

SHEFFIELD SPORTING MEMORIES ZOOM MEETING

APRIL 2021

"CRICKET" - in FILM ... on TV... & at the Theatre.

MY FAVOURITE SELECTIONS

Cricket is one of the most popular and watched sports world wide - but it has not shared the same popularity of several other sports on screen. Being technically difficult to capture on film, there are only a few really good productions worthy of the games rich & dramatic history.

In this personal look, I have highlighted the features that I believe have excellent entertainment value and reflect the game at its best.

I have not included factual cricket documentaries. There are many brilliant cricket films such as the superb "Fire in Babylon" & the outstanding "The Edge ", but I have taken this opportunity to look instead at how cricket has been used in drama on the big screen, in television shows and on the stage.

FILM

Despite the presence of so many British & Commonwealth born actors in Hollywood in the 1930's notably the likes of (Sir) C. Aubrey Smith, former Test match player & actor and the founder of the Hollywood Cricket Club in 1932 - there are basically no feature films made stateside with cricket at their core.

Famous English actors like Boris Karloff ("Frankenstein"; "The Mummy") and Trevor Howard ("Brief Encounter" ; "The Third Man") and others including Errol Flynn, David Niven, Cary Grant Leslie Howard, Basil Rathbone, Nigel Stock, Ronald Coleman and

(Sir) Lawrence Olivier were all either players or active members of the Hollywood Cricket Club, which is still based in Los Angeles.

My late dad, Michael, had an amazing encounter with both Boris and Trevor in 1955 when they both umpired a very competitive Benefit match in which he was playing for Nottinghamshire as a young man.

These famous Hollywood celebrities visited Michael in the Notts dressing room after the game and congratulated him for his part in a match winning partnership.

(An exception from Hollywood more recently may include "Million Dollar Arm" (2014), based on a true story with a combination of baseball & Indian cricket.

There have been major American feature films which have cricket scenes but not as the films central theme, including such diverse releases as

SLUMGOG MILLIONAIRE (2008); FROST/NIXON (2008); THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE (1968); CHARIOTS OF FIRE (1981); THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI (1957); MASTER & COMMANDER - FAR SIDE OF THE WORLD (2003) with Russell Crowe.

But not unsurprisingly, there has been many more feature films made with a cricket related story in Australia and in Indian cinema in particular, such being the level of fanatical interest in the game on the Asian Continent.

Here are my two favourite FILMS featuring Cricket in their story lines:

The FINAL TEST 1953 (UK) - 93 minutes

Cricket has been seen in film several times in the UK from the 1930's onwards notably as scenes in features such as "Badgers Green" (1934 and 1949 versions) ; The Lady Vanishes (1938) ; "Goodbye Mr Chips" (1939); "It's Not Cricket" (1949)

But in August 1953, a UK film "The Final Test" was released with a story entirely based upon the last match of a retiring English Test batsman - played by Jack Warner - against the Australians at the Oval.

Originally written as a play by Sir Terence Rattigan this simple, friendly film also stars Robert Morley and the 'Final Test' was probably the best film depiction of cricket and cricketers to date.

The authenticity of the film is helped enormously by the presence of six current England Test players including (Sir) Len Hutton and Cyril Washbrook and newsreel footage of the game.

The critics were enamoured by the film on its release and in more recent times *Sky Cinema* said "its difficult to imagine that this little film packed out London's huge Odeon, Leicester Square in its day, but it did" and the *Guardian* called it "Britain's only significant cricket picture"

This charming tale ran for 6 months in New York and apparently became one of Harold Wilson's favourite movies.

My dad, Mike, played against Denis Compton, Godfrey Evans and Jim Laker in real life so this film occupies a special place in my favourite film list.

Well worth watching ,often on TCM or on Utube and available on DVD - There is humour , drama & English post war culture to enjoy in the "Final Test"

LAGAAN 2001 - 'Once Upon a Time in India' (India)

A 224 minute epic Indian made sports, musical film produced and starring Aamir Khan and released in 2001 to huge critical acclaim.

