

NEWSLETTER No. 280 - MARCH 2008

THE INDIAN CRICKET LEAGUE – OPPORTUNITY OR THREAT?

Has any game of cricket prompted such far-reaching consequences as last Autumn's Twenty20 World Cup Final? Prior to the Final, India was lukewarm to that form of cricket. Their victory has opened Pandora's Box, spawning the new Indian Cricket League. Today's top performers were auctioned for astonishing sums. If they still will not approach the riches of Tiger Woods and Roger Federer, they will earn far more than their predecessors – and without winning a tournament.

Many will be pleased that cricketers have increased their financial rewards. However, the ICL will present significant challenges to international cricket and county cricket. Competitions between Cities, financed by franchises, have been talked about for some time. The reality has now arrived. Will matches between Cities present a more attractive proposition than those between countries? This might well prove to be the case, no matter how mind numbing those who value cricket's traditions find the shortest version of the game. It must be hoped that the players themselves will wish to be tested in international cricket. However, what remuneration will they seek?

The prospects for county cricket are alarming but there is a silver lining. It would seem that the ICL will spell the death knell for overseas cricketers in the county game. The ICL will intrude upon the Championship season and the Counties cannot hope to compete with the sums earned in the former. The best overseas players will surely gravitate to the ICL where they will earn far more in some 30 days than in a full season's county cricket. The ICL also has the potential to reduce tour revenues; the first two Tests each summer will coincide with the ICL.

The silver lining is that the Counties will play English qualified players only. Pipe dream? The poverty of England's performances since 2005 must surely give out some messages. A number of Kolpak players are second rate. Surely now is the time for Counties, with their much-vaunted Academies, to produce quality cricketers.

MEETINGS

Wednesday 5 March 2008 – Meeting

The Society is very pleased to welcome **CHRIS LOWE** who is a Vice-President of the Cricket Society. We shall therefore be in the company of a like-minded speaker. He joined the BBC the same day as Jeremy Paxman, both as graduate journalist trainees in 1972. After his degree at Oxford he stayed on to complete a teaching qualification; but eventually decided on a career with the BBC.

He was political correspondent at Westminster and during the eighties was largely a reporter for radio and television. He spent much time in Northern

Ireland during the worst of the troubles but reported from places as far apart as Ethiopia and Argentina.

For the last fifteen years or so he has been studio based as a presenter on radio and TV including the Today programme and PM on radio, and Breakfast, Newsnight and news bulletins on TV.

Our guest joined BBC News 24 as a weekend presenter in 2000.

His sporting connections are as a management committee member of Middlesex County Cricket Club and a lifelong supporter of Crystal Palace FC.

The Society is very pleased to welcome our distinguished guest to this evening's meeting.

Wednesday 9 January 2008 – Report

The applause at the end of the Society's evening in the company of Basharat Hassan was the longest that the Editor could recall since John Arlott's emotional farewell to Basingstoke in December 1985. In a rollicking evening our speaker spoke about his family background, his early days in cricket in Kenya, his days with Nottinghamshire, including a detailed account of the Championship summer of 1981 and memories of Gary Sobers, other interesting facets of his career and, in the wake of the Harbhajan saga, some unique views on racism.

He was introduced to cricket by his father and one of his brothers. An elder brother was a Kenyan sprinter who, but for a pulled hamstring, would have represented his country at the 1956 Olympic Games at Melbourne.

He joined the Sir Ali Muslim Sports Club but for his first two years he only fielded at practice! Basharat Hassan possessed a remarkable memory of his early scores as he recounted 54 not out on his club cricket debut – after just one net session and, prior to his departure to England, the fastest century ever scored by a Kenyan in international cricket. He also remembered being given out, caught off his arm, by former Hampshire secretary, Jimmy James.

He was encouraged to come to England by M.J.K. Smith and Willie Watson during an MCC tour of East Africa in 1963-64. Following consistent performances against neighbouring countries, the Kenyan Cricket Association notified MCC at Lord's of his promise. The latter circulated the seventeen first-class Counties and Nottinghamshire offered him a contract.

