

NEWSLETTER No. 235 – MARCH 2003

A GAME BADLY SERVED

It is a pity that cricket's World Cup should have attracted so many adverse headlines for events off the field. Column metres, rather than inches, have been devoted to the Zimbabwe issue and rightly so. None of the main parties – the government, the ICC, the ECB and regrettably, the players, emerged with much credit. It was always going to be safe to play there. The odious Mugabe and his state apparatus would have ensured it. The moral argument would have found much more public support. If the main reason for not playing in Harare was indeed a moral one, then it would be consistent to withdraw Zimbabwe's invitation to tour England this summer. The whole issue has now been fudged and the ramifications will only unravel in the weeks ahead.

One can only admire the courage of Henry Olonga and Andy Flower for their public stand on the plight of their country. Mugabe will undoubtedly exact some form of retribution at the end of the World Cup. One hopes that neither men or their families will come to any physical harm.

The politicking within the ICC has been well and truly exposed by events in recent weeks. The issues of advertising and sponsorship, Zimbabwe, the credibility of Bangladesh's Test status (or patent lack of it), and the playing of matches under lights in the World Cup have all been badly managed.

The World Cup itself is clearly being played over too long a period. After three weeks, key players are predictably suffering injuries and their absence will rob the competition of its lustre in the later stages. Too many teams are participating. Some may, inevitably, point to Kenya's success and John Davison's wonderful century against the West Indies but they have been shining exceptions. If a winner is to be decided purely on merit then the obvious way forward is to revert to the position where all the Test countries play each other once in a league, prior to semi-finals and a Final. Bangladesh and Zimbabwe, where the structure of cricket has all but collapsed due to events in that country, would almost certainly finish at the bottom, but fixtures between the remaining nations would cause considerable interest and be worthwhile watching.

Perhaps the main feature of the past few weeks is that precious little attention appears to have been paid to the views of players. The management of cricket has the potential to descend into anarchy, or be ripe for a Packer-style revolution, if that situation continues.

Finally, all in Hampshire will be saddened by the events surrounding Shane Warne. Such is the man's astonishing self-belief that it would be foolish to sign off his career just yet. Hampshire members will recall his commitment and contributions in 2000 with nothing but affection. Notwithstanding his ban, should he make an off-field appearance at The Rose Bowl next summer he will surely be assured of the warmest of greetings. In a wider context he is one of the few men to influence the course of cricket history and for that reason alone he deserves utmost respect.

MEETINGS

12 March 2003 – Meeting

After this evening's AGM, our speaker will be **ROY CAVANAGH**. Roy is an author who has written books on both cricket and football. His cricket works have included a biography of Cyril Washbrook and the official captains of Lancashire County Cricket Club. The subjects of his soccer books – Duncan Edwards, Dennis Viollet and Eddie Colman – reflect his great love of Manchester United.

Our speaker is heavily involved in league cricket in Lancashire and is Secretary of the Bolton Cricket Association. He has also acted as auctioneer at benefit and soccer testimonial dinners.

12 February 2003 – Report

Alan Fordham provided those present with a fascinating insight of the psychology of cricket. It was a unique evening. No other speaker in the Society's history has quite captured this most elusive of issues so well. Relating to his own career, he talked of the second year syndrome when most players who had enjoyed a successful first year had difficulty in meeting the consequent expectations, and his problems in maintaining his motivation as he achieved the goals he set himself. He left the game with two years still to run on his contract. He knew from his encounters with Malcolm Marshall that he would not make the transition to Test cricket. He regarded the late and much loved West Indian as his most formidable opponent; he felt that a batsman, even when well set, could never feel secure when he was bowling. The best batsman he played with was Allan Lamb. The England star was instrumental in our speaker being promoted to open the innings and he recounted that their record-breaking partnership against Yorkshire – referred to in the last Newsletter – was made in Lamb's first match as Northamptonshire's regular captain. He recalled the latter's complete self-belief – when he was dismissed it was never his fault! He also recalled the giant Curtly Ambrose with great affection; Marshall's opening partner was always willing to bowl, when asked to do so. He would never volunteer!

Alan Fordham then covered his role with the ECB which embraced all facets relating to the smooth running of county cricket, including fixtures, pitches, umpires, playing rules and disciplinary matters. At the end of his talk he answered a range of topical and at times controversial questions from the audience. The only matter on which he would not be drawn, understandably, was Zimbabwe.

Those present enjoyed a memorable and most thought-provoking evening. From her position in the Chair, Susanne Marlow remarked that she had never seen members so animated and anxious to ask questions. The evening represented the very essence of the Cricket Society's existence.

