

THE HAMPSHIRE CRICKET SOCIETY

Patrons: John Woodcock Frank Bailey Shaun Udal

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MEETING

Wednesday 31 March 2010

The Society ends its winter programme by welcoming **MATT JOHNS**, Environmental Consultant to the Rose Bowl Development Project. Educated at Manchester University and King's College, London, he manages his own specialist business consultancy, based in Bath, on environmental issues. Given the number of new sports stadia being constructed in the United Kingdom, his address is bound to give a unique insight on a contemporary subject relating to such new building works.

COMINGS AND GOINGS

Terry Crump's excellent Rose Bowl Round-Up winter editions, and the Rose Bowl website have given details of the numerous new signings for the forthcoming summer, i.e. Simon Jones, Ajantha Mendis, Shahid Afridi, Kabir Ali, Neil Mackenzie and Abdul Razzaq. There has never been such an influx of high quality players in a close season in Hampshire's history.

CHRIS TREMLETT

It is always sad when a player who has graduated through the County's system goes elsewhere. Chris Tremlett's case is even more so. It means that in the last twenty years, only Shaun Udal and Adrian Aymes have enjoyed a normal career span in the first team after progressing through Hampshire's youth system. And, of course, even the former did not quite see out his career with the County. It must be hoped that the hugely talented Liam Dawson, James Vince and Hamza Riazuddin of the current crop of youngsters are able to become first-team regulars in the future and remain with the County, at least for the most productive stages of their careers.

Whilst born with an inbuilt genetic advantage – Chris' grandfather, Maurice and father, Tim, were both first-class cricketers of some note – his talent was such that he deservedly slipped almost seamlessly through the ranks to make his first-class debut at the age of only 18. And what a first appearance it was. Against New Zealand A at Portsmouth in 2000, he took the wicket of future Test opener, Mark Richardson, with his first ball – only the second Hampshire player to do so - and took another soon afterwards. However, in view of his age, captain Shaun Udal was required under ECB edict to bowl him in short spells. Even so, he finished with 4 for 16 in 13 overs, before bowling economically in the second innings and striking a huge six over mid-wicket with the bat.

The ECB guidelines were intended to prevent the incidence of injuries to fast bowlers in particular. Unfortunately, injury was to be a recurring feature of Chris Tremlett's career with Hampshire, leading to the classic case of "what might have been". A very tall man – 6 ft 7ins – his body was unable to stand the strain of a season long programme of first-class cricket. His own frustration, which he found difficult to conceal, must have been immense. At his best, he was high in the England pecking order. His accuracy and the bounce generated by his height were a test for any batsman. Indeed, he was 12th man in the first five Tests of the famed Ashes series of 2005. Even that honour, though, resulted in an adverse mindset as he struggled to adapt to the huge hype surrounding a Test match, to the quieter surroundings of county cricket on being sent back to Hampshire on the opening day. It was a season of fluctuating fortunes. He performed the hat-trick at Trent Bridge to secure an unlikely victory in the Championship, was a member of Hampshire's victorious side in the C&G Final at Lord's, and recorded both his best bowling figures (6 – 44 v. Sussex at Hove) and highest score (64 v. Gloucestershire at the Rose Bowl). He also nearly performed a second hat-trick on his one day international debut against Bangladesh when the third ball bounced on to the top of the stumps without disturbing a bail. However, by the end of the season, again partly due to injury, his form was elusive.

He recovered to play three Tests against India in 2007 and, against one of the strongest batting sides the world has ever seen, he acquitted himself extremely well taking 13 wickets (avge. 29.69). He bowled a particularly vivid spell in the losing cause at Trent Bridge. India, chasing only 73 to win the match, lost three wickets – all to Tremlett – in reaching their target. He dismissed both openers before capturing the prized wicket of Sachin Tendulkar – caught at leg gully. He was replaced by Stuart Board for the one-day series and gradually slipped down out of the England picture thereafter. It is ironic that with England searching for fast bowlers on the current tour of Bangladesh, his injury record, resulting in a startling loss of form and confidence last season meant that he was never in serious contention. His recent selection for the M.C.C.-Durham (Champion County) in Dubai demonstrates, however, he has not been forgotten.

It must be hoped that he resurrects his career with Surrey. If he stays injury free then he might well do so, but there is little doubt that Surrey have gambled on that issue. Nevertheless, he has much to look back on with his career with Hampshire, of which he can be proud. He became only the second County born Hampshire player to play for England since 1896. He appeared in three Lord's Finals; arguably he turned last year's encounter with Sussex inexorably in Hampshire's favour when he threw out Murray Goodwin at the non-striker's end from mid-off. He also took 264 wickets at the impressive average of 28.55 for the County. A more than useful batsman, who was capable of hitting the ball prodigious distances when the force was with him, he scored 1504 runs (avge.18.12).