With a stellar supporting cast, stunning visuals, brilliantly staged outdoor set pieces, wonderful musical interludes, thousands of Indian extras and English actors who could all actually play cricket this is an multi award winning film with cricket dominating the whole film.

Lavishly made on location in India for \$5.5m, "Lagaan" (Hindi translation; Land Tax) has been credited with becoming one of the most iconic films of the 21st century, creating huge impact on Indian cinema and gaining worldwide recognition for Bollywood films.

Lagaan is set in the Victorian period (1893) of the British Raj and revolves around the uneducated peasants from a drought stricken village in a central province of India who are oppressed by high taxes imposed by the British ruling class and enforced by the Army

They are challenged by an arrogant British Army officer to beat the British in a game of cricket so that their taxes (the lagaan of the title) will be cancelled for three years - lose and the tax will be tripled!

After accepting the challenge, the villagers face the daunting task of learning an alien game and its rules and then playing for a result

that will change their destiny - the recruitment of the village team is akin to the "Magnificent Seven" and the film then plays out the most dramatic of three day games in the burning sun in front of a hugely partisan crowd. The cricket action is superb and believable and despite the length of the film, makes for an extraordinary experience.

LAGAAN deservedly swept all the major awards at Indian and International film festivals and became only the 3rd Hindi language film to be nominated for an Academy Award for "Best Foreign Film".

LAGAAN became one of the box office hits of 2001 and achieved the greatest DVD sales for a Bollywood movie up to 2007.

In 2010, LAGAAN was ranked #55 in Empire Magazine's "100 Best Films of World Cinema".

And it is currently rated Number One in the Top 10 cricket movies of all time on the "Cineaholic" critics web site. This epic was also listed at number #14 in the BBC's "Top 50 films you must see before you die", the only Indian made film to be included.

LAGAAN sets a high standard for any sports based film.

I have not yet seen IQBAL, 2005 (India), but I understand it is a remarkable tale and well worth seeking out.



TELEVISION

UK Television has been a much more fertile medium for cricket drama and comedy, featuring the game in specific scenes of episodes of popular programmes or less commonly, as the main theme in a Series.

You can see cricket scenes used in "Inspector Morse" (1989), "Midsomer Murders" (2 episodes - 1999 & 2017); "Downton Abbey" (2012); "The Avengers" (1966 episode) ; "Faulty Towers" (1975 - The Germans) ; "Monty Python's Flying Circus" (1969 - 1974) ; "Bergerac" (1981 - 1991) and "Yes, Prime Minister" (1986 episode - The Smoke screen).

In Australia the list is extended to such series as "Home & Away" (1988 -), "Neighbours" (1985 -) and "The Paul Hogan Show" (1973 - 1984) with cricket being used in multiple episodes.

In India the list of shows is almost endless!

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Cricket has also been featured in specific episodes of popular TV series

EVER DECREASING CIRCLES 1984 - "THE CRICKET MATCH" - BBC Episode 2 Series 2 (27 episodes in a total of 4 Series)

Starring Richard Briers as 'Martin' and Peter Egan as his hated neighbour & rival in life, 'Paul', this cricket themed episode was perfectly filmed even though Egan in reality could not play cricket very well - the use of Wagnerian music , close ups and slow mo however created a wonderful illusion.

Richard Briers has stated it was his most favourite episode of a programme that attracted over 10 million viewers per show.

Available on YouTube and on DVD - great fun, great cast and great scripts.

(This episode is being broadcast on UK GOLD tomorrow at 1.40pm)

**DAD'S ARMY - "THE TEST" - BBC Friday 27th November 1970
Series 4 (9 series in total) Episode 10**

ARP Warden Hodges, brilliantly played by actor Bill Pertwee, challenges Mainwaring's Home Guard to a cricket match and employs a professional ringer to win the match - FS 'Freddie' Trueman plays himself in this classic episode.

Bill Pertwee had a life long passion for cricket and accepted my dad's invitation to be Retford's guest speaker at our Dinner in April 1980 - I still have the letters that passed between them to make this successful arrangement and this episode was a favourite of Mike's.

I had the great pleasure of meeting Bill at the event and talked about the game, his career and DWR in particular.

