



The global game

Relief for refugees in Sicily but sad news for the Milanese. Tweet @CoyneJames with your stories

Cricket on the boot

Tom Cloughton plays impromptu game with refugees on the tip of Sicily

It seemed an unlikely sight, but there, just outside the centre of Marsala, Sicily's westernmost city, were some lads playing cricket. Perhaps more famous for its fortified wine and salt flats, the ancient Carthaginian city clearly possessed some talent, too. This, to coincide with World Refugee Day, was the second national day of cricket for migrants to be held in Sicily.

The pitch, the central piece of grass of an athletics stadium, did not lend itself to even bounce, but worse is played on in the West Midlands, and it provided enough space for a high-standard game.

Members of the Federazione Cricket Italiana and I had travelled from Palermo, the north-western *capoluogo* of Sicily. The Italians who welcomed cricket to

their island may never have held a real cricket ball in their hand, nor do they seem to fully understand the lbw Law, but they do understand that cricket matters to people. The game flowed nicely, with a mixture of backgrounds and techniques making for an exciting match.

Sicily has been at the heart of Europe's migrant crisis and has, over the last few years, seen an influx of people from across the world. One thing that unites some of these people is sport. For many this means football. For lots of others, it means cricket. And, for a migrant from Bangladesh or Pakistan, work is generally difficult to come by, and unstable if found.

One of the young men there, Islam, whose English and Italian were excellent, had been living in Sicily for nearly two years and had found work on a local archaeological site. His job would only last for a further month, though, after which he would again find himself in an awkward limbo. A day spent playing a

sport that he is very good at is of huge significance for Islam, and as he is keen to remind me, he is desperate to play more.

The energy and enthusiasm of men such as Islam makes days like this possible, but they need some support. They need stumps, a field to play on and co-operation. For migrants like Islam, or his friend Abdullah, a proper fast bowler, playing cricket will not find them stable employment, and so may not transform their lives. But for integration and conversation, there is not much that works better than this strange sport. Not only this, but it allows people, whose families may live thousands of miles away, to bring an aspect of their home life with them and so to be a part of something.

What seems a shame is that there is not a pre-existing cricketing infrastructure or culture in Sicily. But if some rather eccentric Sicilians can team up with migrants to play cricket, it surely cannot be an impossibility in Britain.

Farewell to the Radish

Lombardy club evicted from their ground ahead of 30th anniversary, writes Richard Hamilton

October 22 2017 was a sad day for Italian cricket, as the members of Idle Cricket Club in Lodi, south-east of Milan, finished dismantling their clubhouse and removed the artificial pitch from the centre of their Radish Ground, one of Italy's finest.

Over the last 25 years, many a club – even MCC five years ago – has come to play us at the Radish, which was previously used for growing *ravanelli*, hence the name. Now, however, after eviction by the new owner of the farm where the Radish was located, we are without a ground and our future is uncertain. To mark the occasion and in loving memory, we burned the club's set of bails (right).

Lodi, formed almost 30 years ago, is one of the best-known clubs in Italy – and has a pipe-smoking wicketkeeper, Silvio Leydi. Clubs from Britain, France, Switzerland and Slovenia frequently visit to play, and we make regular trips to Velden in Austria, and Winterthur and Zuoz in Switzerland.

It is a bitter blow for Italian cricket. Like



many countries in mainland Europe, cricket has significant potential for growth in Italy, where an increasing number of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent have brought with them their passion for the game. The national team, bolstered by several players of Italian heritage from Australia and South Africa, are one of the strongest in Europe.

But finding a suitable place to play has never been easy. In Milan, Italy's business and

financial capital, from where I write, there are no cricket grounds. Two clubs, Milan CC and Kingsgrove Milan, have to play out of town in Settimo Milanese. There is a large Pakistani population in Brescia where, in 2014, the city council rejected ICC Europe's offer to find 80 per cent of the funds for a cricket stadium which would have provided Italy's first grass wicket, and a home for the city's three clubs, Janjua, Jinnah and Lions.

Although it is unlikely that Italy will become a Test-playing nation in the foreseeable future, it seems a terrible shame that it should be so difficult for cricket lovers over here to play a decent game. Many immigrants resort to playing in public parks, but that is not ideal, particular when cricket balls cause injury to passers-by, which invariably leads to the game being banned by the local authority, as happened a few years ago in Brescia and earlier this year in Bolzano.

Up in the Alps towards the Austrian border, Bolzano (or Bozen, as it is mainly a German-speaking area) is over three hours' drive from Milan, and it is certainly heartening to learn that there are people up there in the mountains who actually want to play cricket. However, without any proper facilities, what are the chances that their love of cricket will pass on to the next generation? 