He recalled early days in the YMCA, being fully kitted out by Reg Simpson with Gunn and Moore clothing and equipment, club cricket with Worksop, for whom his son now plays, and appearances for Nottinghamshire 2nd XI. At the end of his qualification period he played a full season in the County side but the arrival of Gary Sobers then consigned him to the 2nd XI again, because of the qualification rules then pervading. He was amply compensated financially, however, by joining the Rothmans Cavaliers side,

where he took the field with Clive Lloyd, Laurence Rowe and a host of other great players in the making as well as giants of the past.

He talked of Gary Sobers' humility, his little known prowess as an adviser/coach where the little tips he gave could transform a man's game, his total support of players and, of course, his ability to pick winners on the racecourse. He always played to entertain. The pair have remained the greatest of friends; our speaker now arranges his engagements when the finest cricketer that ever drew breath comes to England in May of each year.

Basharat Hassan's benefit year was a momentous one. Prior to the start of the season, Clive Rice was sacked by Nottinghamshire because of his participation in Kerry Packer's World Services Cricket. They looked around for a successor, were informed of Richard Hadlee's availability and signed him. In the meantime, Rice was suing his former employers, who then backed down. Thus were sown the seeds that lead to the Championship success in 1981 sown.

In 1980, Notts. finished third. The County were determined to win the Championship in the following year. Rice set a winter fitness regime for his team and groundsman Ron Allsop was commissioned to produce hard, fast wickets. Our speaker alleged that the team never dropped a catch all summer. It was the most special year of his career.

He also talked about his appearance as a substitute for England in 1985. England required a specialist short leg at Trent Bridge, and he was available. He refused to take any money for that appearance – the honour was enough.

He finished by talking about his life after his playing days (see January Newsletter). He now has his own Promotions Company.

The evening was lightened throughout by Basharat Hussan's vigour, enthusiasm and humour. The Society members who were present will talk about it for years.

Wednesday 6 February 2008 – Report

Tim Munton gave a large Rose Bowl audience another night to remember. This most personable of men with a relaxed and easy delivery of speech began by giving an account of his early days in Leicestershire. Remarkably, he only ever played one match at school, which he organised himself. His cricketing education was received in club cricket for Melton Mowbray and Market Harborough. Though he played lots of 2nd XI cricket for his native County they were well blessed with bowlers at the time and he therefore joined Warwickshire.

The Bears were investing in youth cricket at the time and he was one of a half a dozen or so men who moved through the ranks together. Bob Cottam, whom he regarded as the world's finest bowling coach, and Andy Lloyd were early influences in his development; he became the finished article under the

tutelage of Bob Woolmer. A winter in New Zealand helped him mature and he therefore felt he was ready to play county cricket when he made his Championship debut in 1986. His first wicket was the highly-prized one of Allan Border, then with Essex.

Understandably, he dwelt on Warwickshire Championship successes of 1994 in particular, and also the following year. He remarked that the unlikely Nat. West Trophy triumph of 1993, when Warwickshire chased down 321 against Sussex, instilled the belief for the ensuing year's success. Another factor was, of course, Brian Lara, who scored his runs so quickly that the bowlers usually had ample time to dismiss the opposition twice. Lara was only signed as a late replacement for the Indian all-rounder, Manoj Prabhakar. His appearance generated substantial media interest and brought in the crowds. 12,500 turned up to watch him on his first appearance when he scored 147 against Glamorgan. He created an energy which was passed on to the whole team, and changed the approach of the other batsmen such as Roger Twose and Dominic Ostler.

Our speaker gave privileged insight into the West Indian's 501 not out against Durham. On the Friday (the second day) he ended on 111 not out. It was scored in good time but he was not satisfied as he felt he mishit a few. Rain washed out Saturday and a Sunday League game then intervened. Tim Muntun was usually one of the first to the ground but, on arrival, he found Lara was already batting in the nets. He was refining his back lift, by concentrating on bringing it down straight rather than from first slip. He blitzed the bowling in the pre-lunch session, making a startling 174 runs in that period. Warwickshire were now thinking of a declaration but, such was Lara's self-belief and confidence, he announced that Archie Maclaren's 425 not out and Hanif Mohammed's 499 were within his compass if he was allowed to bat on. He passed the latter's previous record score in the last over.

