

Can we play cricket in October?

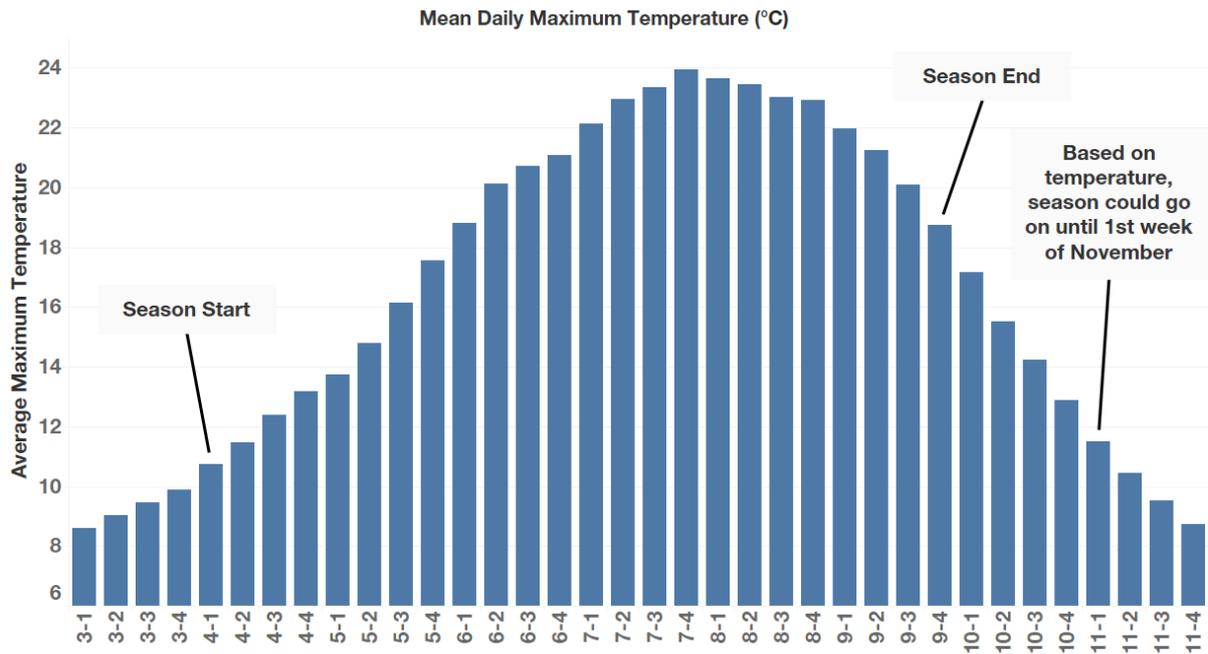
With the impact of COVID creating an at-best stunted cricket season, the focus is now on packing as much into the rest of summer as is possible. Needs must. There is talk of extending the cricket season right through September and well into the perishing margins of summer in early October. But how viable is cricket later into the summer than we are used to?

Here's the science bit: concentrate. In the last couple of years, the UK Met Office has released terabyte upon terabyte of freely available climate change data in the form of its UK Climate Projections (UKCP18) dataset. One of the datasets is fifteen 200-year re-simulations of the climate, parallel universes if you like (but sadly not including one where Simon Jones doesn't twist his knee in the turf at Brisbane). These re-simulations run from 1900 through to 2100 under different climate warming scenarios. The data also has cricket-friendly (!) variables: cloud cover, maximum temperature and rainfall for starters. Essentially: a cornucopia of data for cricket-loving meteorological analysts, who globally quite possibly number in the single figures – and of whom I am one.

What caught my eye from this data was the potential to understand how late into the season that cricket is a viable proposition in the present day, but also in a warmer future. Over the last ten years, the cricket season as started as early as the first week of April and ended as late as the last week of September. But could playing conditions allow us to extend the season into October? It certainly feels as though I've done a lot more basking in the sun at the Oval in late September than early April.

