

NEWSLETTER No. 245 - APRIL 2004

It has been a winter of much fine cricket. The highlight was undoubtedly a quite superb series between Australia and India. The quality of batting was perhaps unparalleled. Twelve centuries were scored – six by each side – but it was the sheer quality that was the distinguishing feature. Each was a gem in its own right. It seemed as if each batsman was trying to outdo their opposite number and that they were bent on improving their performance as the series unfolded. Hence new standards of excellence were attained. For Australia, Ricky Ponting batted with a quick footed mastery and avarice that took him on to a new plane. His batting at the start of his innings before lunch on the first day at Adelaide was a glittering affair and was more memorable than anything seen in the torpid Sri Lanka – England series. Somerset supporters will be relishing the prospect of seeing the runs flow from his bat on Taunton's pluperfect wickets this summer.

India's top order played a sequence of innings which were simply breathtaking. Sourav Ganguly proved he could play pace bowling at Brisbane, Rahul Dravid batted with assurance, composure and technical perfection throughout, thoroughly living up to his reputation as "The Wall", V.V.S. Laxman confirmed his liking for the Australian attack with a number of exquisite innings notable for wondrous gifts of timing and placement, Verinder Sehwag breathed fire and brimstone at Melbourne and, finally, Sachin Tendulkar, after a nightmare tour hitherto, emerged from the shadows to remind everyone of his class. The calibre of the cricket was enhanced still further by Anil Kumble's bowling.

The Second Test at Adelaide was a classic. Australia made 556 in the first innings, yet lost. One writer described the series as being on a par with the famous Australia – West Indies of 1960-61. There would be few who would take issue with that assessment. It was enthralling from beginning to end and it culminated, of course, with Steve Waugh's farewell before an adoring and emotional crowd at Sydney. Perhaps most memorable of all, however, were the dignified and appreciative speeches by the two captains at the end. Both men have been criticised for their abrasiveness in the past but each gave a fitting address which encapsulated perfectly the sporting spirit in which the series had been played.

There were several other highlights. It is evident that a new generation of fast bowlers are about to take centre stage. For the first time since partition India has a ready supply of genuine bowlers of pace.

The West Indies have two raw very fast bowlers in Tino Best and Fidel Edwards. Steve Harmison really came from nowhere to spearhead England's attack in the West Indies. His performance at Sabina Park where he bowled with so much control as he routed some rather timid opponents was Ambrose – like in its execution. The Australians will undoubtedly look to bully him, but if he survives that psychological

test – and the portents are good – and if he stays free from injury then England can look forward to a rather better Ashes future. Perhaps the best of all the young guns, however, is the young Pakistani who prospered on his brief appearances for Kent last season. Mohammed Sami is fast, controlled and savvy. Even allowing for the awesome ability of the Indian batsmen, Pakistan are probably the world's most natural cricketers.

Shane Warne has always been the most positive of men, with extraordinary self belief. Few, however, would have predicted that even he would take a five-for in his first four innings on his return to Test cricket, but that is what he did. Even by his uniquely lofty standards it was an incredible performance.

He was followed to 500 wickets by Muttiah Muralitharan, and therein lies one of the two big “jars” of the winter (the other is Zimbabwe). He is alleged not to be able to straighten his arm. And yet there was a photograph in *The Cricketer* some months ago with his arm ramrod straight. Also it is almost impossible to bowl a leg-break, which he has now added to his repertoire, with a bent arm. Perhaps the most telling statement on his action, however, appeared in *The Wisden Cricketer* in which the cricket authorities in Sri Lanka expressed their concern about the number of young bowlers in the country throwing the ball. Enough said. Michael Holding expressed his worries on Sky about the increase in the number of bowlers with suspect actions. He alleged that virtually every country possessed at least one who was playing Test cricket. The ICC have initiated action to pursue the matter in individual cases but such bowlers should not have even been allowed to appear in first-class cricket let alone reach the Test scene. It is a complete abrogation of responsibility by the Boards of the various nations. The game is losing much credibility.

To end this summary of the winter's activities on a positive note, however, the Editor would like to nominate his “champagne moment”. Amidst all the sumptuous batting, Harmison's 7 for 12 at Sabina Park and Shane Warne's 500th Test wicket, one incident stands out above all. It was towards the end of India's innings in the one-day international against Pakistan at Peshawar. Lakshmipathy Balaji, in the side for his bowling and batting at 10, played a shot of which any batsman in history would have been proud when he on-drove Sami on the up for six over long on. It was not a slog. It was a classical text book cricket shot played with a perpendicular bat. Extraordinary; watch out for the name. Any man capable of producing that stroke deserves to be batting much higher in the order.