Fielders

A sweet and most harmonious sound,
bat meeting ball, echoes around
a peaceful English cricket scene,
swift trace of red outlines the green
and fielders, beaten, turn to chase
pitting their strength in easeful grace.
Like kestrels plunging from on high
or swallows swooping in the sky,
dynamic, sprinting round the track
as greyhounds speed to lead the pack,
they surge like surf upon the shore
to reach the ball and save a four.
A long deep throw the keeper takes,
a short sharp throw the wicket breaks
and all the scorebooks ever tell
is runs, and how the wickets fell.

Imogen Grosberg

SIMON KATICH UPDATE

Simon Katich's move from his native Western Australia to New South Wales has generally been a fraught one, and not as smooth as he would have liked, but he has received a vote of confidence from the Australian captain Stephen Waugh. After NSW's victory in the ING Final (Australia's one-day competition against Western Australia) Waugh commented.

".....he (Katich) is a real fighter and he likes tough situations. He has something burning inside of him which few cricketers have got. I will always back him and support him that he will eventually come out at the other end because he is such a strong character."

Waugh's testimony came after Katich's performance in the ING Final when he guided his team to a seven wicket victory at the WACA. Opening the innings he made an undefeated 75 off 77 balls, finishing the match with a six over square leg. He also found the boundary on fourteen other occasions. NSW made their 211 runs off only 26.5 overs in 111 minutes. If Katich provided the ballast then his captain delivered the fireworks. Katich and Waugh added 131 for the third wicket in just 71 minutes; the latter smashed 88 off only 55 balls.

Katich's decision to move stages has obviously given rise to strong emotions in Western Australia. The home crowd booed their former favourite earlier in the day.

He has yet to make a hundred in the current winter. His highest score at the time of writing has been 84 against Tasmania at Hobart. He has also made three other fifties.

He had scored 388 runs (avge. 35.27) to the end of February. In the ING Trophy, he played in 11 matches, scoring 328 runs (avge. 46.85) at a healthy strike rate of 72.24 per 100 balls.

If he has struggled with the bat, his bowling has provided splendid compensations as he improved on his career best figures in both of the last two Pura Cup matches. First he took 5 for 45 against his former state at Newcastle. His spell led to a sensational end to the match, as Western Australia subsided from 272 for 4 to 296 all out, and a two run defeat. These were his first wickets of the season.

With Stuart MacGill suspended he was required to parade his left arm wrist spin again in the following match in a high scoring encounter against Victoria at Melbourne. First, NSW made 544 for 8 declared, with Waugh striking a princely 211. Katich, unfortunately, made a duck. Victoria then responded with 563 for 9 declared, Katich taking 7 for 130 in 45 overs. He captured the first six wickets to fall.

With Shane Warne now suspended, Katich's development as a wrist spin bowler may soften the blow and give Hampshire wider options when selecting their second overseas player for the coming season and, perhaps, captain.

CHARLES KNOTT

Charles Knott, who died on 28 February, has claims to be Hampshire's finest ever spin bowler. Though he lost six potentially productive years to the Second World War, and, due to injury or unavailability, played only four full seasons, his 647 first-class wickets for the County have been exceeded by only eleven men. Significantly, only seven pace bowlers (though Jack Newman – also Hampshire born – often bowled off-spin) achieved a better career average than his 23.53. He still tops Hampshire's off-spin wicket-takers. He was often described, with justification, as Hampshire's best ever amateur bowler.

Though his playing career was brief, he served Hampshire for a much longer period. He became the club's chairman of cricket in 1968 and continued in that post until just after the County's first Lord's Final success in the Benson and Hedges Cup in 1988. He then maintained his links with the club through his membership of their Heritage Committee.

Charles James Knott was born in Southampton on 26 November 1914. After attending Taunton's School he joined Deanery – for whom his father had played – and then moved to Old Tauntonians. His father was a fish merchant and the young Knott joined the family business on leaving school. His cricket was therefore confined to Wednesday and Sunday afternoons.

He graduated from the Southampton club cricket arena to the Hampshire Club and Ground side – the equivalent of the modern 2nd XI – before making his first-class debut in Frank Woolley's benefit match at Canterbury in 1938. In his first two matches, he bowled fast-medium. After taking 1 – 191 in those matches he switched to spin and enjoyed immediate success with 9 for 114 at Cheltenham. One of his first innings victims was his future Hampshire captain, Desmond Eagar.

The conversion to spin had come naturally. He found it easy to spread his fingers across the ball. Those long fingers enabled him to spin the ball hard. He had shown at Cheltenham that he could extract maximum benefit from a rain affected wicket and he continued to do so throughout his career. With experience he learned to bowl tightly on bland wickets that offered bowlers little or no assistance.

He impressed in his appearances in both 1938 and 1939, in which year he took eight Surrey wickets for 85 at Portsmouth. Strangely, he was awarded his county cap after the outbreak of war in October 1939 but it was, of course, another seven years before he was able to wear it on the field of play!

