

**HAMPSHIRE'S NEW PRESIDENT
BARRY RICHARDS**

Barry Richards' nomination as Hampshire Cricket's President was confirmed at the Annual General Meeting of the Members' Club on 23 April. The move represents Hampshire's equivalent to the Return of the Prodigal Son. He left the County in somewhat acrimonious circumstances in 1978. However, time has proved a great healer and many who watched Hampshire during his playing days will be glad to see him return as the County's figurehead.

For many of that generation, Barry Richards will always remain, with Sir Garfield Sobers, the finest batsman they have ever seen. This may seem a breathtaking statement given the talents of Lara, Tendulkar, Dravid and Aravinda de Silva in more modern times. Yet Richards was a genius of rare quality. He was an inventive batsman who could cut, late, from *outside* leg stump to fine third man; equally he was not averse to finessing balls from *outside* his off stump to fine long leg. He would dance down the wicket to bowlers of genuine pace and hit them straight, or back away to any bowler and hit them into the entire off-side arc.

This is not to suggest that he was unorthodox. Indeed his technique was built on classical lines. He stood sideways, and still, as the bowler entered the delivery stride, picked up his bat straight and hit through the line. He moved very late indeed. He had all the shots; his off and cover driving were majestic and remain unsurpassed. He could make batting look so easy such was his inherent command and assurance. Tony Lewis once observed that he could bat with a walking stick. His great strength was timing. He always seemed to hit the ball with just enough speed to beat the field.

More than any other batsman – even Botham – he could drive crowds wild with hysteria through the sheer cheek and improvisation of his stroke play. Even experienced observers like John Arlott were heard to utter, “Did you see that?” or “Oh my word!” When he was on song he appeared to set himself a series of challenges, each more outrageous than the last, and more often than not he was dismissed only when he decided he was satiated.

How great a batsman was he? Some commentators have suggested that he cannot be placed in the highest bracket because he never faced the continual barrage of fast bowling with which modern Test players had to contend, particularly in the 1970's and 80's. This is too much of a simplification. His record shows that he overcame every hurdle – and usually at the first time of asking. He scored 2,000 runs in his first season in county cricket, 1,500 runs (including 300 in a day) in his only Australian season in first-class cricket, and 500 runs in his only Test series (incorporating one of the most masterful centuries ever seen in Test cricket). His record for Hampshire against touring sides was also quite staggering – 0, 57, 86, 120 not out, 132, 36, 87 not out, 10, 45, 73, 33, 87, 49, 96 and 69 (retired hurt). Ultimately, though he had not played against high pace for many years, he excelled in Kerry Packer's World Series Cricket. His place in cricket's pantheon was cemented when Sir Donald Bradman nominated him as one of the opening batsmen in his “All Time XI”.

Since his retirement he has carried forward his excellence into coaching, administration and media work. He therefore has a wide breadth of experience which will serve him, and Hampshire, well in his new role.

MUSINGS ON THE SEASON

As this piece is written it seems to have rained almost continually for weeks. Worcester's New Road ground is flooded and the weekend's forecast appears to offer little respite. Worcestershire have moved their 20/20 matches to Kidderminster; there must be doubts about the County being able to host Hampshire's Pro 40 match at New Road in a fortnight's time.

It is easy to forget that the season opened in glorious sunshine which allowed batsmen to plunder centuries at will. A record number were scored in the opening Championship matches. Innings totals of 600/700 became almost commonplace as batsmen made hay on pristine wickets. Some bowlers were still engaged at the ill-fated World Cup in the West Indies but it is doubtful if they would have made any difference. The most remarkable totals were recorded at Taunton. The pitch there had been relaid with the intention of making it a more even contest between bat and ball. Somebody forgot to tell both parties. Justin Langer cruised to 312 in his second match for Somerset (having scored 342 in his first at Guildford last year) as his side posted the third highest total in Championship history.

Normality was resumed as the weather worsened in May. Hampshire lost two whole days to the weather - one against Lancashire at the Rose Bowl, and another at Edgbaston, as they struggled to gain momentum in their much-cherished bid for the Championship. However, their travails have been related to performances rather than the weather. The batting, based upon grafters in the top order, has struggled all season. It lacks two genuine strokemakers who will put the opposition bowling on the defensive. Given his success two years ago, when he opened the batting with such élan, surely Sean Ervine must be found a place in the ensuing weeks. Chris Benham will also score his runs quickly.