Allan Donald, on his return the following year – he had been touring the country with South Africans whilst Lara had plundered runs – reminded his team mates that it was now his turn to win the Championship. The great fast bowler who originally arrived in Birmingham speaking very broken English, remained, as always, fully committed throughout the summer and a second successive title was duly landed.

Bob Woolmer was present when Hanif scored his runs. Our speaker thought that the former's work in the townships, which was sometimes dangerous (he was once in a pavilion whilst it was petrol bombed) was underestimated. He was now very committed to fundraising for his mentor's Coaching Academy in South Africa.

Tim Muntun has remained in cricket since his retirement. He was with the PCA for three years, during which time he launched the magazine All Out Cricket. He is now involved with the Barmy Army (BA). His online Sports Retailing Business sells BA merchandise. His view was the management of the BA was a responsible one, dedicated to cricket not losing its values.

In a prolonged Q and A session he was asked about drugs. He felt cricket mirrors life. The best approach exemplified by the fortunes of Keith Piper, was rehabilitation. The latter is now working successfully with youngsters in drug rehabilitation programmes. Piper's story is a heartening one.

Our speaker also possessed some interesting views. He thought two Divisions were essential but that each County should play each other only once. The "void" should be filled with regional matches when Test players were available, and with England qualified participants only.

SOCIETY NEWS

HCS WEBSITE

A reminder that the Society has its own website which can be found at <http://hcs.cricketarchive.co.uk/>

Our Webmaster, Andy Ray, is conscientious in updating information on the site and his latest project has been to reform the pages.

APRIL SPEAKER

April's speaker is now former Hampshire strokemaker **ALAN RAYMENT** who has kindly agreed to fill in for Tony Lewis. The former has lived a very full and varied life. Those present at the evening with Stephen Chalke in will be aware that he has quite a story to tell. It should be a memorable end to one of the most enchanting winters in the Society's long history.

The meeting is still to be held on **WEDNESDAY 2 APRIL** at **THE ROSE BOWL**, starting at 8pm.

NEW SPONSOR

The Society has a new sponsor : **BAKER TILLEY**, a leading independent firm of chartered accountants and business advisers.

JAMES BRUCE

James Bruce has retired from the game to take up an appointment in the City with ABN Amro Bank. It is an announcement which will have saddened, and indeed alarmed, Hampshire supporters.

In his short time with the County his right-arm fast-medium bowling improved tangibly year by year. By 2007 he was moving inexorably to the front rank of English-born pace bowlers.

JAMES THOMAS ANTHONY BRUCE was born in Hammersmith on 17 December 1979. He came from a cricketing family; three of his brothers played for Hampshire youth teams. His promise first surfaced under John Rice at Eton College. He then made his first-class debut for Durham University CCE in 2001, and also played for Cumberland in Minor Counties cricket that season. After a further year at University he was signed by Hampshire for the 2003 season. He grasped his opportunity when given more first-team cricket in 2006, when he was awarded his county cap, and returned his career best bowling figures of 5 for 43 against Nottinghamshire at The Rose Bowl. He enjoyed another successful season last year and seemed destined to be an integral part of Hampshire's first team squad for the foreseeable future.

He was 12th man when Hampshire defeated Warwickshire in the C & G Trophy Final in 2005 and was a member of the team which lost to Durham in the Friends Provident Trophy Final two years later. Though his figures looked unflattering it can now be seen in retrospect that luck favoured the opposition that day. He repeatedly beat the bat of the effervescent Phil Mustard early on, but was unable to find the edge.

Whether bowling, fielding – he was a secure catcher at mid-off or mid-on, or batting – he was a wholehearted trier, whose efforts on the field, and politeness of it, endeared him to the County faithful.

He was always destined to work in the City. It is a shame that he felt compelled to leave earlier than would have been wished.

James Bruce played in 49 first-class matches, taking 124 wickets at an average of 34.07. He also accounted for a further 59 batsmen in limited over cricket. His departure leaves Hampshire dangerously thin on bowling reserves.

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