

NEWSLETTER NO. 257 - OCTOBER 2005

NOVEMBER MEETING

Members are reminded that the next meeting is to be held at **Test Valley Golf Club, near Overton** on **9 November**, starting at 8pm. A map showing the location of the new venue was sent with the Summer Newsletter.

The speaker is NEIL MALLENDER, ex- Northamptonshire and Somerset, and now a much-respected umpire.

12 September 2005 - Meeting

The Society is delighted to welcome **John Crawley** to this evening's meeting. In the last match of the season against County Champions Nottinghamshire at the Rose Bowl, he stood tantalisingly close to breaking Dick Moore's record individual innings for Hampshire. However, the declaration came when his own score stood at 311 – five short of Moore's record. It was a decision that the vast majority of Hampshire supporters regretted. It was a very fine innings. Coming to the wicket with the score at 10, on a damp pitch under a heavy cloud he first established a base. Despite being dropped on 28, he batted in otherwise untroubled fashion throughout the rest of the first day, finishing on 150 not out. His batting on the second morning was a revelation as he and Dimi Mascarenhas plundered 254 at around seven an over in 140 minutes. Any lingering doubts about the quality of the Rose Bowl pitch were banished. Our speaker moved from 200 to 300 in only 58 balls, taking full benefit of the short leg-side boundary on the tunnel side of the ground, as well as rolling out some exquisite front foot drives. He rattled off 148 runs before lunch, to establish a new Hampshire record. In all he batted for only eight hours and received 421 balls; the innings included 33 fours and 4 sixes.

He reached, of course, 301 not out against Nottinghamshire at Trent Bridge last year. Given his debut innings for the County of 272 at Canterbury, he has thus made three of Hampshire's six top scores.

John Crawley has specialised in double centuries throughout his career. He seems to be one of those cricketers who regards reaching a century as a milestone on the way to yet better things. He has now made eight scores of 200 or more, three of which have been at the expense of the Nottinghamshire bowlers. He also crafted 250 at Trent Bridge in 1984. Nor did he spare Hampshire's bowlers when he was with Lancashire, making 239 at Old Trafford four years later. He thus stands as the only man ever to score a double-century for and against the County.

Our speaker has long been regarded as one of the best – *if not the best* - players of spin bowling in county cricket. He exemplified his powers to read spin and play with the softest of hands when he countered the wiles of Muttiah Muralitharan at The Oval in 1998. The controversial Sri Lankan took 16 wickets in the match but our speaker resisted him to the tune of 156 not out in an excellent innings in which he glued

together the tail-end of England's innings. He and Angus Fraser enthusiastically stroked 89 for the last wicket. The innings was punctuated with delicate leg glides, chips off his hip and toes and, as at the Rose Bowl last month, crisp driving. However, his efforts were in vain. England's second innings subsided quickly after he was deceived by Muralitharan on the stroke of lunch on the fifth day and Sri Lanka won a famous first victory in this country by ten wickets.

In a recent article in the Wisden Cricketer he commented that his Test career was not fulfilled as he was unable to score runs quickly enough off fast bowlers. However, one suspects that his technique has improved since his move to Hampshire through having to cope with the initial vagaries of the Rose Bowl wickets.

He was certainly in superb form at the end of the season. Perhaps aided by Sean Ervine putting opposition bowling attacks under pressure for virtually the first time since Neil Johnson's departure three years ago, allied to opening in limited-overs cricket, he batted with greater freedom and relish than at any time since his arrival in Hampshire.

JOHN PAUL CRAWLEY was born into a cricketing family at Maldon, Essex on 21 September 1971. His brothers Mark and Peter also played first-class cricket. He was something of a schoolboy and youth prodigy at Manchester Grammar School and Trinity College, Cambridge. He moved effortlessly via 2nd XI cricket (when he was only 16 years of age), England Under-19's (whom he captained), to the Lancashire side, for whom he scored 76 not out against the Zimbabweans in 1990, before enjoying a highly successful period at Fenner's. Within a year after graduating he was in the England team, making his debut against South Africa at Lord's in 1994.