DR. WHO 1982 - "BLACK ORCHID" (TWO PARTS) - BBC 5th episode of the 19th season

Actor Peter Davidson, the 5th Doctor, showed off all of his own quite exceptional cricket skills as a batsman, demon seam bowler and slip fielder in this two part episode set in England in the 1925.

The authentically filmed cricket sequences are excellent and each part of "Black Orchid" was watched by over 9 million viewers.

He was always my favourite Doctor after this !

However, there are two "stand outs" where Cricket is the main theme throughout an entire Series and not just used in an episode for comedic or dramatic effect.

These are my top 3 favourites

OUTSIDE EDGE 1994 - 1996 (22 episodes - UK)

"Outside Edge" is a comedy satire written by the multi award winning playwright Richard Harris and was originally a stage play "more about the people who happen to play cricket than cricket itself".

It was first performed in 1979, won the 'Evening Standard' award and is set in and around a pavilion in mid summer, late 1970's

My family were guests of actor Frazer Hines who played "Dennis" in a production at the Palace Theatre, Newark in September 2004 - Frazer is a fine actor, charity fund raiser and dedicated Lord's Taverner, who we all knew well from his involvement in Benefit matches held at Retford C. C.

In the three 1990's Television Series, with a cast including Timothy Small, the action sequences for Series Two were filmed at Woollaton CC in Nottingham and Peter Hacker, my former team mate at RCC and a Notts professional, was recruited locally to add more realism to the filming of the cricket sequences.

HOWZAT - KERRY PACKER'S WAR - 2012 (Mini Series - Australia)

This is essentially a faithful dramatisation of the events from 1976 when Australian businessman and media tycoon Kerry Packer - brilliantly played by Lachy Hulme - caused a cricket "war" by setting up an alternative to Test cricket - 'World Series Cricket'.

Packer secretly contracted the world's top 50 Test players (plus Richie Benaud) and established a new "rebel "competition which challenged the cricket establishment.

The film features well executed cricket action and an excellent cast of actors who look like Chappell, Marsh, Lillee, Greig, Holding, Lloyd etc., and was originally shown as a two part series before being released as a film (173 mins)

The outcome of a two year High Court battle in favour of Packer changed cricket forever - if you want to see the reasons we now have fairer pay, helmets, floodlights, coloured clothing, white balls, stadium music, multiple camera views and stump mics, I highly commend this film - it's a truly great sports film!

NOTE: DWR was approached to join WSC, but declined - he wanted to play for his County and feared that Packer players would be banned from Test Match cricket

BODYLINE 1984 (10 Part series - Australian)

I admit this is more of a guilty pleasure but once you get over the massive bias towards the English, some factual errors and several laughable action sequences, this is actually quite good!

"Bodyline" was a huge ratings success when originally shown over a 4 week period in 1984 and is a dramatised version of the events that took place in the Ashes Test series of 1932 / 33 in Australia - forever known as the "Bodyline" Series. England won 4-1

Hugo Weaving ('Lord of the Rings' trilogy) gives a first class performance as the hated English Captain, Douglas Jardine

I might even buy the DVD and relive the deeds of these "evil " Englishmen and their "unsportsmanlike" tactics to overcome the batting brilliance of (Sir) Don Bradman.

ON THE STAGE

As if producing realistic cricket in a film or TV episode is not difficult enough to undertake, using the game & players from the most famous of all Ashes Series ('Bodyline' 1932) should be impossible on stage as a live performance.

Yet in 2001 a play written by Michael Pinchbeck was commissioned and premiered at the Nottingham Playhouse called "The Ashes" and it was a marvellous production.

"THE ASHES" 2nd September 2011

The Times review said "a cracking new play with Harold Larwood as the central victim". Harold was played by actor Karl Haynes who 'got his mannerism off to a tee' and the play is essentially the story of Larwood - the world's fastest bowler and who was critical to carrying out the tactic which became known as "Bodyline" in this dramatic and explosive Test series.

He never played for his Country again.

The play avoids the technical pitfalls of trying to recreate several pivotal moments from 1932 by utilising instead a huge screen and film footage from old newsreels of the day.

