

THE HAMPSHIRE CRICKET SOCIETY

Patrons: John Woodcock Frank Bailey Shaun Udal

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DAVID “BUTCH” WHITE

David White – known throughout the cricket world as “Butch” – collapsed and died on his local golf course at Pullborough in West Sussex on 1 August.

There were few more arresting sights in county cricket in the 1960’s than “Butch” White. Whether bowling, batting or fielding he simply demanded attention.

He roared to the wicket, his energetic run up culminating in a crescendo in his bounding delivery stride as he hurled the ball towards the batsman as fast as was humanly possible. With the exception of Derbyshire’s Harold Rhodes, who enjoyed the luxury of a hyper extended bowling arm, he was the fastest bowler in county cricket in the early 60’s. Only those two great West Indian pace men, Andy Roberts and Malcolm Marshall, have bowled faster in the County’s cause. His run up was not as fluid as his two fast bowling successors but his wholehearted, galvanising action at the crease remains the most exciting sight seen by Hampshire supporters in the last sixty years.

Butch White was born to bowl fast. He possessed all the necessary physical attributes, particularly a broad chest and immensely powerful shoulders. He was also mentally well equipped having a big heart and a bluff personality. However, a smile was never far away. At Northlands Road in 1964, the Australian Norman O’Neill, who became increasingly vulnerable to fast bowling, was greeted with a bouncer. He ducked underneath it. Both men smiled broadly. It was a cameo that demonstrated the spirit in which the game was played as well as Butch’s character. Off the field, he lived the hard and fast life of an archetypal quick bowler.

When he first came into the game he bowled slavish inslant but under Derek Shackleton’s tutelage he learnt to make the ball go the other way. However, he was not always consistent with the latter delivery and his most vivid and penetrating spells emanated from his suddenly finding the ability to vary his stock ball. And there were many such illuminating moments.

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Many will recall his final over of the second day against Sussex at Portsmouth in Hampshire's Championship season of 1961. Sussex's batting, despite the presence of their two illustrious strokemakers in Ted Dexter and Jim Parks, was torpid in the extreme. The match seemed to be drifting to an inevitable draw. The weather was bitterly cold with a biting, strong wind freezing spectators to the marrow. It seemed more like February than August. Many of the day's large crowd had drifted quietly away before stand-in captain, Roy Marshall (not Colin Ingleby-Mackenzie as widely published), in his benefit match, and threw the ball to White just before the seven o'clock close.

His first ball bowled Parks and his next was edged by night watchman Ian Thomson to wicket-keeper Leo Harrison. He achieved the hat-trick - Hampshire's first since 1939 - when he clean bowled Don Smith. He was still not finished. Graham Cooper managed a thick edge off the fourth ball to Jimmy Gray who dived but just failed to hold on to a difficult offering. The fifth ball was a bouncer. Cooper anticipating it, tried to hook but merely directed the ball to Henry Horton standing at gully. Butch had taken four wickets in five balls and effectively sealed the match. Those who left the ground just a few minutes before could scarcely have believed their eyes when they read next morning's newspapers. Dexter, the non-striker, must have experienced similar emotions. Sussex lost their last six wickets for just one run and Hampshire cantered home to an easy six-wicket victory to maintain their title winning momentum.

Sussex were on the receiving end of another hat-trick the following year, this time at Hove.

In 1965, at Middlesbrough, he took 6 for 10 (in 10 overs) as Yorkshire crashed to an all-out total of 23 – their lowest ever score in first-class cricket, and the smallest by any side against Hampshire.

His best analysis in first-class cricket was also an explosive effort, again at Portsmouth, in the following year. After taking three wickets on the first day, he polished off the Leicestershire innings early on the second morning with a spell of 6 for 15 in 8 overs to finish with 9 for 44. He thus confirmed a distinct liking for the Leicestershire batting. Three years earlier, in 1963, he had returned figures of 7 for 43 and 7 for 76 at Loughborough.

He also gave glimpses of burning fires on the unsympathetic wickets of the Indian Sub-Continent on his one overseas tour with the MCC in 1961-62, the winter following the County's championship success. He took four wickets in five balls against Services in a post-lunch spell at Calcutta and in his only two Tests – surely he deserved more – he dismissed both opening batsmen, the redoubtable Hanif and Imtiaz Ahmed in the first and bowled Imtiaz – who had a proven Test record, with his first ball in the second.

