

NEWSLETTER No. 260 - JANUARY 2006

Wednesday 11 January – Meeting

The Society is very pleased to welcome Kevan James to this evening's meeting. Because of his personality and approachability he was undoubtedly one of the most popular men to play for Hampshire in recent years. Since retiring from the game in 1999 he has pursued a successful career as a sports journalist on BBC Radio Solent. Many will have last seen him conducting interviews with Hampshire's C & G Final winning team on their lap of honour at the end of the match.

Our speaker achieved cricketing immortality on two days in June 1996 when in Hampshire's match against the Indian tourists, he became the first, and so far only, man in cricket history to take four wickets in successive deliveries and then make a century.

The start of the tourists' innings on the first morning gave no indication of the startling events which were to unfold in mid-afternoon. Ajay Jadeja and Vikram Rathore tore into the Hampshire bowlers before lunch. They had put on 192 in three hours before Kevan James induced Jadeja (91) to edge to Matthew Keech at slip. The momentous four wickets in four balls started when Rathore (95) was smartly stumped by Adie Aymes down the legside; Sachin Tendulkar was then caught off bat and pad at short-leg by Jason Laney. The disappointment of the crowd in seeing the young genius' dismissal was audible. However, a ball later they were cheering as Rahul Dravid shuffled forward to be trapped leg-before. The emotional roller-coastal of an over continued. Sanjay Manjrekar then edged to slip where Paul Terry held the catch. Kevan James had taken four wickets in four balls – the first Hampshire player to do so, the first in England since 1972, and the thirty-first instance overall. It was a performance of the highest merit. The pitch was perfect. All four of his victims were genuine top-order Test players. Tendulkar and later, Dravid, were among the greatest batsmen the world has ever seen. At that stage, our speaker had taken five wickets for one run in four tumultuous overs.

Following his dramatic over the Indian innings resumed along its merry way as Saurav Ganguly and Anil Kumble added 155, before the declaration at 362 for five. James' final figures were five for 74. The scorecard bore a decidedly bizarre and lopsided appearance.

Kevan James was not yet finished. Next morning he compiled a commanding hundred (103). Standing much straighter than in the previous two or three seasons he made his runs all round the wicket. He hit straight sixes out of the ground at both ends and also left a dent in the sightscreen in front of Northlands Road. He drove powerfully through the covers and cut and pulled with certainty.

When being interviewed in “The Times” he said that he had not felt good and was heavy limbed and heavy headed, courtesy of the champagne the preceding evening, as he started his innings.

Our speaker was elected HCS Cricketer of the Year for his performances that year which also included a well crafted match winning century (118 not out) against the then County Champions, Warwickshire, at Edgbaston and a Sunday-best 6 for 35 against Nottinghamshire at the County Ground when he twice took two wickets in two balls but, much to the crowd’s chagrin, could not complete the hat-trick. He earned international recognition at the end of the season when he was selected for England in the Hong Kong sixes. It was scarcely credible that he had started the season in the Second XI.

He was an integral part of Hampshire’s one day successes during the Mark Nicholas era. His maiden Sunday half-century in the final crucial match of the season against Surrey at The Oval in 1986 enabled the County to post a competitive score and pave the way for their ultimate victory and the title. He also played in the Finals of the Nat. West Trophy in 1991 and the Benson and Hedges Cup a year later, bowling accurately and putting the opposition’s early order batting under pressure on each occasion.

He performed a number of roles for Hampshire in Championship cricket throughout his career. He started life as an all-rounder batting in the lower middle-order, then filled a problematical no. 3 position in the batting order, before reverting to his previous role. In his first phase and indeed his debut season for Hampshire, he shared with Tim Tremlett a then County record eighth wicket stand of 227 at Taunton.* Both he (124) and Tremlett (102 not out) posted chanceless maiden centuries. Their partnership was a pivotal moment in a remarkable match. After a pulsating innings from Ian Botham (149 in 106 balls), the pair rescued Hampshire from the requirement to follow-on and saw the County to a first innings lead. A magnificent 188 by Viv Richards then enabled Botham to set Hampshire a victory target of 325 in 66 overs, which they achieved with just three balls to spare. The match was a glorious advertisement for three-day cricket.

A month later, in a precursor to his feat a decade later, he destroyed the Australians, taking six for 22, as the tourists tumbled to 76 – their lowest-ever score against Hampshire. Among his dismissals that day were Kepler Wessels, Greg Ritchie, Allan Border and David Boon.

He was awarded his county cap in 1989 when he was promoted in the order, and registered his highest score – 162 against Glamorgan at Sophia Gardens.

He made a hundred against Kent in the first match the following season but then sustained a back injury which kept him out for the rest of the summer. On his return in 1991 he enjoyed his best-ever season with the bat, compiling 1274 runs (avge. 47.18). He passed 1000 runs again for the second and final time in the following year.

