boring."

The future

What lies ahead for the Test Match Sofa team? Dan believes the online world offers them infinite possibilities. "The internet is the medium of choice for young and middle aged people. We've used Facebook and Twitter to grow. We've now got websites like the Telegraph's expat site to host our audio player which has transformed our audience because we don't have to funnel them to our website and then explain what we actually do. It's really hard to get across to people that we actually commentate all day!



Test Match Sofa

The success of Test Match Sofa means Dan is close to not having to worry about going back to a normal job. He adds "we're trying to work out what our business plan should be but it's difficult because this sort of thing hasn't been done before.

There's a space on this sofa reserved for garrulous England star Graeme Swann

"We're in conversation with a few production companies whom we hope will pay for the programme to be made. Revenue streams we're looking at are sponsorship (of the podcast, the commentary or both) as well as advertising on the audio player - which is currently syndicated across 15 external sites - and live audio advertising between overs and at lunch and tea. The key is to hit 10,000 listeners daily and then we can monetise the product properly as that's pretty much where sustainable advertising revenue kicks in".

"I'd love us to be big enough to buy audio rights ourselves but, if we become proper broadcasters we'd risk being part of the establishment and have to tone down what we do."

As things stand, there's no plans to move Dan's fabled sofa from his flat and into the rarified air of the Lord's Media Centre, which means we'll get to hear his team's irreverent takes on cricket for some time to come.

You can listen to [Test Match Sofa's unique take on the England vs Bangladesh series at their website](#) and follow them on Twitter at [@testmatchsofa](#)



Test Match Sofa

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Test Match Sofa

Listen to ball-by-ball Test cricket commentary from anywhere in world from today. Where the BBC has failed some blokes (and a girl) on a sofa in south London have picked up the bat.

By Will Holder

Published: 6:21PM GMT 13 Jan 2010

7 Comments (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/expat/6983444/Test-Match-Sofa.html#disqus_thread)

Somehow Test match cricket and the radio were made for each other. Aggers, Johnners, the banter, the japes and, most importantly, the cakes have all made the BBC's *Test Match Special* (TMS) an institution not just in Britain but for cricket lovers around the world.

But even expats with internet access have been unable to get TMS coverage from South Africa because the BBC does not have the commercial rights to stream the England overseas tours to an international audience.



Where's the cake?

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The Ashes: England v Australia live, fifth Test day one (/sport/cricket/international/theashes/6054667/The-Ashes-England-v-Australia-live-fifth-Test-day-one.html)

Help, however, is at hand. A group of self-confessed cricket nuts are providing ball-by-ball commentary online which is freely accessible around the world so that you don't have to miss the excitement of the deciding Test in Johannesburg.

Their site is called Test Match Sofa and is essentially a group of amateur cricketers who, as the name implies, watch the action on Sky's satellite TV broadcasts and offer listeners a fan's eye view while ensconced in a flat in south London.

Tom Clark, the producer, says that since starting at the first Ashes Test at Cardiff in July the popularity of the site has rocketed. "Three of us were made redundant at the same time and we are all cricket nuts who play together in the Surrey League," he said. "A couple of people were saying they could not get coverage abroad and it started off as a bit of fun; now it has snowballed."

They claim their listenership has grown tenfold, with a 50-50 split between the UK and Britons abroad, plus a few non-native cricket enthusiasts. They also have a lively Twitter following based all over the cricketing world. And it is not just about aping Jonathan Agnew and the late great Brian Johnston.

"We're living the dream of being a *Test Match Special* commentator but because we do not have the political aspect of keeping on good terms with the likes of Graham Swann and Stuart Broad we can be a bit more irreverent," says Tom. "We can be partisan and still throw in a bit of ancient Greek if we feel like."

So expect lots of interaction with listeners through email and twitter, and plenty of abrasive comment/fan worship depending on how England do in the final Test in South Africa. The important thing is that expat cricket listeners have not been forgotten.

* To sign up go to www.testmatchsofa.com (<http://www.testmatchsofa.com>)

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Neil Fletcher

01/15/2010 08:59 PM

I live in California and was able to listen to the Second Test on my iphone using an app called tunein.fm (<http://tunein.fm>) which gave me the 5live feed with Boycott and Agnew.

[Report \(#\)](#) [Recommend \(#\)](#)



Reverse Swing

01/14/2010 03:31 PM

And Jrod is awesome, that is pretty cool to listen while in office working on some tedious repetitive work which need almost no brain :P

[Report \(#\)](#) [Recommend \(#\)](#)



The MG

01/14/2010 01:02 PM

Best.Commentary.Team.On.The.Planet

Hilarious, unashamedly partisan and not bound by all the stuffy political correctness and politeness required by other commentators around the world, these guys are fantastic. And you actually know what's going on in the cricket, in between all the brilliant gags and remarks.

