

## NEWSLETTER No. 229 – SEPTEMBER 2002

### SHAUN UDAL - An Appreciation

It is particularly fitting that the inaugural speaker at Basingstoke Golf Club, the Society's new venue in North Hampshire, should be Shaun Udal. He has claims to being the finest cricketer ever to hail from the north of the County. All the leading Hampshire born runmakers and wicket takers hailed predominantly from the Southampton area. One has to go back to almost mythical men of the formative years of Hampshire cricket to find cricketers of comparable stature. Thomas Beagley (Hampshire 1816 – 28), who was born in Farringdon, near Alton, scored the first ever century – 113 not out – in the Gentlemen v. Players fixture. Even further back was the legendary David Harris, Hampshire's premier bowler in the fabled Hambledon era.

**SHAUN DAVID UDAL** was born into a family with a cricket pedigree at Cove, Farnborough on 18 March 1969. His grandfather, Geoffrey, played in a first-class match for both Middlesex, and fourteen years later in 1946, Leicestershire. Geoffrey's grandfather, John, played for Dorset, Somerset and M.C.C. before becoming Attorney-General of Fiji, where he did much to promote the game, and he went on to tour New Zealand with the Fijians in 1894/95. He then assumed a similar pioneering role in the Leeward Islands when he became Chief Justice there. John's son, Nicholas, also played first-class cricket when at Oxford and, but for spending a long career in the Sudan Civil Service, would undoubtedly have played more. He had to be content with periodic appearances for Dorset and Devon.

Shaun's own father has been a stalwart of Cove Cricket Club for many years. Given the family history, it seems reasonable to speculate that the Udal genes may yet produce more first-class cricketers in the years ahead.

Shaun's talent was recognised at an early age as he made his way through the Hampshire schools and colts system. Like many spin bowlers, he started life bowling fast-medium. He made his debut for Hampshire 2<sup>nd</sup> XI in 1987, joined the County staff in the following year and made his first-class bow like many before and since, against Oxford University in The Parks, in 1989. He first played for Hampshire in one-day cricket in the last Sunday League match of that season at Trent Bridge, when he claimed his first wicket. It was the notable one of Derek Randall.

He made his Championship debut at Arundel in the following season and immediately gave notice that he would be a major influence on Hampshire cricket in the years ahead. On a slow pitch, in enervating heat, he bowled splendidly taking four front-line wickets in a long, high-class spell of spin bowling. It was an exceptional performance. He was nursed carefully for the remainder of the season and again in 1991 when he played only one first-class match – against the West Indians, due to a hernia. However, he appeared in all Hampshire's one-day matches and gained his first honour when he played in the winning Nat. West Trophy Final side at Lord's against Surrey. His bowling in one-day cricket that year repeatedly earned the

plaudits of television commentators Richie Benaud and, crucially, given later developments, Ray Illingworth.

Shaun Udal and Hampshire returned to Lord's again the following year when they won the Benson and Hedges Cup against Kent. In a Final spread over two days, our speaker claimed three wickets in the Kent innings on the Sunday including the key one of Carl Hooper, just as the languid West Indian bowler looked about to cut loose. He was bowled by his faster ball, which our speaker bowled to devastating effect in his early years. It was a year in which he stamped his authority in both types of cricket. Fully fit he accounted for 101 batsmen in all competitions. A career best 8 for 50 in the first Championship match of the season against Sussex at Northlands Road set him up nicely for the season during which he was deservedly awarded his county cap.

He enjoyed another productive year in 1993 when he claimed a career best 74 wickets in first-class cricket. He was voted HCS Player of the Year for his achievements. Many felt he should have been chosen for the England A tour to South Africa. Only three bowlers took more wickets and his inexplicable omission angered the Hampshire cricketing fraternity at the time.

By 1994, Illingworth was installed as England manager and Shaun Udal, with Darren Gough, made his international debut against New Zealand at Edgbaston. The two new recruits both took two wickets, Udal dismissing Adam Parore and New Zealand captain Ken Rutherford. He retained his place for both Texaco Trophy matches against South Africa when he again bowled economically and added the wicket of Brian McMillan to his collection. He enjoyed another fine season and his selection for the England tour to Australia the following winter was assured. He thus joined Mead and Robin Smith as the only Hampshire men to have been chosen for an Australian tour.

Unfortunately, he was injured in pre-tour nets at Perth. He was never at his best when fit again, though he was selected for all six of England's World Series matches. He retained his place in the Texaco Trophy side against the West Indies the following summer. Troubled by injury he rarely found his best form during the season but was selected for the England A tour to Pakistan in the winter. He bowled only 60 overs on the tour and was never able to establish a rhythm.

For the next few years he struggled and had to cope with a succession of injuries. He was undoubtedly overbowled in a losing side. However, there were compensations. His batting, always entertaining, developed, and he hit a dashing maiden first-class century – 117 not out – against Warwickshire in 1997. He was also appointed vice-captain.

In the last two years he has bowled superbly at times, on a par with any spin bowler in the country. His performance against the 2001 Australians was an epic and heroic one, and his spell against the Indian tourists this summer, despite the dubious quality of the pitch, could scarcely have been bettered. He was the first spin bowler to 50 wickets.

The Society is proud to welcome Shaun Udal in his benefit year.