He was also capable of batting with equal ferocity. His sole aim appeared to be to hit the ball as often, as hard and as high as possible. He was the classic tail-end hitter. Cricket is much the poorer for their passing. Left-handed, and blessed with a good eye and immense strength, he could drive the ball prodigious distances over long-off and long-on, when given the room to free his arms.

He once hit former Hampshire off-spin bowler Dan Piachaud for 28 runs in one over (066664) in The Parks. He made three half centuries in first-class cricket, none of which took him long. His 51 not out detained the Sussex bowlers for only 20 minutes in Henry Horton's benefit match at Portsmouth in 1965. When he scored 50 not out (four 4's and four 6's) against Surrey at Basingstoke in the following year his partner Mike Barnard was a complete bystander. The pair added 53 – the other runs were all extras.

However, his most valuable innings was at Portsmouth – how he must have enjoyed playing there – in that unforgettable match against Gloucestershire in 1961. Even now, the events of that final day seem barely plausible. After rain had interrupted the first day and washed out the second, it seemed at the start of play as if only first innings bonus points were at stake. Colin Ingleby-Mackenzie had other ideas. After Roy Marshall and Jimmy Gray had added 96 in only 70 minutes, the Hampshire captain then declared, thereby sacrificing bonus points and a first innings lead of 80. Both batsmen were furious. The County were eventually set 199 in 137 minutes, a tall order in those days. Hampshire lost wickets at regular intervals and when White came to the crease, 39 runs were still required in 22 minutes with 3 wickets in hand. With instructions to “thrash on”, he followed Ingleby-Mackenzie's instructions to the letter. Despite losing Bryan Timms almost immediately, he hit powerfully, mainly off the back foot, to make 33 not out and take his side to victory with only 2 minutes remaining.

His fielding was equally wholehearted. Fielding on the boundary, where a pint was sometimes near to hand when he was bowling, he would chase after the ball with gusto before unleashing a strong throw to the wicket-keeper.

Born in Sutton Coldfield on 14 February 1935, Butch White came to Hampshire via Warwickshire 2nd XI and the Army, in which he was a driving instructor. He made his Hampshire debut in 1957, and, upon the retirement of Vic Cannings, gained a regular place in 1960, when he took 124 wickets and was awarded his County cap. Statistically, it was to remain his best season. He again passed the century mark (117) in Hampshire's Championship year. In harness with Derek Shackleton and Bob Cottam he formed a formidable pace attack in the 1960's.

Only five players (Derek Shackleton, Alec Kennedy, Jack Newman, Stuart Boyes and Peter Sainsbury) took more than his 1097 wickets (avge. 23.36) in first-class cricket for the County. None remotely approached his pace and he therefore remains the most productive fast bowler in Hampshire's history. His colourful batting produced 2967 runs (avge. 10.86). He also held 103 catches.

He was famously twice called for throwing by umpire Paul Gibb in 1960. At a time when cricket's managers were purging the game of "chuckers", it was an unfortunate event. His bowling action was such that it was impossible for him to throw.

A cartilage injury in 1970 effectively ended his career and he left Hampshire at the end of the following season. He went on to play for one season, mainly in limited overs matches, with Glamorgan in 1972 before obtaining the post of cricket coach at Christ's Hospital.

However, his love of playing cricket remained undiminished. He became a notable performer in Hampshire League cricket. He chose not to join the more elite clubs in the Southern League, but played for his local side, New Milton, on their recreation park. It typified his personality. He remained a formidable opponent, heading the league averages three times between 1973 and 1977.

He has left a host of enduring memories. Butch White was a man who really relished this great game, and conveyed that enjoyment to onlookers.

A DRAMATIC SUMMER OFF THE FIELD

It is doubtful whether any cricket season has been so completely overshadowed by off-the-field developments. Even Kevin Pietersen's stunning century against South Africa at Lord's had to share the limelight with two significant announcements affecting the English cricket programme over the next two years.

The catalyst to all the events was, of course, Twenty20 cricket and the Indian Premier League (IPL) in particular. Even the Zimbabwe debate was partially influenced by the Twenty20 World Cup in England next summer. The money available to players in the IPL will almost certainly transform the game's finances – at least in the short-term. It will be interesting to see if the franchises continue to invest at the same level. Most lost money. It is bizarre that the IPL winners, Rajasthan Royals, were fined before the start of the tournament for not spending enough money on their squad. It is difficult at this distance to be totally informed and therefore objective, but from television coverage, there seemed to be more than a degree of over-hype. Stadiums in the north of the country were half empty. It was said that spectators at some grounds were admitted free to aid the TV atmosphere. The teams performed and interacted as if they were thrown together; players coming and going during the tournament reinforced that impression. The teams that reached the final stages looked more cohesive but it must be said that, apart from quality interventions by the two Shanes, Warne and Watson, the standard of play was actually quite poor. For all the hyperbole of the quality and natural flair of Indian cricketers, most would struggle to make a county side. There is certainly cream at the top but, when the current crop of great batsmen retire from the game, the replacement pool looks very limited indeed.

