

What is the Optimal Time in Test Cricket?

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A timeless Test is a match of Test cricket played under no limitation of time, which means the match is played until one side wins or the match is tied, with theoretically no possibility of a draw. The format means that it is not possible to play defensively for a draw when the allotted time runs out, and delays due to bad weather will not prevent the match ending with a positive result. It also means that there is far less reason for a side to declare an innings, since time pressure should not affect the chances of winning the game. Before World War II there were Tests of unlimited time.

A timeless Test does appear to be an optimal scoring system. However due to the possibility of injuries (the longest test taking 10 days between South Africa and England in Durban in 1939 with 9 days of actual playing time due to rain) and also scheduling issues (this longest test match actually ended in a draw due to England needed to leave Durban to catch their boat home needing just 42 more runs for victory with 5 wickets in hand), a timeless Test is not really feasible. Although to minimize the chances of player's becoming injured a break day could be allocated after say 5 days of play. Under current Test cricket, matches can last for up to 5 days, with each day's play scheduled at six hours of playing time and at least 90 overs bowled per day. Days are scheduled as six hours of playing time, but there is a requirement that a minimum of 90 six-ball overs are bowled, and the third session may run overtime if the over rate has been slower than this. If there is a change of innings, two overs are deducted from the requirement. If there are interruptions to play due to weather or bad light, the scheduled stumps time may be extended by up to one hour to compensate (light permitting). If more than an hour's play is lost, time may be added on subsequent days. Although, in October 2012, the International Cricket Council recast the playing conditions for Test matches, permitting day/night Test matches.

However, in One-Day International cricket (ODI), 100 overs are bowled with a day's play lasting for around 8 hours. According to Roar 'Remembering six-day Test Matches' <https://www.theroar.com.au/2018/06/24/remembering-six-day-test-matches/> "The record books would tell us that there were two six-day Test matches in the 1970s. One was at Wankhede, Bombay; the other at the famous Adelaide Oval. There were remarkable similarities between the two events. Both matches involved India; both were the fifth and final Test of the series, with both series tied at 2-2; and both matches saw India defeated in the middle of the sixth day's play.

An analysis done by Allsopp and Clarke (2002) show the draw probability in a typical 5-day test match is about 30%. <https://researchbank.swinburne.edu.au/file/6d0555d9-4aab-4bf7-8754-5b2f34e59dbf/1/PDF%20%289%20p%29.pdf>

Extending the amount of time played in a Test match would of course reduce this draw probability and hence increase the chances of the better team winning. A strategy in Test

cricket is to remain at the crease by taking minimal risk and scoring off the loose delivery. After a period of time at the crease players may feel more comfortable in taking more risk by gaining momentum a scoring at a faster run rate. With the current 5 day Test match with six hours of playing time and at least 90 overs bowled per day (rather than 100 overs bowled as in ODI), players are forced to take more risk early to score more runs, due to the fact that if they remain at the crease too long without scoring runs, then there will not be enough time to bowl out the other team in two innings – and hence the match ending up in a draw. You could develop some mathematics to determine an "optimal" length of time for a test match to minimize the draw possibility to say only 10%.

According to rediff.com

<https://www.rediff.com/cricket/report/cricket-has-over-one-1-billion-global-fans-t20-most-popular/20180627.htm>

“Globally, cricket has over 1 billion global fans with T20 cricket as the most popular format with 92 percent interest while ODIs are a close second with 88 percent interest”. This implies that players are earning more money in T20 and ODI cricket compared to Test cricket. It could also be argued that there is just as much skill in all three formats of the game. Hitting a six and playing “unorthodox” strokes in T20 requires just as much skill as scoring a double test century in Test cricket. Therefore, with the popularity of T20 is there a future left in test cricket? There is an argument that players that are not suited to playing T20 (or ODI) and are particularly talented at Test cricket could be disadvantaged and may struggle to obtain a place with T20 (or ODI) where they could otherwise be selected to play in Test cricket.

Also, the modern version of tennis (known as lawn tennis) originated from Real tennis. Although grand slams in Real tennis are still being played (it is not popular amongst spectators and players tend to play lawn tennis due to the increased prize money). Arguably there is just as much skill in Real tennis as in lawn tennis.

Based on the above, if Test cricket was to remain a form of cricket (alongside T20 and ODI) the length of time played in a day could be extended to 100 overs per day (which may require playing under lights) and the number of days played for a Test could be extended to 6 days (compared to the current 5 days).