Though Shane Warne dismissed tail enders for fun in his Test career, the County have been unable to finish off sides. Surrey very nearly pulled off a remarkable victory as they chased 503 at The Oval. They were still 220 runs short at the fall of the seventh wicket yet eventually failed by only 35 runs. It was a portent of future events as Warwickshire and, crucially, Sussex escaped Hampshire's clutches at the end of their respective first innings. The County have much to do if they are to climb the table in the second half of the season. Their fortunes will be clearer by the time members read this Newsletter.

The Friends Provident Trophy has, of course, offered compensations as the County have reached their second Lord's final in three years. As in the Championship, the early batsmen have failed to fire and it has often required Nic Pothas and Dimi Mascarenhas to add impetus. However, the bowlers have done their job.

Notwithstanding success in the Competition, one yearns for the former knock-out formula. The two league format is somewhat boring. In days gone by one could take leave from work with certainty to watch the various rounds and always looked forward to travelling to, say, New Road or Hove. There now seems little point in taking time off work to watch an endless catalogue of matches, the importance of which only becomes apparent in the home straight. In the past, each round was an event; this is no longer the case. Semi-finals are a step in the right direction but go nowhere near far enough. A knock-out format would also give players more rest. And to stage the final in mid-August, with at least 4/5 weeks of the season remaining, as well as still being in the main holiday season, detracts from the competition as a whole.

Hampshire supporters were thrilled by Dimi Mascarenhas' selection to the England one-day squad, and in his benefit year too. He was unworthily slighted by The Times correspondents after he had taken two wickets and held two catches – one of which was difficult as the ball was drilled into his midriff on the boundary on his England debut in the 20/20 at The Oval. His bowling figures would also have been better had one of his fellow bowlers in particular matched his excellence in the field. He was also let down by his fielders the following day but again took a superb boundary catch and confirmed his reputation as one of the game's best finishers as he accompanied Owais Shah in extricating England from a sticky, and potentially losing, position in taking his side to an eventual victory. Mascarenhas' presence would certainly have improved England's lacklustre performances in the West Indies. The energy, as well as soundness, he brings to any side are refreshing and he deserves an extended run in the forthcoming one-day series.

The domestic 20/20 zonal matches drowned in the late June rains. The difference in mid-season weather with the Competition's inaugural season of 2003 could not have been more stark. In the little time available to them Hampshire continued to demonstrate their difficulty in coming to terms with the requirements of the game. Most televised games appeared to be played before cheerful audiences but Hampshire's experiences at Southgate and, to a lesser extent, Glamorgan's at Taunton, are clearly troubling. The ECB always wanted their "People's Competition" to attract a new and different audience. They have done so, but is it one that benefits the image of the sport? It is an issue on which the game's managers must keep a very watchful eye.

The season started with the passing of three of county cricket's most eminent and much-loved servants. Arthur Milton, Les Jackson and Tom Cartwright all died within a few days of each other. Their achievements were immense. Jackson was regarded by his contemporaries – batsmen and bowlers alike – as the greatest and most feared of all post-war County bowlers. Cartwright left an enduring legacy as an all-rounder but, even more importantly, the man who turned Ian Botham into a match-winning bowler. He spent the last twenty years coaching in Glamorgan. It is ironic that he suffered a major stroke on the weekend prior to the publication of Stephen Chalke's excellent biography **The Flame Still Burns**. Arthur Milton was, of course, the last of the cricket/soccer double internationals. At the end of his career with Gloucestershire, during which he scored countless runs and held catches with the minimum of fuss, he returned to serve his community in the local post office and then

delivering newspapers. When he addressed the Society in February, Stephen Chalke stated that he had never met anyone so at peace with the world as Arthur Milton.

Jackson and Cartwright have been celebrated in biographies. One on Milton seems overdue.

England defeated the West Indies without too much difficulty. The latter, Chanderpaul apart, were a very poor side, and England did not have to exert themselves overmuch. Ryan Sidebottom and Matthew Prior became the latest County cricketers to join the ranks with success – startlingly so, thus undermining the case for central contracts still further. Alistair Cook, Kevin Pietersen, Ian Bell, and Monty Panesar enhanced their burgeoning reputations and Michael Vaughan made a triumphant return after two years as both batsman and captain. Steve Harmison remains an enigma. The Indians will provide a sterner test, though their batting has struggled in the past year or so and their bowlers will be inexperienced in English conditions. England should therefore continue their rehabilitation following their mauling in Australia.

