Twitter Thread by Jan Fran



Jan Fran
@Jan__Fran



The thing about cricket in Australia is that it's very white. I know, I know, I say that about everything (true but!) Just stick with me here. Cricket is verrrrrry white. More-so than other (well-loved) sports in this country.

Yes, it's played in South Asia and the Caribbean (which is a thread in itself!) but I'm talking about cricket specifically here in Oz and more specifically in Sydney communities.

For some context. I grew up in Western Sydney and I have Lebanese heritage. This is important to note because growing up I didn't know a single Lebanese-Australian person - kid, adult, man or woman - who played, watched or talked about cricket. ZERO.

Cricket was never on in our home (several reasons for that) and nor was it ever on in the homes of anyone I ever visited. EVER. This is not an exaggeration.

To give you an example of how much I did not know about cricket, I only heard of Richie Benaud when he died. (To be fair, I knew Steve and Mark Waugh because they were from Bankstown and sometimes in the local Torch newspaper. Also, I knew Shane Warne because of hair-loss ads).

I couldn't tell you if cricket was even offered at my (all-girls) high school because the wog kids never played it. But more than that. It wasn't even on our radar as a sport at all.

If it was offered at our brother-school I also wouldn't have known because not a single guy I hung out with played it, watched it or spoke about it. (And yes, I hung out with wog boys who had cars and paid for my McDonalds LIKE GENTLEMEN!)

I've often wondered why cricket was just never a thing in the Leb community and I have a few initial thoughts. Open for discussion as always. And to be clear this is MY experience in the 90s and Naughts. This is NOT shade on the game or Cricket Aus so nobody @ me goshdarnit.

First, cricket, through no fault of its own, is inherently exclusionary to new migrant communities, particularly those who don't have South Asian backgrounds.

Unlike say soccer, cricket is just not played in countries like Lebanon. Lebanese migrants will have likely never heard of it so when considering the sports they enrol their kids in, cricket probably ain't it.

This flows on culturally. No shade on old-school Leb dads - love em, they're the best, etcetera - but in the 90s those brothers weren't playing ANY sport with their kids in the backyard let alone a sport they'd never heard of.

So a love of cricket is not nurtured from childhood in a way that it might be with white/Anglo kids whose parents know and love the game. Two, for new migrant communities, test cricket is actually very difficult to follow.

There are a lot of numbers on the TV screen, which sounds like a joke complaint but if you've never heard of the game, can't speak the language and you see a screen riddled with figures that no one has ever told you about it's unlikely to entice you to keep watching.

Also, there's no quick pay off in test cricket, unlike say basketball where there's a goal every few mins. You can watch and enjoy a b'ball game without being familiar with it because you get to watch people score often and that's sometimes enough. Cricket is a slow burn.

Three, the language barrier is real. Because test cricket is so long and slow (I promise this isn't shade) the commentary is part of the experience but again if you don't speak the language you won't benefit from the background chat. It actually becomes a hindrance.

Four, cricket has got some strong community competition. Rugby league and soccer had a much stronger hold in the western suburbs when I was growing up. Community clubs were everywhere (rugby league more than soccer but shout out to Marconi under 18s dance parties).

I'm pretty sure footballers came to our school once. Homes and cars would be covered in blue and white if the Bulldogs made it to the grand final. People went round for an afternoon and watched football. Ain't nobody going round for THREE WEEKS to watch test cricket.

Five, location. The SCG is far from the western suburbs. If you barracked for the Eels, odds are they played at Parra. If you went for the Bulldogs, their home ground was in Belmore.

There's something comforting about a big game being in your burb and not on some hectic train line in a city that you've never felt was truly yours.

Six, whiteness begets whiteness. Usually, there's least ONE player the community identifies with (Robbie Farah etc). There are ZERO Lebs who play cricket. Even if you wanted to get your kid into the game you couldn't point out one person the kid might be able to relate to.

Some folks might not think this is a big deal (it should be about the game blah blah) but trust me when you feel yourself an outsider to start with - it IS a big deal to see someone who looks and sounds like you play a sport you love!

In some ways, I don’t blame cricket for being so white. It has a real hill to climb and other sports have a massive head start. But in other ways, I kinda do blame cricket for not noticing or wilfully ignoring the fact that in the past 200 years almost all its players were white.

Not my opinion BTW. Researchers found that between 1946 and 2015, there were only TEN Test players for the Australian men’s team who weren’t of British descent. TEN. In 70 years!! https://t.co/uXzrIustMC

I mean damn!! I get why there aren’t any Leb players (see above) but why aren’t their more players of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan descent? Here’s your answer I guess. https://t.co/QmbErTh9e6

Anyway, I don’t really know why I’m telling you all this. Maybe because after 3 decades I’ve finally learnt what an “innings” is and, well, I actually like test cricket. I finally get it. Sort of. It’s just so damn white and so damn exclusionary. Get it together mate!