

THE HAMPSHIRE CRICKET SOCIETY

Patrons: John Woodcock Frank Bailey Shaun Udal

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The Society is delighted to welcome this year's beneficiary, **Nic Pothas**. When *Wisden Cricketer* commissioned Robin Martin-Jenkins to select the best County team of the first decade of this century, Nic Pothas was his nomination as wicket-keeper. It is doubtful that any Hampshire follower will disagree with that assessment.

In the early years of the last decade, when the Rose Bowl wicket earned a reputation for being unreliable, the eternal memory will be of our speaker and his great friend Dimi Mascarenhas preventing Hampshire's batting from falling into the abyss. They deserve to be regarded as one of the County's great pairs alongside Kennedy and Newman, Shackleton and Cannings and Richards and Greenidge.

No cause ever felt lost whilst Nic Pothas was at the wicket. He had to be prised out. He always retained the priceless asset of keeping the scoreboard ticking.

This trait was exemplified in Hampshire's miraculous win over Glamorgan at the Rose Bowl in 2003. The County were required to field a weakened team. Wasim Akram and Ed Giddins had played their last games, Shaun Udal was absent with a sore shoulder and Will Kendall had been dropped. Hampshire were required to draft in Richard Hindley from Southern League Havant. Glamorgan made 437 to which Hampshire responded with 185. Following on, the County were 114 for four, still 138 behind at the end of the second day. When the fifth wicket fell at 194, the arrears were still 58. It was then that the miracle started to take shape. Nic Pothas and Dimi Mascarenhas (75) added 149 for the sixth wicket. Our speaker was then joined by the left-handed Hindley. The score rose to 394 before our speaker was dismissed for 121. He had turned the overnight deficit into a lead of 142. An injured hamstring provoked some aggressive stroke play. He batted for 198 minutes and made his runs off 170 balls (with 18 fours and two sixes). The gallant Hindley, despite two broken fingers, then guided Hampshire to 449 with 68 not out. By now, Glamorgan were on the back foot and their psychological trauma had been worsened by close of play when they finished on 33 for three. The coup de grace was administered by Chris Tremlett (six for 51) and James Bruce (three for 42) on the fourth morning as Glamorgan subsided to 104. It had been a pulsating match and the comeback had been engineered by Nic Pothas. It was the third time Hampshire had won a match after following on. The last occasion was at Birmingham in 1922. Did any Hampshire player replicate Lionel Tennyson's nude Highland fling in the showers?!

Hampshire's record eighth wicket partnership of 257 was also conceived from a seemingly hopeless situation. On the first day of the County's match at Cheltenham they sank to 83 for seven before lunch. Our speaker was then joined by the Australian Andy Bichel, making his debut for the County. The latter was dropped before he had scored but then flayed the Gloucestershire bowling to all parts and raced to his 100 off only 104 balls. Nic Pothas intelligently played second fiddle but moved remorselessly to his own century. When he was out, shortly before close of play, he had made 139. He then scored 54 not out in the second innings. Hampshire eventually won the match by 178 runs.

2005 was his *annus mirabilis*. He scored a season's best 973 runs (which he equalled in 2006). It was also the year in which the County won the C&G Final at Lord's against Warwickshire. His contribution was immense. Once promoted to open the innings in the second round against Glamorgan, he reeled off scores of 114 not out, 27, 73 not out in the semi-final and then 68 in the final.

But for injury, he would undoubtedly have reached the much coveted 1000 runs in a season on at least five occasions. He averaged over 50 in a season four times, his best being an eye-watering 74 in 2009. His career average of 43.88 far exceeds that of any other Hampshire wicket-keeper. His 17 centuries are equal to Neil McCorkell's tally but in a third fewer matches. His centuries per match ratio is also considerably ahead of George Brown.

His mannerisms have become ingrained in the minds of Hampshire supporters. He is one of the game's great fidgets. After reinforcing his guard he becomes an inveterate sweeper of creases, first in front of the line and then behind, and then sometimes more than once each. After tugging at his box, the peak of his helmet and his gloves, he awaits the bowler in a bat up position. He is a fine judge of what ball to leave alone or what to play. He defends resolutely early on. As he becomes accustomed to the pace of the pitch he will begin to unfurl his attacking shots. He drives powerfully and despite his height pulls and hooks with some relish. If he had been able to qualify for England earlier, he may well have played Test cricket. As it is, his international cricket was restricted to three limited-overs internationals for South Africa against Pakistan in, of all places, Singapore in 2000.

As a wicket-keeper, he has stood to Shane Warne's and Imran Tahir's leg-breaks; the latter's googly was always well concealed. He also kept adeptly to Alan Mullally's left-armers' movement, Chris Tremlett's pace, Shaun Udal's off-spin and Danny Briggs' slow left-arm spin. He has therefore had to cope virtually with all of the bowlers' variations and has done so admirably. His ratio of dismissals per match is significantly ahead of any other wicket-keeper. Others will have their own nominations as Hampshire's best ever wicket-keeper/batsman and it is difficult to compare cricketers who played in different eras. However, Nic Pothas' figures, as illustrated by David Allen in this year's Hampshire Handbook, are difficult to ignore. Though injuries have restricted his movement latterly, he will be remembered as a cricketer of considerable stature. We are lucky to have seen him play.

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