

SPORTS PAGE.

(or Demystifying Social Statistics, with apologies to John Arlott).

From our cricket correspondent:

R S S versus RADSTATS.

Lords, Saturday August 30.

A match that promised much: A large queue had formed throughout the damp night and by 11.30 a.m. it stretched almost halfway round the ground. Clearly, a memorable match was in store; but it was not to be. Once again in this dismal summer, surely the worst since 1947, it was the elements who were to have the upper hand. The uncovered outfield remained damp throughout the sunny morning, throughout the smoked salmon and hock and even into the sunny mid-afternoon. Even the ticket-holders and, yes, even those in ties were getting restless, privileged though they were to be enjoying the sun and bars within the hallowed walls. Not until gone 3 pm were the patient supporters allowed to part with their £5 and settle down for the great spectacle.

R S S had won the toss and, fearing a sticky wicket was in store, had put RADSTATS in to bat. Unfortunately, the game had only just got under way with an over of medium pace bowling from R S S reviewer, Freda Conway, when bad light stopped play. But that first over promised much: With the benefit of home advantage (JRSSA, 1980, 143, page 200) and with the home crowd behind her, Conway had felt justified in opening up with what might seem an excess of short deliveries for such a medium pacer. The second ball, equally short, was wide down the leg side ('The question that users of statistics must ask is not whether particular statistics are accurate, but whether they are accurate enough for the purpose for which they are being used'). In fact, many a club player has bowled similar deliveries in the past and Evans, opening yet again for the away team, hardly offered a stroke. The bowler was clearly experiencing trouble with her run up ('Reading this book is not made easier by those authors who insist on making their political opinions so very obvious), and followed the wide by two successive no-balls. ('Although unemployment statistics are much criticised in this book, there is no discussion of alternative definitions of unemployment. It is surely reasonable to question whether university students who do not obtain employment in their Christmas vacations should be regarded as unemployed.')

However, the next delivery was a better line and length. (' .. the needs of an individual social science do not necessarily add up to a viable statistics course'). The crowd anticipated that the attack was about to get into its stride and an expectant murmur went round the ground. But it was not to be. Did the umpires decide to cut proceedings short or did the home side take up the umpires' offer and restrict the day's play to this brief salvo? It seems we may never know. But the outcome is a match restricted to ten overs per side; clearly we can look forward to some attacking strokes when RADSTATS take up the challenge.