They have jingles, they have a female commentator, they have passion. What more could a listener ask?

[Report \(#\)](#) [Recommend \(#\)](#)



Zoob

01/14/2010 10:03 AM

"Some" of your limericks??? We have read everything you've written, Dave. You have become the most broadcast poet in the World. And very good it is too!

[Report \(#\)](#) [Recommend \(#\)](#)



Almerimar Life

01/14/2010 08:42 AM

Love these guys. Follow them on Twitter @TestMatchSofa, I do (@MyAppleStuff). They have a great mix of knowledge and humour.

[Report \(#\)](#) [Recommend \(#\)](#)



Tom

01/13/2010 08:25 PM

And we're totally free!

[Report \(#\)](#) [Recommend \(#\)](#)



Dave Bird

01/13/2010 08:08 PM

They really are a breath of fresh air. Having moved to Scotland a few years ago I do miss cricket banter with my mates, and these guys made me feel right at home. They've even been kind enough to read out some of my ridiculous limericks ...

<http://www.birdfolk.co.uk/bard.html> (<http://www.birdfolk.co.uk/bard.html>)

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THESPORTBLOG

OPINION. CONJECTURE. OTHER STUFF.



Test Match Sofa – it is TMS couched in chumminess

Can a bunch of couch-bound, cricket-loving entrepreneurs offer an alternative to the professionals of the BBC?



Can cricket

enthusiasts out-commentate the doyens of Test Match Special from the comfort of their own couch? Photograph: Murdo Macleod

It's a funny thing that of all sports it's cricket – musty, stiff-backed cricket, a game that is still played while wearing a pair of slacks – that seems to have engaged most successfully with the [internet](#).

The last home [Ashes](#) series saw a huge mushrooming in the numbers following online. And this time around one of the beneficiaries of 2005 has been building on an already cultish web following. Test Match Sofa is billed as "the real TMS": a kind of punk DIY version of the gurgling prog-rock chorus on Radio 4. "Forget Aggers and Tufnell," it urges. "This is Test match cricket with your friends" – and so it seems to be, or at least a radio-style commentary delivered by a bunch of blokes who do sound a bit like your mates, or someone else's mates, watching TV somewhere in west London.

This may well be the future. But is the future any good? It's natural to approach things like this in a spirit of deep hostility. For a start it all sounds far too relaxed and cool and fun to be up to much. And the first half-hour or so of play today – as relayed from Edgbaston, via Sky Sports – was slightly baffling. I'd paid £1 to listen. I kept clicking buttons on the site to see if I'd missed something. This? This is it?

"It was four from the moment it left the bat." "Leaves that outside off-stump."

"Anderson in to Clarke ... hang on it's Onions." The voices were almost indistinguishable, although Nigel (first names only here) was impressive in his role as the annoying posh one who keeps interrupting.

But what was it all for? The only real reason for following this stuff is if you genuinely can't stand the chumminess of the BBC, which is also online and free. And there were times when you appreciated how good the professionals are. I don't want blokes on a sofa trying to explain reverse swing. I don't want their cakes and cosy chit chat. I couldn't help thinking the whole thing would be better if they were drunk. Or if I was drunk.

And then something good happened. Maybe it was related to the mention of a bottle of wine somewhere along the way. Maybe it was just the need to get the pace of it, like so many things on the internet. But before long James Anderson was bowling an over that was "absolute cack ... Diabolical. Rubbish". Stuart Broad was next up: "Floaty rubbish ... unbearable to watch." Michael Clarke was out lbw: "Australia are teetering! ... Clarke removes his helmet to reveal his horrible haircut." And suddenly any lingering yearnings for Aggers and Tuffers were being flushed away by a thoroughly cleansing draught of the kind of spiky, unaffected, deeply personal bile only the internet can offer.

Tearful Australian veneration of "the sodding baggy green" was roundly jeered. Aussie wickets were greeted by mocking laughter ("They've crumbled, the suckers!"). And just before lunch we were rocking along with "and it's BOWLED HIM!!! The bails flying off like the ears of a donkey that have been sliced by a Stanley knife".

It was funny. You had to be there. It's just the guys. And it's also something about what listening to blokes chatting on a sofa on the internet seems to do to you after a while. Before long there were comedy German accents ("HilfenHAAUUSSSZZ zcoringr runzz") and suddenly I was giggling in cretinous fashion, also sofa-bound, dribbling Pot Noodle and thinking, hey, this internet sofa cricket chat thing is kind of neat.

I was going to say if I did have an objection it was probably that the guys – my guys now – on the real TMS weren't waffly enough, or vitriolic enough, or annoying enough. But by the time a distinctly woozy tea interval came around, trust me, this wasn't really a problem any more.

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