

NEWSLETTER No. 234 – FEBRUARY 2003

HAMPSHIRE IN THE BENSON AND HEDGES CUP 1972 – 2002

The Benson and Hedges Cup will be viewed with some nostalgia by Hampshire cricket supporters and indeed those elsewhere. The early season matches in the competition invariably represented an opportunity to renew old acquaintances off the field, to view the new signings on it and to assess early form. And, of course, two of Hampshire's three Lord's final triumphs were in the Benson and Hedges Cup.

The County's record in the competition was an even one – played 142, won 66, lost 67, with a further nine matches being abandoned (4) or designated no result (5). The games originally started in early May but were gradually moved forward with the result that, at least in recent years, they were increasingly spoilt by inclement weather.

The venue for Hampshire's first match in the Cup in 1972 will probably become a trivia question. It was at the delightful Cotswold market town of Moreton-in-Marsh. The first day (Saturday) was washed out, rain again interfered on the second (Monday) and the match was completed on Tuesday, with the County emerging victors by 99 runs. Bob Herman (4 – 20), Peter Sainsbury (4 – 17) and Tom Mottram (2 – 5) bowled out Gloucestershire for just 70. The duration of the match was in stark contrast to more recent times when no reserve days were allocated. Interestingly, Hampshire played all their home Benson and Hedges matches at either Northlands Road or The Rose Bowl, unlike the Gillette Cup where a smattering of matches were played at Portsmouth, Bournemouth and Basingstoke in the early years of that competition.

The following year Gordon Greenidge (173 not out) and David Turner (123 not out) scored Hampshire's first centuries as they laid waste to the Minor Counties (South) attack as they added 285 in only 150 minutes on Mike Taylor's old home ground of Amersham. The partnership remained a Benson and Hedges record. Minor Counties sides were generally on the receiving end of a resounding thrashing but they did turn the tables in 1981, when they inflicted a 3 run defeat.

Hampshire reached the quarter-finals for the first time in 1973 but they succumbed to Kent by 11 runs. Kent were to remain the County's bogey side. Hampshire won only 2 out of 13 encounters. However, one of those victories was, of course, in the Lord's final of 1992.

Barry Richards scored Hampshire's first century against a County when he made a thrilling 129 at Bristol. He reached 50 out of 55 in 11 overs and reached his 100 out of 149 in 29 overs. Gordon Greenidge, handicapped by a stiff neck, was batting at the other end for the duration of the carnage! Hampshire again reached the quarter-final but in one of the most famous matches in the Competition's history they were defeated by a young Somerset side by one wicket. Chasing 183 Somerset were at one

stage 113 for 8, needing to score 70 in the last 15 overs. It was now that Ian Botham entered the public consciousness for the first time. John Arlott takes up the story:-¹

“At 131 (Andy) Roberts bowled a steep lifter; Botham tried to hook it, missed. It hit him in the mouth and knocked him over. Struggling to sit upright and streaming blood, he spat out a couple of teeth (he lost two more later) drank some of the water brought to him but refused to come off. Blood all over him, but head down and looking perfectly calm, he played through eight more overs; and when Bob Herman began the last over but one – Roberts was to bowl the last – Somerset needed three to win. Botham stopped two balls; played at and missed three; the sixth he hammered through the cover boundary to take his score to 45; and give Somerset a win by one wicket. The crowd ran on to the pitch to salute him; the unknown Ian Botham became a local hero and headline news on every sports page in the country”.

One of the indicators of Andy Roberts’ greatness as a fast bowler is his record in the Benson and Hedges Cup. In his four years for the County between 1974 – 1978, Hampshire won 14 of their 18 matches; Roberts took 31 wickets at an average of only 12.35, and, crucially, conceded only 2.21 runs per over. They never, of course, reached a Final but in 1974 and 1977 (more of which later) they were thwarted by extraordinary individual performances.

In 1975 they were defeated in the semi-final by a very good Leicestershire side lead by Ray Illingworth. Gordon Greenidge played a lone hand in Hampshire’s innings, making a magnificent 111 out of an all out total of 216. The home side had prepared a very slow wicket in an effort to nullify the pace of Roberts. Nevertheless, in possibly the finest display of fast bowling in Hampshire’s one-day history, Roberts consistently beat the bat and hurried the batsmen as he returned figures of 10.1 – 5 – 16 – 1. Four of those runs were the streaky boundary through the slips which took Leicestershire to a five wicket victory in the last over. Chris Balderstone made a fortunate century but the real match winner was Roger Tolchard, the ultimate run stealer. His running between the wickets that day was outstanding. Leicestershire went on to win both the County Championship and the Benson and Hedges, defeating Middlesex by five wickets in the Final.