After having left his imprint on Somerset with the bat at the start of his career with Hampshire, he made merry with the ball against that County towards the end. At

May's Bounty in 1997 he returned match figures of 13 – 93 including a career best 8 for 49 in the second innings. He actually had a hand in nine wickets – he also caught Rob Turner off Shaun Udal's bowling.

Kevan James was, therefore, a cricketer who touched the heights. Yet in many ways he must be counted as an unlucky one. He played only three full seasons of first-class cricket, courtesy of injury and Hampshire's selection policy. On many occasions when the County wished to bring in either a batsman or a bowler it was he who had to make way. He would probably have achieved even more as a batsman had he not been shuttled up and down the order.

KEVAN DAVID JAMES was born in Lambeth on 18 March 1961 and educated at Edmonton Comprehensive School. He was a precocious teenage cricketer who toured Australia with Young England in 1978-79 and the West Indies a year later. Among his contemporaries on the tours were Kim Barnett, Norman Cowans, Jonathan Agnew, Neil Foster, Tim Boon, Raj Maru and Neil Mallender, who spoke to the Society in November last year. David Boon, Gus Logie and Roger Harper were the most notable adversaries.

He joined Middlesex in 1980 at the same time as Simon Hughes and Maru. His first few days on the Middlesex staff are hilariously captured in Hughes' award-winning book "A Lot of Hard Yakka". Hughes described our speaker as being "wiry" at that time. He enjoyed his time at Middlesex but found it difficult to break into the side. He therefore joined Hampshire, initially on a two-year contract, for the 1985 season, playing only 13 matches between 1980 and 1984.

He went on to play 15 seasons for the County, appearing in 204 first-class matches, scoring 8189 runs (avge. 31.01), 10 centuries, taking 359 wickets (avge.32.47) and holding 75 catches.

He also played in a further 225 limited-overs matches, scoring 2324 runs and taking 223 wickets.

He also played two seasons for Wellington in New Zealand during his term with Middlesex.

This is the second occasion that Kevan James has addressed the Society. His previous appearance was in November 1999, on which occasion he paid heartfelt and fulsome tribute to Malcolm Marshall, who had passed away only a few days before that meeting.

Newsletter No. 205 incorporated a very fine poem on our speaker by Imogen Grosberg. If any member would like a copy of that poem, would they please send a stamped addressed envelope to Alan Edwards at 34 Porteous Crescent, Chandler's Ford, Hants, SO53 2DH, whereupon the editor would be pleased to post it to them.

- See article in this Newsletter on Nic Pothas.

SOCIETY NEWS 30th ANNIVERSARY

The Society celebrates its 30th Anniversary this month. Our first speaker on Thursday 29 January 1976, at Basingstoke Sports Centre, was Desmond Eagar. His subject was "Collecting Cricket". The Society's first Newsletter editor, Phil Bichard, wrote that "his passion was communicated to his audience and, after his talk, his exhibits and books were handled carefully and lovingly".

Desmond Eagar's library of mainly antiquarian books and pamphlets was sold at auction at Christie's on 21 April last year (2005). In a sale which established many records, his collection raised just under half a million pounds – a valuable collection indeed.

EDDIE BARLOW

HCS members will be sorry to have learnt of the death of the former South African Test all-rounder Eddie Barlow over the New Year period. Long-standing members will remember him addressing the Society nearly twenty years ago, on 24 September 1986. He was then Director of the South African Sports Office in London and recalled amusing exploits on the cricket and rugby field as well as speaking on the graver issue of South African politics and sport. He carried forward his on field passion to his public speaking. It was to be another five years after the meeting before South Africa were re-admitted to the Test arena.

HCS PLAYER OF THE YEAR 2005

NIC POTHAS

In a summer when many Hampshire players returned some memorable performances Nic Pothas' season-long consistency stood out above all others. HCS members recognised his signal contribution by voting him as their Player of the Year. He thus becomes the first Hampshire wicket-keeper to win the award.

But for a knee injury in the match against Kent at Canterbury, the first game he had missed in any form of cricket for two years, he would surely have become the first Hampshire wicket-keeper to score a thousand runs in a season since Neil McCorkell in 1951*. He therefore had to be content with 973 runs in first-class cricket. However, his summer's average of 51.21 is, as far as the editor is able to trace, a record for a Hampshire wicket-keeper.

Many of his runs were made in adversity. In the second match of the season, at Hove, he came to the wicket with Hampshire standing precariously at 89 for 3 in response to Sussex's first innings total of 252. For the next three hours, in company with John Crawley, Sean Ervine and Shane Warne, he chipped away at the total. He was eventually dismissed for a meritorious 84 just after the County had nosed ahead. That drawn match was nip and tuck throughout as was the following game against Middlesex at the Rose Bowl.

After an almost even first innings (H 275; M 279), Middlesex seemed to have the game won when Hampshire subsided to 156 for 6 second time round. Pothas (65) again came to the rescue with a shrewd and calculating knock, In alliance with Ervine, again, and then Dimi Mascarenhas he saw Hampshire to a competitive 304. Chris Tremlett and Warne, with four wickets each, then despatched the visitors for 236. For Pothas and Mascarenhas it was a reprise of similar stirring partnerships in the previous season. Little could anybody have foreseen that future partnerships with Ervine at the top of the order were to take Hampshire to the heights in one-day cricket later on in the season.