What of Hampshire's prospects for next season? The side will be galvanised by the addition of Shane Warne and Michael Clarke and they will bring much needed experience, guile and steel in the County's quest for a successful season. They now look fairly well equipped in the one day game. However, the biggest faults of the last few seasons in 4 – day cricket still seem problematical. Unless Hampshire are able to secure consistent performances from their opening batsmen and new ball bowlers then their ability to make headway will continue to be severely impaired. Let us hope that all those concerned will respond to the inspiring motivational ministrations of Shane Warne.

MEETINGS

31 March 2004 - Meeting

The Society is very pleased to welcome Nigel Gray to this evening's meeting. In fact, this is one of the very rare occasions where the Society goes to the speaker rather than vice versa. Nigel last spoke in April 1995 when he gave members a guided tour of the facilities at Northlands Road before speaking on "the groundsman's year".

Nigel Gray was born in Leicester but left there at the age of seven for Southampton, where he has lived ever since.

After school at Richard Taunton College in Southampton he gained an honours degree in geography at Keele University. After leaving Keele he returned to Southampton working on sports ground maintenance for the local education authority. He became particularly involved with cricket grounds and was eventually specifically assigned to his old school, which included the preparation of pitches for Old Tauntonians in the Southern League. Sadly, that cosy, enclosed ground was subsequently sold for development.

He came to the County Ground at Southampton at the start of the 1989 season, spending two years as assistant to Tom Flintoft. After the latter's departure to Durham, the County had no hesitation in appointing Nigel as Head Groundsman. Our speaker was subsequently nominated runner-up in the TCCB Groundsman of the Year award in his first year.

He has, of course, been Head Groundsman at Hampshire's Rose Bowl since the County moved there in 2001. Members will undoubtedly now gain an insight this evening on the maintenance of an international ground.

10 March 2004 – Report

Jeff Levick, Chairman of the Hampshire Cricket Board, entertained and undoubtedly surprised members with his expose on the wide ranging activities of the HCB. It is often said that cricket is not played in all schools. This is demonstrably not the case in Hampshire. Thanks to the energy of Andy Hobday, the Schools Cricket Development Officer, 6000 children in 78 primary schools received coaching last year, 300 of whom were introduced to clubs, and 50 teachers were introduced to inset courses.

Alan Rowe, Club Cricket Development Officer, reported there were now 100 clubs with junior sections and 35 major clubs were targetted to achieve ECB Club Mark status over the next 5 years. Jeff also touched upon the strength of club cricket in Hampshire, personified by Richard Hindley's performance in the County's historic victory over Glamorgan at The Rose Bowl last summer.

There were District Development Centres for the most talented young players in six age groups. Raj Maru was the Performance Cricket Development Officer. He was responsible for developing those gifted players identified by the Districts and had formed Development Centres in 8 age groups. He had also established a School of

Excellence to provide 1 – 1 coaching provided by Bob Parks (wicketkeeping), Raj Maru (spin bowling), Steve Malone (fast bowling) and Tony Middleton (batting).

The HCB had also appointed a Southampton Community Development Officer. It seemed a staggering statistic, given the history of cricket in the City's Parks during the last century which produced many County players especially during the 1930's, that there was no club in the centre of Southampton prior to 2003. The Southampton City Community Club was launched in 2003, and now had over 80 members in three age groups. This was seen as a crucial development in tapping and developing the reservoir of talent in the City's ethnic population.

There was also a Women's Cricket Development Officer, the product of which was that there were currently 6 junior clubs, 3 County age teams and a Senior Women's team in Division 2 of the National League.

Finally, Jeff was co-ordinator for cricket for people with disabilities. Children in 28 special schools had been introduced to the game. Nine secondary schools were linked with senior mainstream clubs and six adult clubs had organised a league. There was also a Cricket Festival for people with disabilities.

The range of activities was therefore prodigious, designed to make cricket accessible in every sense, to develop the grass roots level and to develop the best young players in the County. All of this cost money and there was a current funding deficit of some £30,000. The HCB therefore welcomed any contributions to enable these important activities to continue.

It was a most interesting evening and the disappointingly small audience went away much wiser about the organisation now in place to produce the cricketers of the future, at all levels, in the County.

