

Saturday, March 5, 1966

Life's Many Sides

Let's play cricket

By TON THAT THIEN

You have probably read the letter to the editor from what I shall call 'the man from Dak Do' on Henry Fink's articles about STIF (SDN, March 3, p.7). I for my part welcome debate, having learnt, during the years I spent in the West, that debate is an integral part of democracy, and that one may disagree strongly, or even violently, with others without having to suspect that they are not 'playing cricket', as the English would say. Therefore I was pleased to read the letter from 'the man from Dak Do', with the exception of the last few lines, in which the writer expressed doubts as to the real nationality of Henry Fink, and hinted that he might not be an American. In other words, he suspected both Fink and the SDN of not 'playing cricket'.

Our editor has clarified the point in his editors' note. But, all the same, the hint puzzled me. For one thing, our man does not seem to realise that no Vietnamese, not even those who had gone to college in the States, could write about American baseball. We do know something about football (which to us is not football, but soccer. But that is a game we play, because we are not heavy enough). But baseball is above our heads. Not that we despise it or anything. But the Vietnamese, by and large, are not interested in baseball, or rugby, or cricket. Do not hurry to conclude that we are ant-Western. The reason is very simple: those games are too expensive for us, because they require elaborate equipment, and we just cannot afford it. Football (that is soccer) is different: all we need is the ball, four sticks, and twenty two pairs of feet, or even less.

And we need neither dressing rooms, nor even a field. We play it anywhere: on a harvested rice field, in a school court-yard, in a plot of waste land. We do not need shoes or socks or anything. We just play barefooted. That is why soccer is so popular in Vietnam. There is nothing political or racial about it.

I said all that to explain that it would be impossible for a Vietnamese to write about baseball, and especially about the current matches in the States. Besides, we do not get newspapers from the States so fast. I hope these explanations will satisfy our friend from Dak Do that we 'play cricket' here at the Saigon Daily News. If he does not believe us, then there is nothing we can do about it. As for wishing that the circulation drops 90 per cent, well. I do not recall having read in the American papers any letter to the editor containing something like it from people who disagreed with Walter Lippman or Joe Alsop.

Let us play cricket, and straight, please.