The sustainability of the IPL and – indeed – Twenty20 as a whole – must be questioned. At the Society's March meeting, Chris Lowe, rightly questioned how succession players would be recruited if Twenty20 completely dominates the cricket programme. By banning cricketers competing in the Indian Cricket League (ICL) which, after all, preceded the IPL, the BCCI may well have cut off the future talent pool and ruined the careers of a number of promising youngsters in the process.

Events in the IPL Final demonstrated quite starkly that Twenty20 also gives a misleading picture of a player's true ability. Yousuf Pathan, of the Rajasthan Royals, lit up the tournament with his big-hitting. Yet, promoted in the order in the Final, he showed his defensive play was embarrassingly flawed – and he was pinged twice on the helmet by the quicker bowlers. Test batsman he is clearly not. His off-spin bowling was far more effective.

Because of the fear of the future of cricket generated by the unprecedented money available to players in the IPL, other countries, and England in particular, have rushed to create a rival league. India is indeed in a powerful financial position. The business pages of the quality broadsheets have carried headlines such as "Reverse Colonialism" and "Prepare for change as world tilts to the east" in describing India's economic power. That fact is therefore a "given". The UK will just not carry the same economic clout in the future. At one stage, it seemed franchises might be introduced. Sponsors of any franchises in this country, at the same level as in India, must be questionable. It would be the supreme irony if it was to be Indian firms operating in this country. In the current economic climate, they may be the only companies able to do so. Thankfully, a County-based system is being retained though there have to be doubts about the desirability of the proposed balance of the programme from 2010.

The overriding issue arising from the IPL is the very future of cricket. The ICC has effectively been sidelined. In any event, it lost any moral authority it possessed with its stance on Zimbabwe. Wisden must be commended by noting the ICC ruling on revising the result of the England-Pakistan Test at The Oval in 2006 but refusing to alter their records. It is only a relatively small matter, but this highly-principled, independent, stance cannot be praised enough.

In the final analysis, the BCCI is now effectively governing world cricket. Power should be accompanied by responsibility. They have a long, long way to go. Boards in other countries have to decide whether they wish to retain the structure of the game, which has Test cricket at the pinnacle. Will they have the courage to adopt the Wisden approach? Or will they continue to indulge in labyrinthine politics? If they take the latter course, there is only one winner. The game of cricket will be the loser, and its sustainability as a major sport will be undermined due to its anarchical governance.

The game does need a credible governing body, but this is no longer the case. Until this occurs, then the game will be heavily influenced by

entrepreneurs, just as it was in this country in the mid-19th century. Is that really progress and forward looking?

One final point. Should not the ECB have taken a firm line to insist that both Twenty20 finalists - and not just Middlesex – should participate in the Champions League? Kent can rightfully feel very aggrieved.

SOCIETY NEWS

STAN SHARPE

Members will be sorry to learn of the death of Stanley Sharpe, one of the Society's longest-standing members. Stan often accompanied his sister Mary to meetings. After her death, he continued to attend until the last year or so. He was a staunch supporter of the Society, not least in organising the raffle for a number of years. Quiet and kindly in nature, Stan was a true gentleman and will be much missed.

“BOMBER “ WELLS

Bryan “Bomber” Wells who died in July, spoke to the Society at their Annual Buffet in December 1983. On that occasion, he confirmed his reputation as one of cricket's greatest raconteurs as he kept his audience in rapt attention with a fund of amusing stories.

Years later, the editor met Bomber at that beautiful ground at King's School, Gloucester, where the view looking towards the city's cathedral is on a par with that of the more renowned Worcester. He was a groundsman there but managed the school's 2nd and 3rd XI's. He was always a keen supporter of spin and informed me that his 3rd XI's bowling attack comprised only four off-spinners!

He was one of the game's greatest characters. Should any member wish to know more about Bomber then Stephen Chalk's “One More Run” is highly recommended. Based on a match between Gloucestershire and Yorkshire at the Cheltenham Festival in 1957, it is possibly the most evocative and nostalgic cricket book ever written.

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