# Cricket’s pocket stories reveal the sport’s quirky side from phones to sandpaper



# The Quirky Pocket History of Cricket: From Phones to Sandpaper

In the colourful theatre of cricket, where passion meets unpredictability, players have often stashed away not just their skills but also an array of unusual items in their pockets. Recently, Lancashire bowler Tom Bailey’s mobile phone made headlines when it tumbled out during a Championship match against Gloucestershire. This amusing incident sparked laughter and led to a cautionary letter from the England and Wales Cricket Board’s anti-corruption officer, marking yet another addition to cricket's eccentric pocket stories.

Cricketers have a long-established tradition of carrying quirky talismans, and one such item belonged to Derbyshire’s Fred Swarbrook, who would bring a lucky pebble onto the field after struggling with the yips. The advice of a psychologist to rub the stone before bowling turned out to be ineffective, leading to Swarbrook's premature retirement from the sport. This reflects a broader theme in cricket where players look for superstitions or rituals to bolster their performance on the field.

Another memorable tale revolves around the Essex bowler John Lever, who famously attempted to bowl an orange at Ian Gould, jokingly claiming he could dismiss him with it. While the attempt resulted in laughter rather than wickets, it underlines the light-hearted nature that often permeates the sport. Likewise, Jack Leach’s glasses cloth became iconic during the 2019 Headingley Test, where it found its own fan base online, continuing its life beyond the match itself.

Players have also used paper for dramatically personal statements. In 2012, West Indies batsman Denesh Ramdin revealed a scrap of paper bearing the words “Yea Viv, Talk Nah” after scoring a century against England, a cheeky dig at former cricketer Viv Richards. Despite the humorous assertion, Richards remained unfazed, showcasing cricket's interplay of mutual respect and camaraderie, even amidst light banter.

The legendary umpire Dickie Bird added to the folklore when he recounted receiving a set of false teeth from a worried player during a snowbound Lancashire match. This amusing anecdote illustrates the lighter side of cricket, where even unexpected items can become part of the narrative.

Cricket's tendency towards the bizarre extends into more controversial territory as well. The infamous “dirt-in-pocket” scandal involving former England captain Michael Atherton in the 1994 Lord’s Test raised questions over ethics in the game, particularly as television technology became increasingly sophisticated. Atherton's act of rubbing dirt on the ball triggered a fine and a scandal that remains a contentious topic among cricket fans and historians.

More recently, the Australian team faced scrutiny when wicketkeeper Cameron Bancroft was caught attempting to alter the condition of the ball with sandpaper during a Test match in 2018. This incident not only leads to heavy penalties for Bancroft, Steve Smith, and David Warner but also cast a shadow over the integrity of the sport, sending ripple effects through international cricket.

On the more humorous side of things, Australia’s coach Justin Langer once banned Marnus Labuschagne from bringing a ham and cheese toastie onto the field during a Test against India, underscoring a shared belief in etiquette at the highest levels of the game. The message was clear: while cricket may embrace eccentricities, there's still a line drawn for decorum.

Even England has a share of pocket-related peculiarities. In an odd tactical move during the 2007 Test at Trent Bridge, England players filled their pockets with jelly beans, only to be targeted by Zaheer Khan, who took five wickets against them. Such quirks, while amusing, often serve as reminders that cricket is not merely a game of skill but one where the human element plays a pivotal role.

Through these anecdotes, cricket reveals itself as a sport rich with history, humour, and a unique blend of tradition and modernity. Whether through the nostalgic grip of a fast bowler’s red handkerchief or the infamous tales of sandpaper and scandal, the pocket history of cricketers continues to enthral fans worldwide, celebrating the unusual alongside the hammering of wickets and feats of athleticism. Every item tells a story—often a comedic one—that adds depth to the fabric of the game we love.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/07/the-spin-phones-sweets-and-sandpaper-a-pocket-history-of-cricketers-unusual-items> - An article from The Guardian detailing various unusual items cricketers have kept in their pockets, including Tom Bailey's mobile phone incident during a match against Gloucestershire, Fred Swarbrook's lucky pebble, John Lever's orange, Jack Leach's glasses cloth, Denesh Ramdin's piece of paper, and more.
3. <https://www.espncricinfo.com/series/vitality-blast-2020-1207645/leicestershire-vs-lancashire-north-group-1207708/match-report> - A match report from ESPNcricinfo covering the Vitality Blast 2020 North Group match between Leicestershire and Lancashire, where Tom Bailey took five wickets for 17 runs, leading to a no-result due to rain.
4. <https://www.espncricinfo.com/series/county-championship-division-one-2023-1347099/lancashire-vs-essex-1347248/match-report-2> - An ESPNcricinfo report on the County Championship Division One 2023 match between Lancashire and Essex, highlighting Tom Bailey's six-wicket haul that helped Lancashire secure a victory.
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