He always remained a prolific compiler of runs in county cricket. In the first few years following the introduction of four-day cricket, he and another very fine, classy technician, Mark Ramprakash, scored more runs than any other batsman. He gained his Lancashire cap in 1994 and captained the side from 1999 to 2001. However, his form dipped for the first time during that period, and he lost his place in the England side and decided to seek pastures new.

He joined Hampshire for the 2002 season, and, aided by his startling first innings for the County, regained his England place. He immediately scored an imperious century against India at Lord's, retained his place for the rest of the series, and was selected for his third tour of Australia. After making 69 not out at Brisbane in the First Test, when he was one of the few batsmen to make runs after Nasser Hussain's now infamous decision to invite Australia to bat after winning the toss, he damaged a hip in Tasmania, lost his early tour momentum, and eventually his place for the following English season. Hampshire made him a reluctant captain at short notice and the cares of that role in a weak side with constant changes of personnel (24 players appeared for the County) clearly hampered his form in that crucial summer. However, Rod Bransgrove paid fulsome tribute to his commitment and selfless dedication. Our speaker has always been a model professional.

When John Crawley eventually retires, he can review a career of achievement. He won 37 Test caps (1800 runs – avge. 34 - 61 – 4 centuries), appeared in 13 Limited-Overs Internationals, was on the winning side in five Lord's finals and won two

Sunday League (or its subsequent equivalent) titles, one of which as captain. Only a County Championship eludes him; he and his colleagues could not have come much closer last month.

HAMPSHIRE 2005

2005 must rank as one of the great years of Hampshire cricket. A C & G Final victory at Lord's and a second place in the County Championship, after years in the shadows in both competitions were unexpected riches indeed. The year marked the end of the see-saw pattern of promotion and relegation between the two Divisions of the County Championship in alternate years. In fact, the first two Counties in this year's Championship were first and second respectively in last season's Second Division.

Hampshire were obviously upset about the contrived circumstances of Nottinghamshire's victory against Kent at Canterbury in the penultimate weekend of the season (when the latter agreed to a declaration target that was both in retrospect and reality a totally impossible one). However, Hampshire undoubtedly contributed to the situation in which they found themselves at the season's end.

The County lost only three matches. However, two of these, against Warwickshire at Stratford-upon-Avon and Surrey at the Rose Bowl, were both debacles. They were both two-day defeats by an innings in which, crucially, not a single batting point was obtained. Nottinghamshire eventually ended the season with 4 more batting points than Hampshire (50-46). Third-placed Sussex gained an impressive 55. The other defeat against Middlesex at Southgate, by two wickets, could have gone either way.

There was also a drawn match - the early season encounter at Hove - where Hampshire, uncharacteristically, called off the run-chase, and finished 17 runs short with two wickets in hand. They also failed by only one wicket to defeat Kent in the preceding away match at Canterbury.

Nonetheless, it was a wonderful season, during which 9 wins were recorded. One, against the County Champions at Trent Bridge, defied belief. After rain looked to have ruined the match, captains Shane Warne and Stephen Fleming contrived a situation where Nottinghamshire were set 276 off a maximum of 65 overs. (In the match at Canterbury referred to earlier Kent agreed to chase 420 off 70). With their score at 251 for 4 the home side looked home and dry. However, a Chris Tremlett hat-trick and the wiles of Warne eventually conjured a 14 - run win.

Hampshire also showed their mettle when they pulled around a seemingly disparate situation on no less than four occasions when Sussex visited the Rose Bowl. It proved to be a match of amazing swings in fortune. In the first innings Hampshire recovered from 102 for 6 to 309 thanks to late order heroics by Nic Pothas (109) and Sean Ervine (69), who shared a seventh wicket stand of 191. Both men, of course, were later to bat so successfully in tandem in the top-order in the last two matches of the County's C & G triumph. With Sussex coasting along at 219 for 4, Sean Ervine intervened to take 5 for 73 and restrict their first innings lead to just 7. Hampshire's top-order then again subsided alarmingly to 28 for 5 before Shane Watson (82), Craig McMillan (34), and Pothas again (74) took the County to a respectable 277. In the

last innings, Sussex, with Murray Goodwin firmly in control, were coasting along at 193 for 3, needing only another 78 for victory. Dimi Mascarenhas then stood up to the rostrum taking 5 for 64. Keeping the ball up to the bat, all his victims were out driving.

