

Snow ball



The pitch may be artificial, but the cricket's for real

THE THWACK of leather on willow remains the same, but the dazzling white pitch, and thermal-clad players present a very different picture from the traditional English cricket green.

Last Saturday, on the frozen lake of the exclusive resort of St Moritz, the British Universities Winter Cricket Team battled it out with the St Moritz Winter Cricket Club for the Charles Heidsieck Trophy — an outsize Swiss cowbell.

Four years ago, the burghers of St Moritz barely knew what cricket was. Now, it is one of the central attractions of the high season and has so captured Swiss imagination that one of their leading winter sports stars, Földi Berchtold, plans to make a special trip to Lord's this summer.

The British have long had close links with St Moritz. It was the Victorians' favourite winter playground and, in 1885, they built the famous Cresta Run, a perilous ice chute for daredevil tobogganists, still overseen today by the very English, Lieutenant Colonel Digby Willoughby.

So, when amateur cricketer Anthony Boucher, 29 (Old Cantabrian and British to a wicket, despite the surname), saw the frozen lake on which horse racing and polo tournaments were already staged, he jumped at the opportunity to forge a modern link between Britain and St Moritz.

With Simon Doggart, 30, a Cambridge cricket blue and the son of ex-England player G.H.G. Doggart, he recruited two teams and set off for the ritzy resort, where, not yet accepted as part of the town's sporting elite, they stayed in the local youth hostel.

Now the Heidsieck Trophy draws a mixture of amateur and professional players, such as Mark Nicholas, captain of Hampshire, Simon Hughes, on the new Durham team, Colin Metson, Glamorgan player tipped for England, Christopher Cowdrey, ex-captain of England and son of Sir Colin Cowdrey, and the Hon. Pip Fitzherbert, son of Lord Stafford.

ENGLAND cricketers and keen Cresta riders David Gower and Allan Lamb are also St Moritz regulars, but international commitments have kept them from playing on the lake so far. Both teams are British, although the Zucor International public school, just down the Engadine Valley, contributes players.

This is the only cricket match on ice in the world. The lake freezes to a depth of at least half a metre and each snowfall is packed down to give a solid surface, strong enough to hold the fleet of Range-Rovers that deliver the teams to the lake.

However, as David Gower found to his shock two years ago when his car took a dive into the lake, there are areas of thin ice. The artificial pitch is rolled out on to what was, a few weeks earlier, the car park for the

KATE DUNDAS

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Pictures:

TIM EDWARDS

polo tournament. Whereas in England players pray for no overnight rain, in Switzerland they pray for no overnight snow.

If snow falls, the pitch must be swept between overs, and cold can stop play at 4.30 pm as the sun goes behind the mountains and temperatures can sink to minus 15C.

The greatest hazard of playing cricket at St Moritz is not the icy lake, but the call of the Cresta Run. Last year Simon Hughes broke his shoulder and Tim Wright smashed his arm.

This year, thankfully, despite the odd spin-off at the notorious

shuttlecock bend, there were no serious injuries. At half-time players crowded into the pavilion — a brightly-coloured tent — for wurst and glühwein.

It was a nail-biting finish — at the last ball with one wicket to go and three runs to win, Jervis Smith, of St Moritz Winter Cricket Club, hit the ball cleanly into the outfield, but was run out by a splendid throw as he went into the final run. The score was British Universities 161 for six (the highest total ever scored on ice), St Moritz 160 all out.

If it sounds like the silly British upper classes at play, Anthony

Boucher is quick to argue this is proper cricket. 'We take the match seriously. It is a great MCC tradition to spread the game of cricket to all outposts of the world.'

CLUBS

MCC, I Zingari, Free Foresters and the Arabs, all exclusive English cricket clubs. Players have to be invited to qualify for membership, and are then selected on merit.

CLOTHES

OFTEN instead of cricket whites (players can be invisible against the snow), navy blue tracksuits are worn, and thermal underwear. Players wear

ordinary cricket boots, but ski-gloves and anti-glare sunglasses are essential.

HOW TO PLAY

TEAMS are drawn from the exclusive clubs mentioned, but you can make a start (on grass) by contacting your local cricket club. The Test & County Cricket Board, Lord's Cricket Ground, St John's Wood Road, London NW8 (071-288 4405), has a list of addresses.

HOW TO SEE IT

YOU can watch the event on television — on Channel 4 Transworld Sport next Saturday, February 15.



Wintery wicket: At least there's no problem with rain in this spectacular setting



Keeping score: All wrapped up for a day's play, complete with essential sunglasses, and thick coats for spectators