The cast had also undergone cricket coaching at a local club to ensure that an air of realism was created around the use of nets and catching practice as portrayed during the production.

I took my family to see the play on the first night mainly because of our interest in how Harold would be portrayed - he had been a team mate and friend of my grandfather in the 1930's at Notts CCC and both my late dad and myself met this legendary player in 1977 on one of Harold's rare visits to England.

None of us were disappointed by this evening's entertainment and this is a seriously well crafted stage play.

In 2013 , the play was revived at the Nottingham Playhouse to mark the First Test of the Ashes Series at Trent Bridge (which England also won) with members of the original cast.

Well that's my brief summary of cricket in film , TV and on stage

My top SIX BATTING ORDER

1.LAGAAN - FEATURE FILM

2.HOWZAT - MINI SERIES/FILM

3.THE ASHES - STAGE PLAY

4.OUTSIDE EDGE -STAGE PLAY AND TELEVISION SITCOM SERIES

5.BODYLINE - MINI SERIES AND FILM

6.EVER DECREASING CIRCLES - TELEVISION COMEDY SERIES EPISODE
"THE MATCH"

12 th man DR. WHO TV - Episode "Black Orchid"

RESERVES The Final Test - feature film

Dad's Army - TV episode "The Test"

Chris Hall

April 13 th 2021

Cricket film TV and Stage Quiz Questions

What was the answer to the vital cricket question asked in the feature film "Slumdog Millionaire" ?

Sir Jack Hobbs (199 Centuries)

Who won the match in the epic film "Lagaan"?

The Indian Villagers by one wicket

What was amazing about the winning boundary ?

The batsman was caught on the boundary going for a six but the fielder ('evil' Captain Russell) had completed the catch over the line!

What Television sports channel did Kerry Packer own in Australia?

Channel Nine

Who was the Captain of the World X1 in Packer's "World Series Cricket" competition?

Tong Greig

In "Ever Decreasing Circles" - 'The Cricket Match' - how many runs did Peter Egan's character "Paul" score

100 of course!

"Boris Karloff" was an icon of Universal Studios horror films - but what was his real name?

William Henry Pratt

What Cricket Club had "Maid Marian" and "Cleopatra" as social members? **Hollywood CC, Burbank, Los Angeles, California, USA**

Frazer Hines was a main character in the original "Emmerdale Farm" on Yorkshire Television and starred in "Outside Edge" on stage.

In what iconic BBC Series did Frazer set an appearance record?

DR.WHO from Series 4 1966 - with Patrick Houghton, 2nd Doctor, in episodes 31 'the Highlanders' - 36; Season 5 E37- 43; Season 6 E44 -50 (total of 111 programmes)

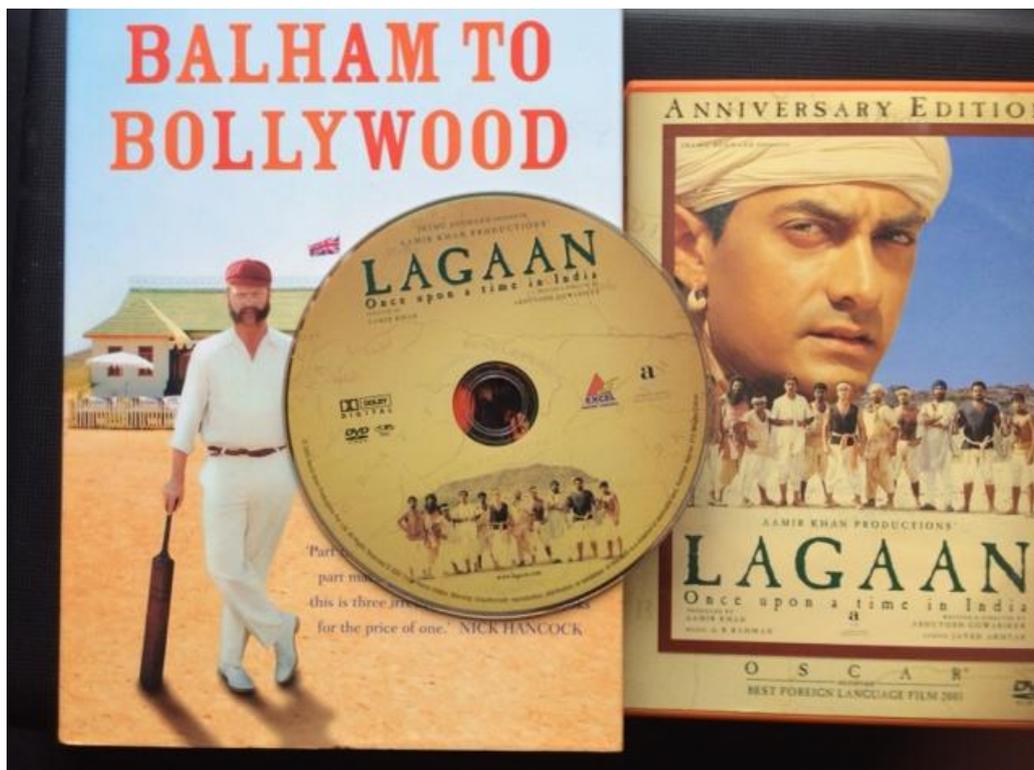
What was his role and characters name ?