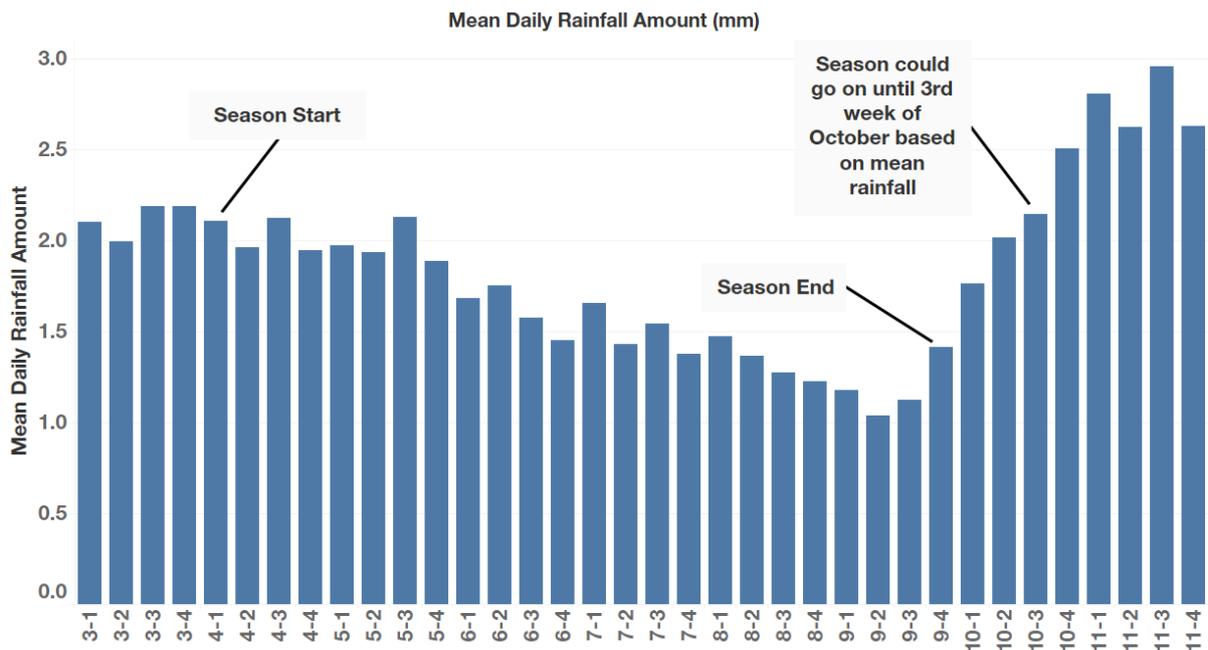
As someone in cricket once said: we need to look at the data. What I have done is take the 15 simulations and looked at the model's viewpoint of the average weather from 2010-2019 for a grid-point in the simulations as close as possible to Lord's, roughly somewhere just north-west of London. In the charts you will see, the numbers X-Y along the bottom of the charts count for Month (X) and Week of that month (Y). So 7-4 is the fourth week in July.

First up: temperature. Based on your average season start in the 2010s of around the first week of April (4-1) and season end in the third week of September (10-3), the cricket season typically ends 8 degrees warmer than it starts in terms of maximum temperature. If you wanted to carry on the cricket season until it got as cold as its usual start, you could be playing until the 1st week of November! Even the third week in October is warmer than the first week in May:



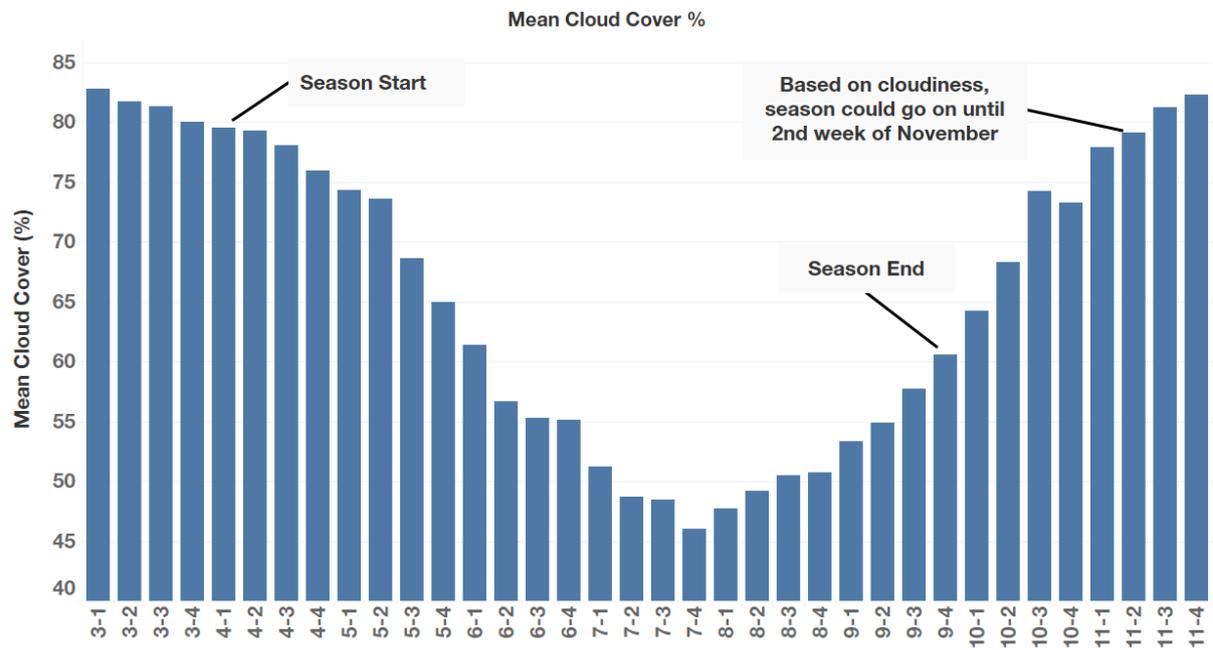
But obviously, there is a lot more than just warmth. Those that live here or have visited here are likely to be aware that it can rain from time-to-time in the United Kingdom. Would playing into October start to gamble a little too much with Mother Nature and her winter-time jet-streams?

