



VINTAGE

ON THE  
CORINTHIAN SPIRIT

D.J. TAYLOR

# *Contents*

*Cover*

*About the Book*

*About the Author*

*Also by D. J. Taylor*

*Dedication*

*Title Page*

*Epigraph*

Prologue - The Umpire Strikes Back

- I 1929
- II Strickland of the Sixth
- III Marlon
- IV Word-Hoard
- V Annals of the Corinthians
- V 'True Cricketers'
- VII 'Mr Sheppard to You'
- VIII 'Play Up, Kings!'
- IX 'I Paid for Everything'
- X 'I Could Do That'

*Notes and Further Reading*

*Acknowledgements*

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## *About the Book*

In January 1929, before 20,000 spectators, Norwich City of the Third Division South went down 0-5 in the third round of the FA Cup to an amateur side composed of ex-public school boys who disdained professional tactics in favour of instinct and teamwork. Within a decade, the Corinthians, the club that for forty years had supplied the entire English national side, had all but ceased to exist. The world was changing. By the time of the last 'Gentleman vs. Players' cricket match in 1962 a whole era in English sport had come to an end.

But the passing of amateur sportsmen - footballers, cricketers, golfers, tennis players - had implications beyond the playing field. A century ago 'amateur' was a compliment to someone who played a game simply for love of it. A hundred years later it is a byword for cack-handed incompetence. In this brilliant study of the patterns of sporting and cultural life, D. J. Taylor examines the process that led to professionalism's triumph and the long rearguard action fought by sportsmen - and literature - on amateurism's behalf.

*On the Corinthian Spirit* has many heroes - from 'Charlie Bam', the legendary Corinthian defender, who once played a game with a broken leg, to the boys' school story hero Strickland of the Sixth, Old Etonian cricket-lover George Orwell and the 14th Norwich Cub Scout XI of the early 1970s. Drawing on his own experiences of 'amateurism', D. J. Taylor describes a changing moral universe with

profound consequences both for sport and the world beyond it.

## *About the Author*

After scoring 42 goals for the 14th Norwich Cub Scout XI in their outstanding 1970-71 season, D J Taylor retired from the game at the age of ten. Despite finding the net with six novels and a Whitbread Prize-winning biography of George Orwell, he believes that nothing in his later life has quite matched these early triumphs. His latest novel, *Kept*, was published by Chatto & Windus in February 2006, and his group biography, *Bright Young Things*, will be published in October 2007.

ALSO BY D. J. TAYLOR

Fiction

*Great Eastern Land*

*Real Life*

*English Settlement*

*After Bathing at Baxter's: Stories*

*Trespass*

*The Comedy Man*

*Kept: A Victorian Mystery*

Non-fiction

*A Vain Conceit: British Fiction in the 1980s*

*Other People: Portraits from the '90s*

*(with Marcus Berkmann)*

*After the War: The Novel and England Since 1945*

*Thackeray*

*Orwell: The Life*

For John Taylor MBE,  
on his eighty-fifth birthday

# *On the Corinthian Spirit*

The Decline of Amateurism in Sport

D. J. Taylor



Yellow Jersey Press  
LONDON

'Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words it is war minus the shooting.'

George Orwell, 'The Sporting Spirit' (1945)

'All sports are eventually confining.'

Martin Amis

'He spent the morning in a torment of indecision. At lunch, however, his resolution returned to him. As he sat with another fellow smoking a pipe over the coffee, he felt himself filled with an immense courage. He did not tell the other fellow anything of what was in his mind, but talked enthusiastically with him about the prowess of the Corinthians. He pictured the little team of amateurs charging triumphantly through the burly hosts of professionals, while the crowds cheered them to the echo.'

Bryan Guinness, *Singing Out of Tune* (1933)

## PROLOGUE

### *The Umpire Strikes Back*

It is a warmish summer Sunday in the late 1980s somewhere in the Oxfordshire countryside and I am sitting on the steps of a rickety cricket pavilion, eyes shaded against the sun, watching the batsmen - ambling white figures, set against an emerald backcloth - cross and recross. Ten feet away someone's wife or girlfriend is reading a copy of *Orley Farm*. From inside the pavilion male voices bicker and whinny. 'Bob said he was going to give Stephen out for not batting amusingly.' 'What's the point of bringing a blue with us if he gets out for three?' Someone else is asking if anyone happens to be going home in the direction of Ealing. All in all, it is a fairly typical afternoon spent in the company of the Scotts.

In their modest way, the Captain Scott Invitation XI - motto *modo egredior* ('means of egress', i.e., 'I'm just going outside'), complex supporting mythology based on the travails of Sir Robert Falcon Scott - are quite as famous a cricketing proposition as the Lord's Taverners or I Zingari. At least two books have been written around their exploits. The occasional off-duty celebrity can be found diffidently ornamenting their ranks (Hugh Grant, turning out in the summer of 1993, told a friend of mine that he was acting in some dreadful film about weddings that looked set to be the ruination of his career). They play village sides, college 2nd XIs, obscure aggregations of journalists. The core personnel consists of a gang of minor public school boys who knew each other at Oxford and are now gracing the