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I'm enjoying watching the Women's Twenty20 World Cup on television in Australia, where I spend seven weeks a year mentoring junior faculty and giving guest lectures when professors want to escape Perth, elude the responsibility of entertaining the great unwashed, or save their souls from preparing one more PowerlessPointless slideshow because today we are all 1970s art historians who just *lurv* Malevich.

Malevich at Tate Modern



The tournament is like watching [the College World Series](#), but with drastically fewer spectators. I saw almost no one in the stands [for the semi-final in Mumbai](#) between New Zealand/Aotearoa and the West Indies (an imaginary confederation of former British colonies in the Caribbean).

The match lasted about as long as a baseball game and was of high quality, with dramatic slow bowling, big hitting, shrewd captaincy, and fairly athletic fielding. The commentary was serious but delivered in good humor, and featured big names from the past of both the women's and men's game, such as Ian Bishop.

As I watched this match, and others before it, I was writing and editing four columns, for a newspaper, CST, a football-fan website, and *Psychology Today*. Perhaps this should be called “[Blogs by a Nobody](#)”.

As I relaxed thanks to fun TV while producing these things, I pondered the contest’s lack of resonance with local spectators. [It is said that the Indian organizers failed to promote the Women’s World Cup adequately.](#)

Matches were supposedly boosted by being set up as double-headers with the men’s competition. But what did that mean? Girls played in the heat of the day, when folks were at work; boys played in the cool of the afternoon and evening, and families attended *en masse*. Right. Go figure.

But as I relaxed in my hotel (as readers may recall, [I’ve been denied a TV set at home, so this was a guilty pleasure](#)), I thought about what made it possible for me to enjoy the program.

Superficially, of course, it was the sport of cricket, the players, the TV network, and its precious, wonderful, generous advertisers.

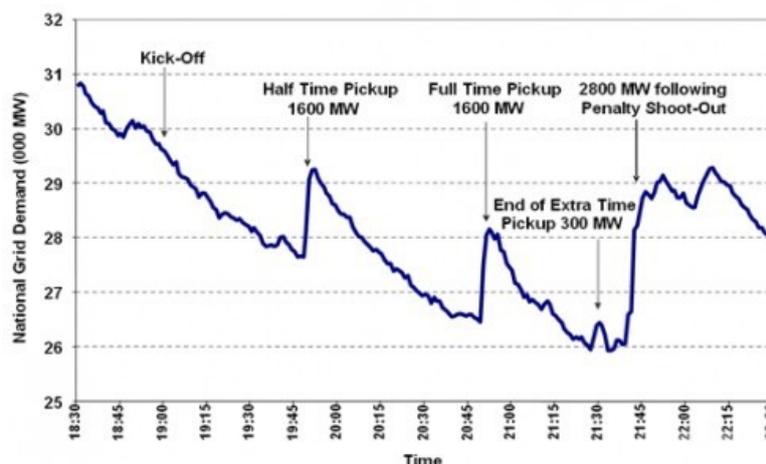
But actually, deep down—[in fact, down, down, deeper and down](#)--it was brought to me by electricity. And hence by power. And hence by some combination of coal and uranium.

I decided to take a peek at what we know about the environmental impact of watching TV sports.

My childish headline, designed to catch your attention, is indeed childish, because ratings for Twenty20 women’s cricket are not massive, [at least outside Australia](#). But live sport—specifically association football—has the capacity to draw gigantic numbers of viewers. And that’s where I found data and stories.

The UK’s National Grid has the gall to promote its management of peak electricity usage based on the impact of audience viewing and activity during half time in football matches, when people race to the kettle and porcelain. Power use surges then by as much as 10% in what is known as the ‘TV pick-up,’ because folks both boil and urinate water.

The Grid proudly illustrated this with a graph of viewership and power surges during England’s hilarious exit from the 1990 men’s World Cup of football.



Twenty-five years after that pitiful failure, the Carbon Trust has shown that people watching football on cell phones multiply their footprint tenfold in comparison with television or WiFi viewing. And the drain on power sources in other countries broadcasting the Cup is certainly huge, but rarely acknowledged: <http://www.nationalgrid.com/uk/Media+Centre/WorldCup2010>; <http://www.carbontrust.com/media/360767/carbon-bootprint-infographic.pdf>.

Clearly, the carbon bat-and-ball print of the Twenty20 Cup is not as significant as the environmental scar that we call “football on television.”

But fans like me, who luxuriate from afar at the skills on display in women’s cricket, are complicit with the impact of team transportation, power generation at the ground, transmission energy, our own electricity use, and so on.

As you are all aware, the endless, repetitive *nostra* that color debates about the effects of watching TV are conducted within psychology, paediatrics, communications, and cultural studies. Everyone knows what everyone thinks, and writes off contending research as ordinary science.

No-one departs from their easy ways and comfy *clichés* to discuss the environmental impact of their demons or pleasures.

So in amongst a certain sadness of viewing a high-quality but ill-promoted cricket tournament, I lay back in my hotel room—pampered but lonesome, as one is—and pondered not just the women’s migrant labor that brought me my fresh linen, superfluity of soap, and new teabags, but the carbon footprint of my TV fun.

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