Hampshire's top-order struggled continually until Sean Ervine was promoted to open the innings. It proved to be a masterstroke as he reeled off scores of 69,74, 2,60,20,75 and 9. His attacking methods allowed the other batsmen to prosper and Hampshire's batting points aggregate improved considerably as a result. Whether an earlier promotion will have improved the County's bonus points tally must always remain a matter for conjecture.

In a season where cricket captured the imagination of the nation as a whole, Hampshire's supporters will have much to remember. There was Shane Warne's luminescent maiden first-class hundred at Canterbury, Watson's aggressive strokeplay, John Crawley's always cultured batting and Andy Bichel's swashbuckling century at Cheltenham and Mascarenhas' fine all-round cricket. What a splendidly reliable and mature cricketer the latter has become. Ervine's efforts gave succour to James Adams who visibly gained end-of-season confidence; Greg Lamb, Jon McLean and James Bruce also gave glimpses of future promise. However, apart from Ervine's superbly enterprising batting there will be three lasting memories of the season. Nic Pothas was the epitome of consistency – both in front of and behind, the wicket. He finished fractionally short of a much-deserved thousand runs for the season. Shaun Udal enjoyed the form of his life. Free from injury his pivot and body rotation enabled him to gain more flight than hitherto. He bowled accurately and assertively. No batsman was ever allowed to rest. He thoroughly merited his selection for the England tour to Pakistan. He also captained the side excellently in Warne's absence.

The omnipotent Shane Warne, whether as batsman, bowler, fielder or captain, demanded attention. He pulled innings after innings around with his field placing which were always designed to take wickets rather than save runs. As a bowler he never spared himself. He bowled more overs and took more wickets than any other man. Only another wrist spinner – the delightful Mushtaq Ahmed, rivalled either tally. Warne always batted pugnaciously, and with no little craftiness. He demonstrated that he not only possessed a uniquely incisive cricket brain, but also the heart of a lion. Even when he was away with the Australian team his spirit still pervaded the club. By the end of the season he looked desparately tired. However, in an end of season interview he was still positive, promoting Hampshire's cricket. The fires of his competitive spirit were continuing to burn within. His contribution to the County's cricket in the last two years is simply immeasurable.

ASHES REVIEW 2005

It is difficult to remember a Test series that so captured the public imagination as this Ashes summer. Whether at ancient Old Sarum or alongside the Itchen Navigation Canal in Winchester, whole families were seen playing cricket together. Some possessed all the paraphernalia; bats, gloves, pads and so on. They really were an uplifting and heart-warming sight.

It was one of the biggest of all ironies that after years of attempts to make cricket more seductive to a new audience, it was the hitherto maligned Test cricket that acted as the catalyst to a quite staggering resurgence in interest. The introduction of coloured clothing, white balls, floodlights and Twenty/20 cricket paled into insignificance. It was Test cricket that held sway.

At this short time span since the umpires ceremoniously lifted the bails at The Oval it is quite difficult to place last summer's Test series into historical perspective. There were too many imponderables that will only unravel in the next couple of years. Australia crushed England at Lord's. The first day's play must rank as one of the great roller-coaster experiences in the history of the game. By 3 o'clock Englishmen were on cloud nine as the pace attack of Hoggard, Harmison, Jones and Flintoff stunned the Australians with their aggression and skill. By six o'clock it was Australia who held the ascendancy as Glenn McGrath produced a hypnotic spell of fast-medium bowling which ranked with any in his illustrious career. Australia never surrendered that advantage. Barring rain, a 5 – 0 whitewash seemed almost inevitable.