A LOOK FORWARD TO THE SUMMER OF 2010

In the County Championship, Durham have proved in the last two seasons that bowlers win matches and, unless rain intervenes, they would appear favourite to land their third title in a row. If they do so, then they will emulate the Yorkshire side of the mid 1960's. No other County matches their strength in depth of bowling.

The signing of Neil Mackenzie should give the Hampshire batting more reliability, and if he stays fit, Kabir Ali will give the bowling a new cutting edge. However, the rest of the bowlers will need to improve markedly on their 2009 form if the County are to mount a serious challenge for the Championship.

Virtually all the Counties have made exciting overseas signings for the Twenty20; the quality of overseas players this summer will match, or even exceed those of the County Championship's golden age of the 1970's. Hampshire have, of course, signed Shahid Afridi, arguably the most explosive character in world cricket, and his fellow countryman, Abdul Razzaq. In the context of Twenty20 cricket both men are quite capable of winning a match in a couple of overs. However, they have a number of rivals, such as Virender Sehwag (Northants) and Adam Gilchrist (Middlesex). A gain, the contribution of Hampshire's support cast will be crucial if they are to make their first appearance on Twenty20 final's day, which is of course to be held at the Rose Bowl.

THE WINTER OF 2009/10

It has been an interesting winter. Unlike the two previous winters, there has, to date, been no momentous event to rival the introduction of the Indian Premier League, or thankfully, the terrorism attack in Lahore.

Possibly the most important development in the past few months in the long term was the introduction of the Royals franchise. It is, potentially a far reaching initiative, the implications of which will only unravel in the months and years ahead.

On the field of play, India have leapt to the top of the Test world rankings which has provoked a realignment of their priorities. Given the power they hold, their proposal to trade two one-day internationals for two Test matches on their recent tour of South Africa is most welcome.

All Hampshire supporters will also have shared with Michael Carberry's joy on making his England debut in Chittagong. It was deserved recognition for his form in the last year. Michael Lumb also played for England Lions and stroked a typically scintillating century (110) against Pakistan A in Dubai.

On a more negative note, the continuing decline of the West Indies, whose minds seemed to be elsewhere on their tour of Australia, is an ongoing cause

for concern. Australians were hypercritical of both the West Indies and Pakistan during their respective tours. It was apparent that internecine strife, which seems an ever present feature of Pakistan cricket, affected the cohesion of the team. The subsequent provocative response by the Pakistan Cricket Board will weaken their Test side still further, and lead to further tensions between players and the Board which will continue to simmer in the months ahead. The issues seem unlikely to be resolved before their tour of England this summer. It would be as well, however, not to write off their prospects. England scraped an unlikely drawn series in South Africa and then played unconvincingly in Bangladesh. Pakistan have demonstrated time and again that they possess the most inherently talented cricketers in the world.

Bangladesh made some improvement in the winter, particularly with their batting. Like their western neighbours they have a gifted line-up; they now need to marry that raw talent to the requirements of Test match cricket and not continue to throw away their wickets so irresponsibly. They also have a handy array of spin bowlers but still need to find a pair of competitive fast bowlers. In Shakib Al Hassan, who will play for Worcestershire this summer, and Tamim Iqbal they possess two world-class cricketers.

If there was one issue that gave more cause for concern than any other in the winter, then it was the on-field behaviour of the Australians, and Mitchell Johnson in particular. First, he was involved in a physical altercation with Suleman Benn in Perth, and then appeared to head butt Scott Syris in Napier (The fact that Syris was wearing a helmet at the time provoked much mirth Down Under). And yet, on both occasions he escaped lightly. On field physical abuse is definitely on the increase. It needs to be stamped out by the introduction of punitive bans very quickly.

Another worrying incident was TV camera capturing Stuart Broad drinking Red Bull on the pavilion balcony. The product, to practical intent and purposes, is a stimulant and should surely be banned from the dressing room. Broad's on field behaviour also needs to be addressed.

To end on a lighter note, mention must be made of the publication of 'Of Didcot and the Demon: The Cricketing Times of Alan Gibson,' published by Stephen Chalke's Fairfield Books. For those who grew up by hearing Alan Gibson in the days of regional radio programmes and then avidly read his pieces in The Times, it is an evocative trip down Memory Lane. A further feature to commend it is a heart-warmingly appreciative Forward by our founder Patron, John Woodcock (with whom, incidentally, there is a marvellous interview in the March edition of Wisden Cricket Monthly). There is also much of Hampshire interest in the match reports. Matthew Engel, in WCM, gave the book the maximum of five "blobs" in his review; that ranking is not exaggerated. It is undoubtedly the book of the winter and perhaps even of the decade.

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