Frazer played Dr. Who's Scottish assistant , "Jamie" McCrimmon.

The Highlander

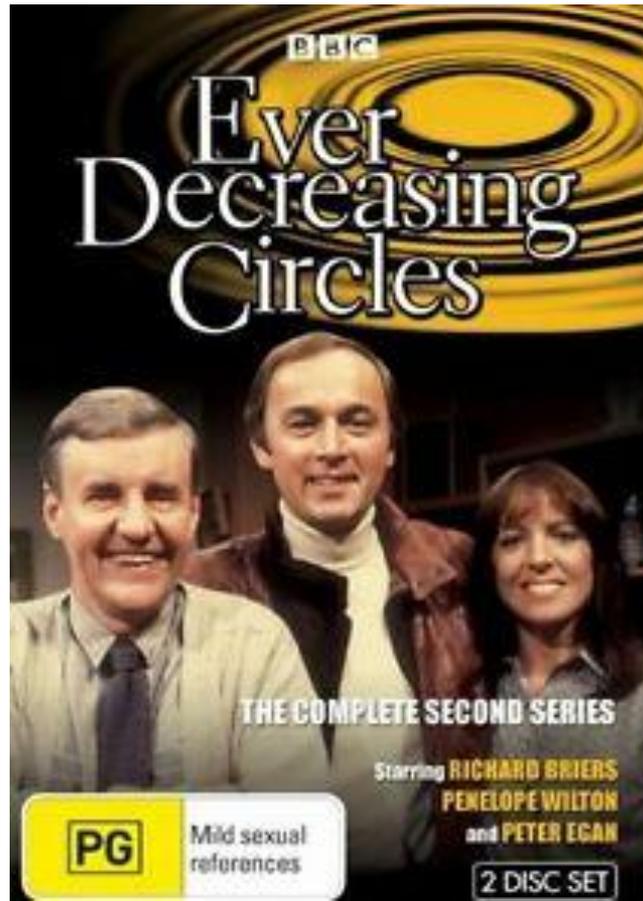
In the famous Dad's Army episode 'The Test', how many balls did Freddie Trueman bowl in the grudge match ?

One and then retired hurt!

