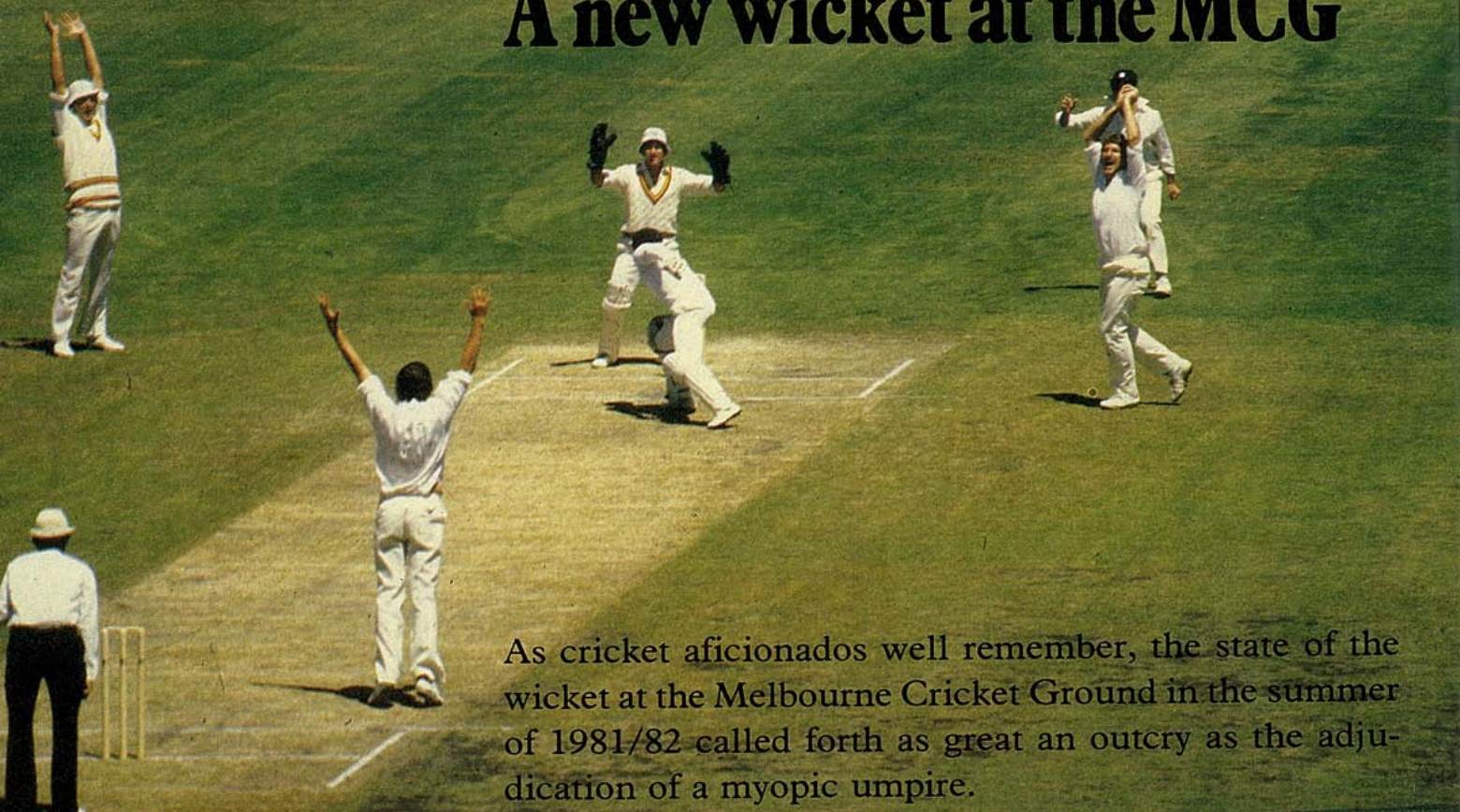
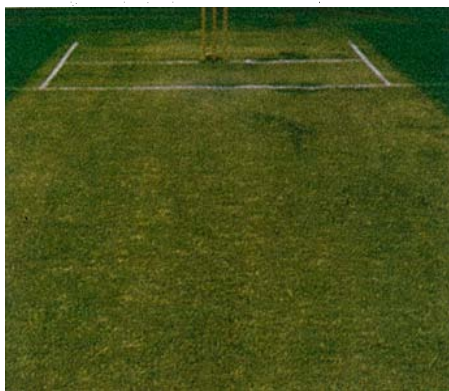


A new wicket at the MCG



As cricket aficionados well remember, the state of the wicket at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in the summer of 1981/82 called forth as great an outcry as the adjudication of a myopic umpire.



The old wicket in poor condition. *Below:* a close-up of some of the cracks, with a scale 150 mm long.



Both batsmen and bowlers suffered from the problem — variable bounce. The ball mostly bounced low, in some cases becoming a grubber, but occasionally it lifted from a good length. Although not as seriously, the affliction had also shown up in 1980/81.

The fault lay with bare patches that looked like the bottom of a drought-stricken dam. The surface had shrunk and cracked into islands that tended to curl up at the edges. These 'saucers' could give when hit by a fast ball and, depending on whether the ball struck the centre or the rim, the rebound height varied.

In vain, the curator tried to promote growth of grass and cure the problem.

The grounds management called on Dr Don McIntyre, a soil physicist with the CSIRO Division of Soils in Canberra. After some close observation and analysis of core samples, Dr McIntyre pin-pointed the problem and offered a solution. Now, under optimum conditions of moisture, aeration, and temperature, the newly laid M.C.G. wickets (10 in fact) are performing well.

Dr McIntyre measured cracks in the wicket up to 10 mm wide.

Clay for bricks

In Australia, a turfed wicket is made of heavy clay soil. When wet, the clay is plastic, so it can be rolled to a smooth level surface. When dry, it sets hard like a brick pavement, giving good bounce to the ball.

And, of course, the pitch must be green. Fine turf binds the playing surface together with its roots, reinforcing the clay