With Roberts absent in 1976, Hampshire predictably failed to qualify from the zonal matches, but strode confidently into the semi-finals against Gloucestershire at Northlands Road the following year. In the quarter-finals Trevor Jesty had scored his maiden century (105) for the County at Swansea. He was to become Hampshire’s most productive all-rounder in the B & H (1486 runs; 59 wickets). Visions of a first Lord’s final loomed even larger as Gloucestershire were restricted to only 180. This total was a lot less than looked likely early on as they did not lose their first wicket until the score was on 106. Mottram (3 – 21), Taylor (3 – 37) and Roberts (1 for 20 in 10.2 overs) then retrieved the situation. Mike Procter then wrecked Hampshire’s hopes as he took 4 wickets in 5 balls, including a hat-trick. First he bowled Greenidge and then trapped Richards (though the latter always claimed he got an inside edge) and Jesty lbw, and bowled John Rice. Hampshire were left reeling at 18 for 4. David Turner (49) and Nigel Cowley (59) then rallied Hampshire to resurrect the dream. However, Brian Brain (3 – 28) and Procter with two further wickets had the last word

¹ Botham: Patrick Eagar, John Arlott, Graeme Wright, Bill Frindall (pub. The Kingswood Press 1985).

and Gloucestershire ran out winners in an enthralling match by 7 runs. Roberts had done his best with the bat to try and snatch victory but after making a typically canny 17 he was castled by Brain. Procter finished with 6 for 13.

The only better figures against the County were Jeff Thomson's 7 – 21 for Middlesex at Lord's in 1981, a match which, unlikely as these figures indicate, Hampshire won. It was a rare victory in the fallow years after the heady mid 70's. It was not until 1983 that the side progressed again beyond the zonal matches. A new side was developing. Paul Terry, Mark Nicholas and Chris Smith were now established. Malcolm Marshall was well on his way to becoming a world-class fast bowler. Robin Smith was waiting in the wings.

By 1985 "Judge" was a regular and beginning to establish a reputation for playing vivid innings, usually against the odds. In the quarter-final that year he hit 81 in the same number of balls in a lost cause against Leicestershire.

Gordon Greenidge played his final match in the Benson and Hedges Cup in 1987. At the time of his leaving he was the County's leading run scorer (2157 runs at an average 39.21). His number of centuries (5) and "Gold (Man of the Match) Awards" (9) were to remain County records.

1988

It is the supreme irony that in 1988, in the absence of Greenidge and Marshall, Hampshire should triumph in a Lord's Final. The County won 3 of their 4 zonal matches though progression to the quarter-finals was dependent on run rate. Having defeated Somerset and Glamorgan, and lost to Gloucestershire they eventually needed to score 131 against a Combined Universities side at Fenner's in less than 33.3 overs. Thanks to 68 not out from Paul Terry the target was reached with four overs to spare. The CU side that day included two future England captains in Mike Atherton and Nasser Hussein.

Worcestershire were then trimmed in the quarter-finals by 3 wickets. The match was a close-run affair throughout. Requiring 169 on a rare spiteful New Road wicket, the County subsided to 114 for 7. Robin Smith, in another of his epic one-day innings, then found an ally in Nigel Cowley and they saw the County home. Smith's 87 not out of 141 balls earned him the Gold Award. Previous award winners in the season so far had been Paul Terry (twice) and Hampshire's overseas signing for the year, Steve Jefferies. All three men were to make a profound impact in the two remaining matches.

Paul Terry always regarded his match-winning 109 in the semi-final against Essex at Chelmsford as his finest innings for the County. Facing a demanding target of 239, he was given excellent support in an opening stand of 118, by Chris Smith (56), and then by David Turner (31) and, at the death, Robin Smith (20 not out). Hampshire won by seven wickets with 8 balls to spare.

The Final against Derbyshire was a team triumph but the decision of captain Mark Nicholas to post himself at short leg to take advantage of Steve Jefferies' late in swing was a masterstroke. After Jefferies had bowled the dangerous Kim Barnett, Nicholas went under the helmet and caught Peter Bowler the following ball, as well as Bruce

Roberts shortly afterwards. With Steve Goldsmith then being trapped lbw Derbyshire were 32 for 4 and in a position from which they never recovered. Only the talented John Morris kept the Hampshire bowlers at bay though he was never able to break free from the stranglehold they imposed. Nigel Cowley bowled superbly taking 1 for 17 in his 11 overs; he also ran out Morris. Jefferies finished with 5 for 13 in 10 overs; he could have pitched the ball on a proverbial handkerchief that day and eventually won the Gold Award. Needing only 118 for victory, the County lost Paul Terry early on but Chris Smith and Mark Nicholas then weathered the opening salvos of Devon Malcolm and Michael Holding. Upon Kippy's dismissal, his brother took centre stage. In a memorable display of strokeplay he despatched the Derbyshire bowling to all parts as he made an explosive 38 before falling to an extraordinary running and diving boundary catch by Goldsmith off a top-edged hook. Robin Smith had demonstrated he could play on the big stage and he made his England debut only a few weeks later. Fittingly, the veteran David Turner, who had endured a number of semi-final disappointments, and his captain were at the wicket when Hampshire achieved their victory off a no ball. The manner of the eventual victory may have been an anti-climax but the match has left an indelible myriad of memories for Hampshire supporters.