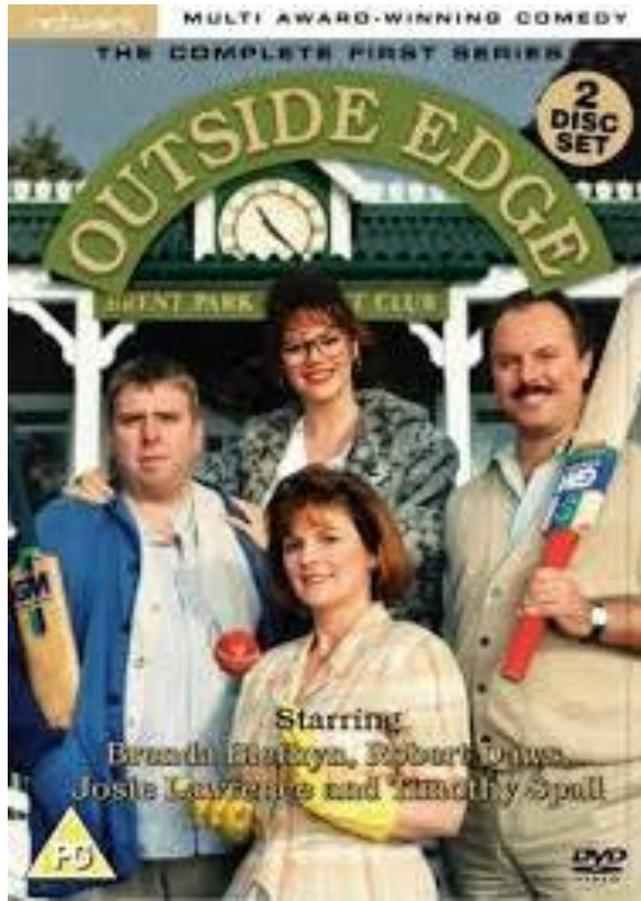


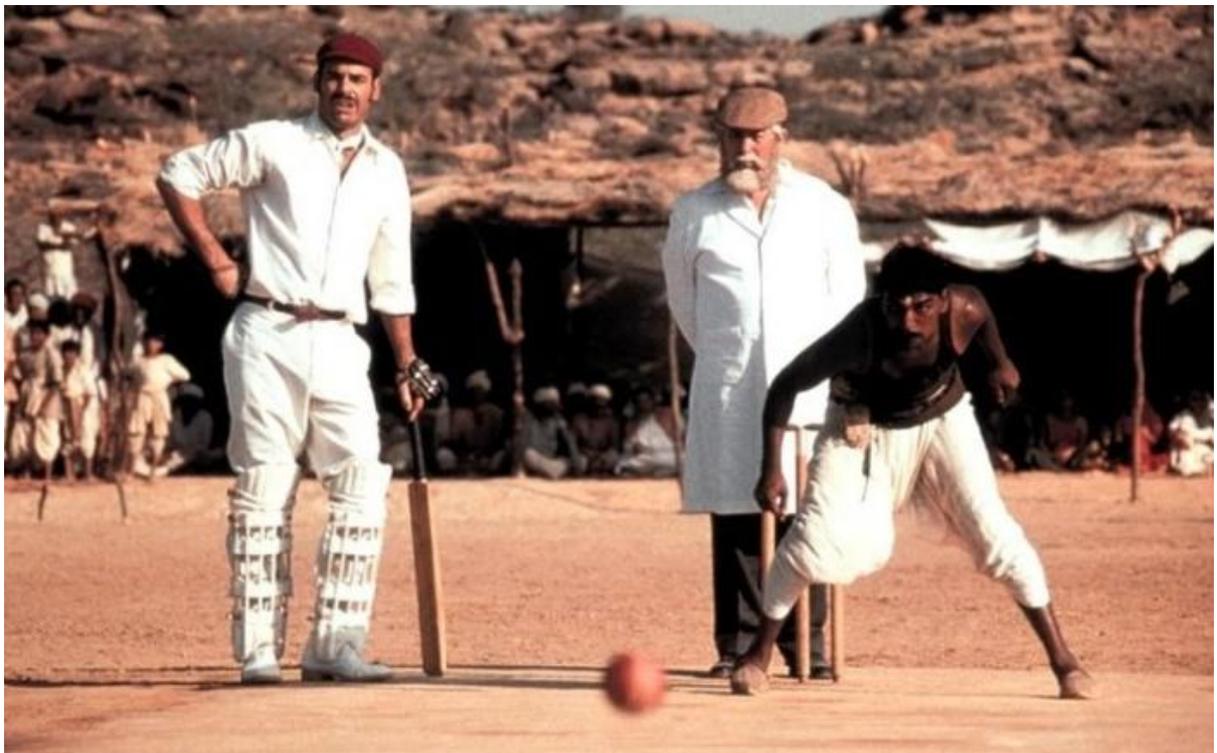