This chart, showing the mean rainfall each week shows typically how damp the start of the season can be – but our sun-soaked last days of Test and County Cricket in September often happen in the driest part of the season. We can see that this September dryness does come to a fairly abrupt halt however as we move through October, although it's only until we hit the 3rd week in October that we start to get wetter weather than the worst of what April and May can throw at us.

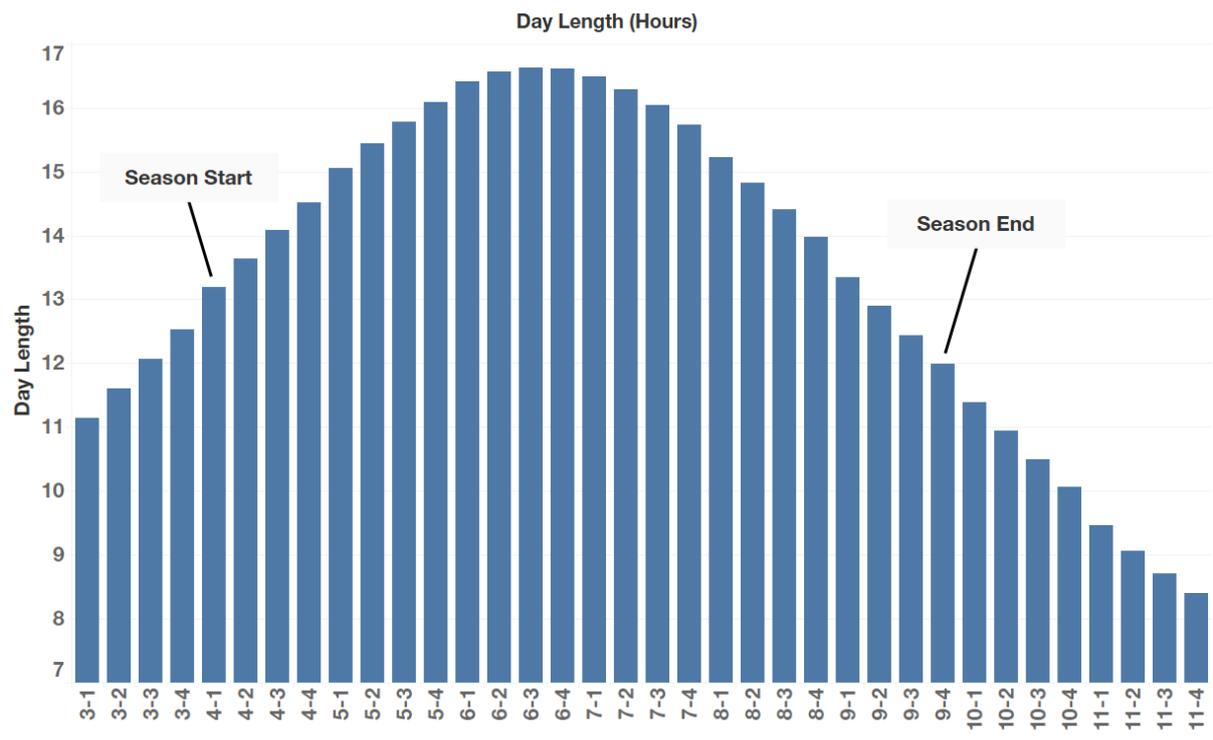


Of course, in the UK even if it doesn't rain, there's always cloud - and with cloud comes bad light. Are we just going to be relying too much on the artificial lights if we try and stretch the season that little

bit longer? In terms of the mean percentage of cloud cover in the chart below, nothing October throws at us is as bad as the murk of early April. Indeed, late October appear to have as much cloud cover as late May, although admittedly the sun is at a lower angle in October, so bad light might come more easily.