One of the joys about watching county cricket is spotting stars of the future. Kent appear to have found a gem in Joe Denly. There was a calmness and maturity about his innings against Hampshire at Canterbury, when he carried his bat, which suggested a very rare talent indeed. Kent born and a product of their Academy, he coped admirably with the wiles and accuracy of Mascarenhas and seemed unphased by Shane Warne. Tall, slimly built and right-handed his shot selection was almost flawless. He seems one to watch. England's opening partnership is still not without problems. Denly could well be in line for an accelerated promotion in the next year or so.

One unexpected bonus from the dreadful weather over the May Bank Holiday was a conversation between Geoffrey Boycott, Viv Richards and Vic Marks on Test Match Special. Jonathan Agnew gave the trio free rein as they recounted their playing careers, the West Indian pace quartets and told stories about the great players of their era. They spent a considerable time recalling the exploits of Malcolm Marshall, as well as appreciating his unique personality. Richards and Marks also recounted those halcyon days of Somerset cricket. All three had a tale about the irascible Brian Close. It was a magical hour – the very stuff of Cricket Society meetings!

THE HAMPSHIRE LIBRARY

It is difficult to think of a summer which has seen the publication of so many quality cricket books. Many will be of interest to Hampshire cricket supporters.

The first to be published was **Hampshire County Cricket Club 1946-2006 : Entertain or Perish** by David Allen. (Price £20). It is an informed history of post-war Hampshire cricket, based on interviews with players, and set against the many changes in society, over that period. Rather than being a recitation of events, David Allen is very strong on conveying why the various developments occurred. This feature is what sets the book apart from other histories on Hampshire cricket. The author's comprehensive account of the move from Northlands Road to the Rose Bowl

is likely to remain a standard text for cricket historians for many years. The work contains much new information on Hampshire's post-war players, and also gives an informed account of the two County Championships (as well as the near misses in 1974 and 1975) and the four successful Lord's finals. David Allen's book is thoroughly recommended.

Also published have been:-

My Turn to Spin by Shaun Udal (published by Know The Score Books Ltd, price £17.99)

Shane Warne – Portrait of a Flawed Genius by Simon Wilde (pub. John Murray, price £16.99)

Shaun Udal once again confirmed his natural talent behind the microphone when he appeared on BBC Radio Five to talk about his autobiography, during which he gave a very open account of his playing career and family life. His is obviously a tale which is well worth reading.

Simon Wilde's book on Shane Warne and Shaun Udal's autobiography will be reviewed in a future Newsletter.

Probably the most erudite book of the summer is John Major's **More Than A Game: The Story of Cricket's Early Years** (pub. Harper Press, price £25)

His appearance at the Chichester Festival when he trotted through the history of cricket from its still uncertain birth to the First World War was a memorable one. The book is extremely well written and, though studious, reads like an adventure story. The only contentious chapter is the one on Hambledon. His researchers were ACS revisionists who wanted to downplay the importance of Hambledon in the development of the game's history in the last few years. However, when challenged at Chichester, John Major rightfully accorded proper credit to the Hambledon era. The revisionists seem to be obsessed with the claim that cricket was invented at Hambledon. Any self-respecting historian will be aware that this is not the case and indeed, a plaque on the exterior wall of the Bat and Ball Inn makes it very clear that the game had its derivations elsewhere. This criticism apart, John Major's book is outstanding. It also contains some new references to Hampshire cricket in the 18th and 19th centuries

Another eminent book is **Silent Revolutions: Writings on Cricket History** by Gideon Haigh (paperback pub. Aurum, price £8.99). Those acquainted with Haigh's work hold him in the highest regard. This excellent miscellaneous collection of essays includes one on Roy Marshall. Aptly entitled **Fear Is The Key**, the work describes Marshall's fear and insecurities when facing fast bowling, but how he dealt with it "by attacking his opponents with an almost vindictive fury". Hampshire supporters of his era still recall his heady strokeplay with misty eyes and Haigh's account captures the character of the man and his batting perfectly.

C'est La Meme Chose

Cricket was a game
surrendering to Spring
linseed oil on willow
blancoing of pads

Cricket was a game
roundabout of spin
thunderbolt of leather
diving catch at slip

Cricket was a game
tactics, battle, splendour
scintillating scoring
obdurate defence

Cricket was a game
capturing an addict
inspiring a poet
promising a poem

Is cricket a game?
coloured kit with numbers
ignorant spectators
sledging, betting, booze

Is cricket a game?
subtleties eroded
complexities dumbed down
crowd in fancy dress

Cricket was a game.
It isn't quite the same
but still it is a game

Imogen Grosberg

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