

THE HAMPSHIRE CRICKET SOCIETY

Patrons: John Woodcock Frank Bailey Shaun Udal

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Tonight's speaker, Henry Olonga, achieved cricketing immortality when, with his team mate, Andy Flower, he staged the most famous protest in cricket history. Such protests are normally viewed with some suspicion but this one was greeted with universal approval, apart, of course, from the party at which it was aimed. In Zimbabwe's World Cup match against Namibia at the Harare Sports Club in February 2003, the two players issued a statement expressing their distress at their country's political and economic climate. They then both took the field wearing symbolic black armbands, thereby attracting the attention of millions of people around the world watching the match on television. Both men knew that they risked their careers, and indeed their lives, because of their actions. A deeply spiritual man, with a strong Christian faith, Henry Olonga's conscience was such that he felt he could no longer remain silent. Flower retired at the end of the competition and emigrated. Our speaker never played cricket at the top level again, and following a tip-off from a sympathetic government source, moved secretly across the border to a safe house in South Africa about a month afterwards, before coming to live in England.

HENRY KHAABA OLONGA was, in fact, born in Lusaka, Zambia, on 3 July 1976. His father was a Kenyan born doctor, and his mother originated from Zimbabwe. He boarded in a strict school at Plumtree in Matabeleland. He developed as a fast bowler and the Streak family often used to collect him from the school so that he could play for a club in town. He made his first-class debut at the age of 17 in the Logan Cup for Matabeleland against Mashonaland, taking five wickets. Within a year he was in the Zimbabwean Test side. It was a notable match for a number of reasons. Zimbabwe recorded their first ever Test victory as they overwhelmed Pakistan by an innings and 64 runs in Harare. The result promptly attracted bribery and match-fixing allegations in the visitors' camp. Our speaker enjoyed wildly fluctuating fortunes. He had become the first black cricketer to play for Zimbabwe. However, after dismissing the dynamic Saeed Anwar with only his second ball, he was called for throwing by local umpire Ian Robinson. Due to a side strain, he did not bowl in the second innings and missed the rest of the 3 match series. The Zimbabwean match winner with the ball was Heath Streak (6 for 90 and 3 for 15), who went on to spend the ensuing summer with Hampshire. To demonstrate the very different political climate prevailing at the time, Henry Olonga's Test debut was actually facilitated by the Zimbabwean government. He was denied an opportunity to play against Sri Lanka, who had toured previously, because a Kenyan passport but the government then gave him special dispensation to allow him to play against Pakistan.

It was only his fastest deliveries that had ever attracted adverse attention and after flying to Sri Lanka to Dennis Lillee's coaching clinic for remedial work, his action was never queried again. He went on to play in 30 Tests, taking 68 wickets (avge. 38.52). His best bowling figures were 5 for 70 against India at Harare, a venue which always contained seminal moments in his career. In a match which see-sawed throughout, Zimbabwe eventually emerged victors by 61 runs. Having made his debut in Zimbabwe's first Test win, he now played a major role in their second. Defending a first innings total of only 221 on a good wicket, our speaker dismissed Mongia and Sidhu early to leave their opponents on 22 for 2. India, thanks to a Rahul Dravid century eventually squeezed out a lead of 59. However, tonight's guest had limited that lead by dismissing the late middle order of Azharuddin, Ganguly and R.R. Singh. When India batted a second time, needing only 235 to win, he and Streak knocked over both opening batsmen for only 6. They were blows from which India never recovered. Henry Olonga was nominated Man of the Match. His fine first innings effort had instilled self-belief in his team mates to bowl out the strong opposition batting for a second time. Though Dravid (44) and Ganguly (36) fought hard another player with Hampshire connections – Neil Johnson – and another black quick bowler – Pommie Mbwanga ensured that their country were not to be denied.

Our speaker enjoyed most success against Pakistan, against whom he took 20 wickets at the very creditable average of 24.10. It was against that country that he took 5 for 93, again at Harare, in his penultimate Test in November 2002. On that occasion, however, Zimbabwe were defeated by 119 runs.

He reserved his most startling performance in international cricket for England, when he took a remarkable 6 for 19 at Cape Town in January 2000. Chasing a target of 212, England were terminally undermined in a devastating opening spell. He swept away the first five batsmen with only 47 runs on the board. He later returned to take the last wicket as England subsided to 107.

He was a well-travelled cricketer, having toured all the Test playing countries, except Australia, as well as the United Arab Emirates, Singapore and Kenya. However, he met his wife whilst both were attending the Australian Institute of Sport in Adelaide.

Since leaving the game, he has worked as a commentator and played the occasional game for Lashings. However, due to an injured knee, his appearances have been as a batsman. He has enjoyed immense popularity wherever he has played, both for his general demeanour and for his famed singing. He possesses a very fine tenor voice. Had he not pursued an international cricket career, he might possibly have attended the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art in 1995. He released an album "Aurelia" in 2006.

Henry Olonga – a most courageous, principled and multi-talented man is sure to receive the warmest welcome at this evening's Annual Dinner.

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