On the morning of the first day of the Edgbaston Test, McGrath stepped on a ball in practice and was ruled out. The psychological lift it gave the England batting line-up will always be a matter of speculation but it *must* have made a difference. Freed from the chains of one of their jailers, England rattled up an indecent 400 plus in the day in a glittering display of strokemaking. By the fourth morning, the home side were viewing the winning post. Shane Warne and Brett Lee had other ideas and, with Mike Kasprowicz, they took Australia to within 3 runs of victory. England celebrated; most seemed to forget that McGrath's absence usually meant at least 120 runs per innings to Australia's opponents. The euphoria and jingoism therefore appeared wildly exaggerated, and so did the subsequent label of The Greatest Test. There were several in front of it, eg. Old Trafford and The Oval 1902 and Headingley 1981 to name but three.

McGrath, phoenix like, appeared at Old Trafford and suffered terrible luck with dropped catches and wickets cancelled through no-balls. Michael Vaughan needed no second bidding and helped himself to a sumptuous, glorious, classical century. His opposite number, Ricky Ponting, responded with one of the great fighting Ashes knocks in the fourth innings and a pulsating game was left drawn.

Shane Warne had kept Australia afloat in this match – with the bat. He was cruelly left just short of a maiden Test century. It was a superbly courageous, determined and exciting effort in the first innings. In partnership with Ponting it seemed at one stage on the last evening if Australia were going to record an improbable victory. Hampshire followers were all too familiar with their captain's positive, never-say-die approach where all games are for winning. The English cricket public at large, if they weren't aware of it before, were certainly conscious of his unique all-round influence after that Test.

The remarkable leg-spinner nearly pulled the game out of the bag at Trent Bridge as he plotted England's downfall in the last innings. However, Ashley Giles and Matthew Hoggard held their nerve and their side crept home by three wickets.

McGrath was again missing from that match. Would he make a difference at The Oval? It was clear, however, from Trent Bridge that Australia's sole game plan was now to give the ball to Warne. There simply wasn't a plan B. He responded magnificently with six wickets in each innings. If it had not been for his efforts at Old Trafford, England would have already won the series. It is the supreme irony that he should drop his great friend Kevin Pietersen and literally hand the series to England.

It was a series with so many highlights. There were, however, three which lifted the summer to the greatest heights. The first was Andrew Flintoff's consoling of Brett Lee after the end of the Edgbaston Test. At a stroke, that act took sport to a long-forgotten era where opponents openly respected each other.

The other was Pietersen's stirring batting with Lee in the post-lunch session at The Oval. The latter had almost taken his wicket with a searing fast and hostile over just before the interval. KP responded in kind when battle was resumed. It was difficult to remember such a rousing duel; Lee bowled, as usual, very quickly and with great heart. Pietersen stood up and simply smote him all over The Oval. Despite the mathematics of the runs/overs equation, he assured England of the series in that remarkable twenty minute session.

However, the ultimate memory will be of two men – "Freddie" Flintoff and Shane Warne. It was a clash of two titans. Neither would be cowed. Neither spared themselves in the quest for victory for their side. They looked the opposition in the eye and neither blinked. The fate of the series for much of the time was in their hands; it was only interrupted by Kevin Pietersen's coruscating intervention on the last afternoon at The Oval. When was the last occasion when two men – one of each side – towered over their team-mates to such an extent that the destiny of a series was a matter for their determination?

Where now? It would seem that the Australian side is in decline. The series was confirmation that Warne and McGrath will be irreplaceable when they retire. It is simply not possible to replace two of the all-time greats in a short space of time. England are still fallible in a number of critical areas and it may be premature to proclaim their arrival as a dominant force in the same way as the West Indies and Australia in the last thirty years.

There are also challenges for the ECB in maintaining the momentum generated this summer. Cricket will not be shown on terrestrial television for the next four years. Test grounds are also not large enough to accommodate the insatiable demand for tickets.

However, in the immediate future, let us rejoice and warmly remember the events of the last few months. It is small wonder they are spawning a record number of books and videos.