SOCIETY NEWS

The AGM which preceded the last meeting was a fairly routine affair with all committee members and officers being returned unopposed. Chairman, Susanne Marlow, thanked Brian Smith for his important contribution as Membership Secretary.

The Society has been fortunate in that **LES FISH** has offered to replace Brian as secretary and his nomination was gratefully accepted.

DEREK SHACKLETON & ARTHUR HOLT COMMEMORATED

At the Society's Annual Buffet Supper last December all three speakers, Alan Castell, Keith Wheatley and David "Butch" White expressed the hope that Derek Shackleton and Arthur Holt could be commemorated in some way at The Rose Bowl.

The latest edition of Hampshire Cricket Members' Newsletter, published in March, announced that the members' bar in the pavilion is to be named The Derek Shackleton

Bar. Hampshire's most prolific bowler has accepted an invitation to attend the naming ceremony at the AGM on 14 April.

The 2nd XI pavilion is to be officially named The Arthur Holt Pavilion when the season is under way.

It was also announced that the Long Room in the pavilion will be officially renamed The Robin Smith suite.

HAMPSHIRE 1973 WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Hampshire's winning of the County Championship in 1973 was one of the most unlikely of all time. They were quoted at 66 – 1 before the season yet were to go through it undefeated, winning 10 of their 20 matches. They bowled out the opposition twice in nine of those matches; in the other they took 19 wickets.

In their series "Caught in Time" the Sunday Times on 27 July last year featured the team and gave details of their current whereabouts. The information may be of interest to members.

Richard Gilliat – deputy headmaster at Charterhouse School, Surrey.

Gordon Greenidge – was batting coach for Bangladesh in the World Cup in South Africa.

Bob Herman – teacher in Sarisbury.

Trevor Jesty – first-class umpire.

Richard Lewis – coaches cricket at Charterhouse School, Surrey.

Tom Mottram – architect in Poole.

Andy Murtagh – teacher and in charge of cricket at Malvern College.

David O'Sullivan – lives in his native New Zealand where he runs a successful insurance business.

Barry Richards – lives in Perth, Western Australia, television commentator and writes a newspaper column.

Peter Sainsbury – retired.

Bob Stephenson – sports coach at Twyford School, near Winchester.

Mike Taylor – retired; living in Chandler's Ford.

David Turner – returned to Chippenham where he runs a key cutting and shoe repair business that he took over from his father.

The Terrible Twins

I'll ask you please to imagine, the scene on a hot summer day.
The year, forty seven, the crowd are in heaven; they've come to see Middlesex play.
The pavilion is full of blue blazers and ties of yellow and red.
In the rest of the ground, from the Tavern to Mound, it's shirtsleeves and hanky on head.

They call Lords the Mecca of Cricket, where all the great heroes have been.
From Grace with his beard to Jack Hobbs revered, and hundreds of names in between.
But now two new heroes have entered and taken the country by storm.
"Ground Full" signs displayed at each ground they've played in this year at the peak of their form.

The gates have been closed since eleven and the match started dead on half past.
Now it's twelve thirty eight and down through the gate strides Compton – the scene's set at last.
The openers gave us a confident start but the bowlers have just broken through.
Jack Robertson, Brown; that's two wickets down. Now, what can the great duo do?

Bill Edrich is already out there, since the fall of the previous wicket.
There's a noisy ovation in anticipation of seeing some cavalier cricket.
A hush falls as Compton is ready; the bowler begins his long run.
If they let him get set, it's a pretty safe bet, they'll have a long day in the sun.

The bowler unleashes a beauty; no captain could ask any more.
He starts a "Howzatt!" but a flick of the bat sends the ball to the boundary for four.
For three hours they torture the bowlers, with runs to all sides of the ground.
Three hours of fun making hay in the sun to a background of carnival sound.

There's Edrich so strong and pugnacious, driving with violent intention.
With his partner in crime it's all about timing and full of audacious invention.
Two hundred and eighty they share on that day and they've barely batted past tea.
They're joyful and gay (in the old fashioned way!)-well, crickets a game don't you see.

All round the country they're spreading this joy while the crowds cry out for more.
They're raising a cheer during times still austere in the bleak aftermath of the war.
So get to the ground good and early; it barely matters who wins.
At the end of the day it's sufficient to say, "I've just watched the 'Terrible Twins'"

Bryn Strudwick 1999