He quickly made up for lost time. In 1946 he took 121 wickets for the County, played for the Gentlemen v. Players at Lord's and was selected for the second Test trial at Canterbury. A tour to Australia in the forthcoming winter must have been tantalisingly near. He was even closer to cricket's ultimate tour in 1950. On that occasion he was asked about his availability and even measured for his blazer.

After missing much of 1947 through injury he reappeared as an improved bowler in 1948 when he and Jim Bailey embarrassed Bradman's "Invincibles". Knott (5-57) and his spin bowling partner (4-27) shot out the tourists for just 117, giving Hampshire a first innings lead of 78. It was the only occasion that the Australians trailed on first innings throughout their all-conquering tour. Knott's figures would have been even better had not the charismatic Keith Miller hit him for three consecutive sixes. Australia were eventually left with 182 to win. On a wicket still affected by rain, Knott immediately bowled Barnes for a duck before lunch on the final day. However, the sun shone for the first time in the match during the interval. The wicket eased and the Australians won in some comfort by eight wickets with about 45 minutes left for play.

The spin twins of Charles Knott and Jim Bailey bowled brilliantly in tandem during that summer. The latter not only took 100 wickets, but also passed one thousand runs to become the last Hampshire player to complete the now fabled "double". It was to Desmond Eagar's everlasting regret that the pair were never able to bowl in tandem with Derek Shackleton and Vic Cannings, who began their great partnership in 1950.

It was in 1948 that he performed what he always regarded his finest spell of bowling. On a batsman's paradise he returned figures of 8 for 79 in 25 overs at Trent Bridge, helping Hampshire to gain a narrow two-wicket victory.

After another good year in 1949 he was involved in a number of quite remarkable matches in the following season. He had the distinction of completing a hat-trick for the Gentlemen v. Player's at Lord's and an unusual one it was too. Two of his victims, Godfrey Evans and Roy Tattersall, were stumped. The other unwitting collaborator in the feat was none other than his Hampshire team-mate Derek Shackleton, who was caught off a skyer at long-on. He finished with figures of 5 for 66.

At Eastbourne with Eagar away injured, he took over as acting captain. Sussex were left with only 98 to win, but were dismissed for 38. Knott's analysis was an

astonishing 7-4-5-5. He also took 7 for 26 as Gloucestershire crashed to 53 all out when chasing 130 in even time at Bristol.

His batting was always a token affair, as a career aggregate of 1023 runs and average of 6.95 testify. He maintained that batting at number eleven always gave him the opportunity to enjoy some convivial conversation on his return to the pavilion! However, in the Whitsun fixture against Kent at Northlands Road that year he was required to exercise much more diligence than normal. In a low scoring match the County were eventually left with 153 as a winning target. They lost wickets at regular intervals so that when he joined Cannings, 22 runs were still required. With lunch beckoning, the newly recruited fast-medium bowler reduced the deficit by 7. In growing excitement, the pair edged Hampshire closer to the winning post. Four leg byes, a genuine drive by Knott and some well-placed dabs by Cannings, took Hampshire to within 3 runs of victory. Knott then late cut or lashed (the versions vary) Doug Wright through gully to a vacant third man, but the pair were only able to run two. Unfortunately, he then edged the next ball to Arthur Fagg and the match finished in a tie – Hampshire's second in three years.

He played intermittently thereafter. He still had a few more outings to enjoy and returned his career best bowling figures of 8 for 26 against Cambridge University at Bournemouth in 1951, as well as making his highest score-27 at Worthing-in the same year. Business commitments compelled his eventual departure from county cricket 1954, though he was able to play in one match for the MCC three years later.

His term as Hampshire's Chairman of the Cricket Committee was eventful for many reasons. During his tenure he was responsible for bringing a galaxy of uniquely talented overseas players to the club. Barry Richards was recruited on the advice of Leo Harrison, Gordon Greenidge came from Reading and initially stayed at his home, Andy Roberts arrived from Antigua (when Hampshire insisted the West Indians pay his air fare), Malcolm Marshall was recommended by Wes Hall, to be complemented by Chris and Robin Smith from South Africa. These recruits demonstrated his agile brain in maximising the qualifying rules to Hampshire's benefit. If these were the successes then the downside was conveying bad news to the men in his charge. Releasing David O'Sullivan and John Rice and telling Roy Marshall that he was losing the captaincy to Richard Gilliat were particularly difficult tasks.

Nevertheless, Hampshire's Championship triumph in 1973 – surely the most unlikely in all cricket history, three Sunday League titles and a first Lord's Final victory must have offered tremendous compensations and satisfaction in his retirement. He had indeed presided over a Golden Age.

He also made a mark as a radio pundit in the early 80's when he was heard commentating on Radio Solent's regular "Speedway Special" series, where his partnership with ex-Poole Pirates Captain, Pete Smith, ranked as one of the most entertaining of any media sports coverage. In fact, he and his father promoted speedway at the stadium adjacent to the former County Ground for many years. His heart was therefore never that far way from that evocative corner of Southampton.