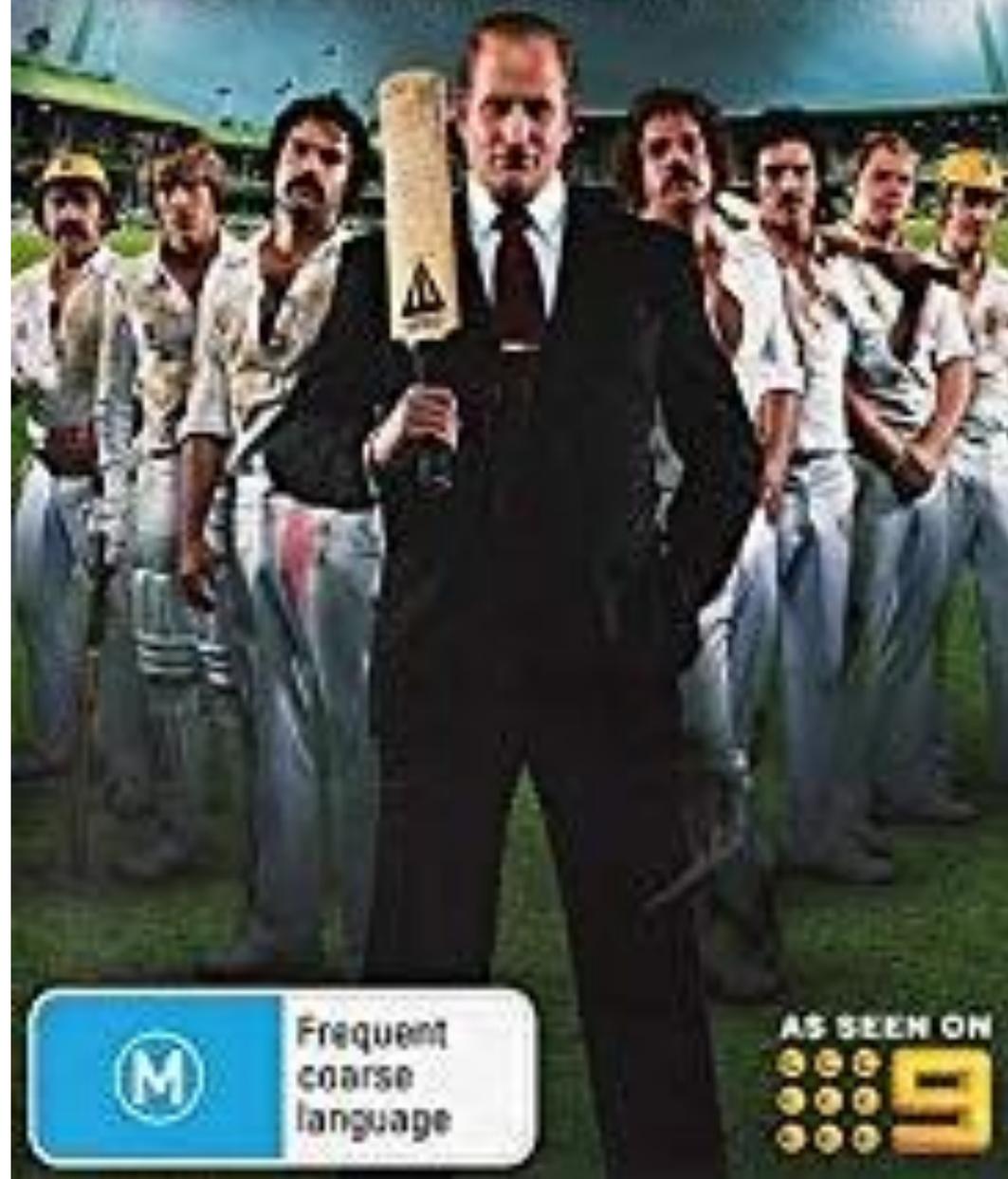






HOWZAT!

KERRY PACKER'S WAR



M

Frequent
coarse
language

AS SEEN ON



