



to sledging in this up-market cricket match as the St Moritz side take to the ice to overcome the Cresta Cricket Club in Switzerland Photograph: Tim Edwards

Bagging ducks on the frozen lake

DESPITE the prowess of the Swiss on bobsleigh and toboggan, there is still a tangible British influence in St Moritz. Disregarding the trend for figure-hugging Lycra suits, the Cresta Run riders Whitman and Fitzherbert, attired in plus-fours and old motorcycle helmets, still dice with the treacherous zig-zagging ice chute, and are pronounced upon in abrupt pukka-ness by Lt Col Digby Willoughby. "Come come, Higgins, you *must* be properly attired during riding!"

The rows of bashed toboggans, some emblazoned with RAF emblems, epitomise the situation at the Cresta, where local daredevils like Claus Bertschinger now dominate. But in their never-ending quest for incongruity, the Brits are promoting more eccentric pursuits. Their latest asset is St Moritz's huge frozen lake. First it was the annual horse racing and polo meet, which has become an institution. Now it is cricket on ice.

Bizarre as it may sound to bowl to prominent county players (an ex-England cap-

Simon Hughes, the Middlesex bowler, watches no-balls replace snowballs

tain or two for instance) at 6,000 feet and -20C on an artificial wicket surrounded by rolled snow, the standard of play was actually quite high.

There was the occasional alarm when a rasping square cut reared off a mogul in the outfield — players all wore skiing gloves and spiked shoes, of course — but the pitch was satisfactory until its foundations began to melt. There were perfect natural 3,000-metre sightscreens at each end and a specially erected pavilion inside which players in thermal jockstraps and Ray-Bans were revived with hot toddies — not so different from Fenner's in April.

Bowlers handed gloves to shivering umpires, who were armed with brooms to clear snow debris, before crunching in. But there was precious little swing — the atmosphere in St Moritz has only two per cent humid-

ity. There was no spin either; the protagonists' fingers were too cold. Lofty hits plugged, drives skimmed towards orange boundary boards and fielders performed outrageous sliding stops. The square leg umpire probed the surface for any sign of David Gower's hire car which disappeared through the ice this time last year.

The aroma of barbecued *bratwurst* and the occasional sight of a horse-drawn sleigh (giving a new slant to "sledging" in cricket) betrayed the location. But in Switzerland, as in other European cities, cricket is catching on. Milan has a strong team, the MCC will never live down being beaten by one from Paris last year and the quality of the Dutch and the Danes is well known.

The St Moritz side are no more than useful. But, augmented by Chris Cowdrey, Mark Nicholas and other professionals,

they were more than a match for the Cresta Cricket Club, though by the time the temperature dipped to -30C, the scorer's fingers were frozen to his pencil.

The plan is for an international cricket-on-ice festival next year which, with the participation of enthusiastic teams from Spain, Italy and France, as well as Blighty, might be quite something. Who wouldn't swap an indoor net for this inspiring backdrop, lavish sponsorship and negligible health hazards? It doesn't bare comparison with the Cresta itself, where all you might get for a crippling initial investment of £150 could be broken bones and a resonant ear-bashing from Col Willoughby: "Good God, Hughes! That was a ghastly ride."

The mesmeric appeal of the Cresta will survive though. Once through Shuttlecock, a notorious 90-degree bend, and down the home straight at 70mph, the old-fashioned challenge seems absurd, yet wholly addictive. Like cricket?