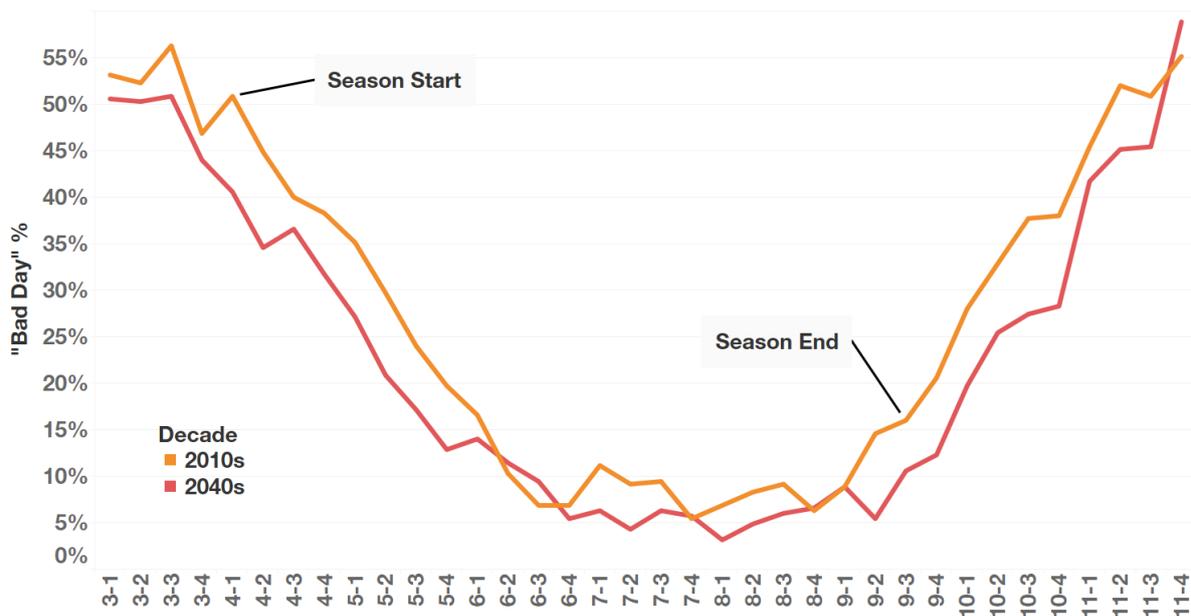


Bad light. Ah yes, the sun. An issue. One area that even Mother Nature doesn't control that when it comes down to it and drives the whole damn weather system. And by October, our daylight hours are getting in short supply. By the last week in September, we still have 12 hours of daylight, but they are waning damn fast, shortening to 11 hours by mid-October and 10 hours by the end of October:



Is it possible to shoe-horn in the 7 hours of cricket, lunch and tea intervals into a 10-hour day? For what it's worth they play Test matches in Mohali in December when they day length is only 10 hours (although admittedly the sun angle is slightly higher). By the third week of October, sunrise is 7.30am and sunset is 6pm. Would starting at 9am and finishing at 4pm be so much of an upheaval? Heck, golfers start their rounds at 7am in the early rounds of major championships. Admittedly an early start in Autumn brings dew into the equation, but surely that's what the mysterious rope-tied-to-a-tractor or the Super-Sopper is primed for.

What about the future? Can we get more play in at the margins of the season? If we assume days with more than half an inch of rain or more than 90 percent cloud are ones that are not going to be conducive to a full day's play, we can see how this type of day might change in the future by seeing what percentage of days might be deemed as "Bad" as in at risk from disruption:



We can see that – as we've discussed earlier - October seems to be largely more clement for playing cricket, although it rapidly goes downhill by late October. And as for the future – that red line showing the 2040s – well it's only looking good for play into October: what looks like fewer disruptive days and – although not considered here - warmer temperatures.

The first fortnight of October, if you believe the data churned out by a massive supercomputer, is still warmer, less cloudy and no wetter than any April day. October, light permitting, is there if we need it and, in the future, cricket becomes more of a prospect with global warming. Or so the supercomputer says.

Global warming is not all doom-laden: more weeks to host cricket!