In the next two years Hampshire failed once more to progress through the group stages but Robin Smith set new standards as he plundered 155 not out against Glamorgan at Northlands Road in 1989 and 132 against Surrey at The Oval in the following year. In the first of these matches only 5 wickets fell whilst 576 runs were scored. His innings was to remain Hampshire's highest against a County side in the competition. For good measure, he thumped 96 not out in the following match at Hove.

However, it was his brother Chris, in his final season, who recorded the County's best aggregate in a season in the competition in 1991. He stroked 413 runs (avge. 137.66) including two centuries.

1992

In 1992 Hampshire returned to Lord's for another triumphant Final. David Gower was now in harness and he paraded his pedigree with a glorious 118 not out off 96 balls against Northamptonshire, including Curtly Ambrose, at Northlands Road. The County won their first three group matches before the final one, against Scotland at a freezing Glasgow, was abandoned with Hampshire in a precarious position. Nevertheless, they cruised past Middlesex and Somerset – both by six wickets – en route to the Final, which was their 100th match in the competition.

Hampshire's indifferent record against Kent in the B & H was put firmly to one side as the County raised their game to a higher level on this occasion. Upon winning the toss, Kent invited Hampshire to bat. Openers Terry (41) and Tony Middleton (27) set out their stall with some cheeky running between wickets as they repeatedly stole singles from under the noses of the Kent infielders. Smith and Gower (29) then pushed the score along at six an over in the same manner. By the time the latter departed, "Judge" was totally settled and proceeded to play the most calculating of innings. One on drive to the top deck of the Erich stand was an awesome blow. His 90 occupied just 109 balls and was made in 130 minutes. Nicholas (25) and Marshall (29 not out) both scored at a better than a run a ball at the end as Hampshire closed on

253 for 5. Given the conditions – poor light, drizzle, interruptions and delays – Hampshire's total was of miraculous dimensions – a credit to all who batted.

The Kent openers received only 2 overs before play was abandoned for the day. The quality of Hampshire's batting was confirmed next morning. On a bright sunny morning – the weather on the two days could not have been more contrasting – the Kent batsmen never came to terms with the movement off the pitch gained by the Hampshire bowlers for the first hour and a half. The irrepressible Marshall, aided by Cardigan Connor, Jon Ayling and Kevan James, all left the later Kent batsmen with too much to do. They had to attack Shaun Udal but the young off-spinner bowled straight, and varied his flight, length and speed. He was rewarded with three wickets, including the crucial one of Carl Hooper, bowled by his faster ball. The fielders also played their part. Bob Parks and David Gower took two catches each. Gower's second, fielding at slip, was a collector's piece. Most memorably of all Mark Nicholas took a sensational catch high to his left at wide mid-off to remove the dangerous Matthew Fleming.

The presentations were as emotional as ever, none more so than when the captain asked Malcolm Marshall to hold the cup aloft. After some initial reservations the sheer joy of his response was a sight to behold. It was the great Barbadian's only Cup Final honour for Hampshire and the West Indies.

It was at this time that the place of the Benson and Hedges Cup in the cricket calendar became more tenuous. Its format became subject to continual change. In 1993 and 1994 the competition was played on a knock-out basis. In 1995 it reverted to its original zonal format though the number of overs per innings was now reduced from 55 to 50. This arrangement was interrupted once more in 1999 with the creation of the Benson and Hedges Super Cup. This event was confined to the Counties who had finished in the top eight of the previous season's County Championship. Hampshire successfully qualified but were comprehensively defeated by a rampant Yorkshire at Headingley. Indeed, Hampshire's three heaviest defeats in the Benson and Hedges were all inflicted by Yorkshire at their Headquarters.

At the Millennium, group matches were played once more though there were now three geographical groups, rather than four as was previously the case.

That most poignant moment on the Lord's balcony in 1992 was virtually the last highlight of Hampshire's Benson and Hedges campaigns. The County won only 13 of their last 42 matches. There were still centuries to enjoy from Robin Smith, Matthew Hayden, John Stephenson and John Crawley, as well as a few overs from Shane Warne, but the last few seasons became synonymous with rain and disappointment.

Robin Smith finished as Hampshire's highest run maker (2490 runs – avge. 43.68); brother Chris achieved the highest average (46.85). The lion-hearted and durable Cardigan Connor was comfortably the most prolific bowler (81 wickets - avge. 25.96).