Meanwhile, after a quiet period, he excelled in memorable fashion in two matches as July ran into August. First, against Sussex at The Rose Bowl, he twice retrieved extremely difficult situations. In the first innings, Hampshire slipped to 102 for six before he (135) and Ervine (65) yet again, pulled the innings around adding 191 for the seventh wicket. Sussex went on to secure a slender first innings, despite the prolonged attentions of Ervine who took 5 for 73, and then had Hampshire reeling at 28 for 5. Shane Watson (82) and Craig McMillan took the score to 111 before the latter was dismissed. Sussex were still firm favourites and they still seemed to be in the box seat when the brilliant stroke making Australian was stumped 66 runs later. Ervine and Udal followed quickly so that when last man Chris Tremlett walked to the wicket the County were only 187 runs ahead. However, by now, Pothas was well ensconced and he found a willing ally in England's new international bowler. The pair gave their side a fighting chance with a fine stand of 83, Pothas eventually totalling 74. Ervine and Mascarenhas, both pitching the ball up, then bowled the County to victory on Saturday morning in a match in which Sussex had held the ascendancy in all four innings. Hampshire's victory was a triumph of character, with Pothas and his colleagues from the southern hemisphere leading the way.

If the Sussex match was played on a knife edge then it was firmly eclipsed in the extraordinary following match at Cheltenham. On a slow, seaming wicket Hampshire's quest looked doomed as they sank to 83 for 7 on the first morning. However, experience was showing that the Warne-inspired Hampshire possessed considerable moral fibre and fighting qualities, even when he was absent. Almost needless to say, Pothas was again the saviour, this time in partnership with Andy Bichel, making his debut for the County. The Australian, dropped before he had scored, flayed the Gloucestershire bowling to all parts, and raced to his hundred off only 104 balls. Pothas, intelligently playing second fiddle, also made a century as the pair added a new Hampshire eighth wicket partnership of 256. When Pothas was dismissed shortly before close of play, he had made 139. He then scored 54 not out in the second innings.

His amazing Bradmanesque sequence then continued in the next match against Kent at Hampshire's headquarters. He and Bichel were at it once more with another exciting eighth wicket partnership, this time of 138. Bichel made 87 and Pothas, driving splendidly, 74 not out. He was also undefeated in the second innings (14 not out) as Hampshire opted for a draw.

His appetite for run scoring was still not exhausted. In a rain-ruined affair with Surrey at The Oval he accumulated his third and final century of the season, scoring

an undefeated 100. His last seven innings had realised 591 runs at an average of 197.00 - an astonishing spell of run making by any standard.

Nic Pothas was, of course, a key factor in Hampshire's C & G victory. Promoted to open the innings he reeled off scores of 114 not out at Cardiff (his maiden one-day century in this country), 27 at The Oval, 73 not out against Yorkshire in the semi-final and then 68 in the Final. In the first of those matches he played foil to Kevin Pietersen before playing a similar role in two memorable stands with Sean Ervine in the last two matches. His final run tally in this year's competition stood at 289 runs at an average of 144.50.

His mannerisms became ingrained in the minds of Hampshire supporters last season. He is one of the game's great fidgets. After reinforcing his guard he becomes an inveterate sweeper of creases, first in front of the line and then behind, and then sometimes more than once each. After tugging at his box, the peak of his helmet, and his gloves, he awaits the bowler in the bat up position. He is a fine judge of what to leave alone or what to play and defends resolutely early on. As he becomes accustomed to the pace of the pitch he will begin to unfurl his attacking shots. He drives powerfully and despite being tall for a wicket-keeper, pulls and hooks with some relish.

He emerged as a considerable cricketer in 2005. His wicket-keeping also improved. He hardly put a foot, or glove, wrong and one catch, low down away to his left, after the ball had passed him, in the C & G semi-final will live long in the memory. He will be England-qualified next season. Every season since his arrival in Hampshire in 2003 has been one of improvement. If he continues to develop his batting and wicket-keeping then, despite England's squad system, he must come into the reckoning for at least a tour at the end of next summer. England will need to rest players in their ridiculously intensive schedule over the next twelve months or so and the side will not be weakened with his inclusion.

*McCorkell shared wicket-keeping duties in that year with Leo Harrison, David Blake and Ralph Prouton.

HCS PLAYERS OF THE YEAR

1982	Trevor Jesty	1983	Chris Smith	1984	Paul Terry
1985	Mark Nicholas	1986	Gordon Greenidge	1987	David Turner
1988	Robin Smith	1989	Robin Smith	1990	Malcolm Marshall
1991	Chris Smith	1992	Tony Middleton	1993	Shaun Udal
1994	Cardigan Connor	1995	Mark Nicholas	1996	Kevan James
1997	Matthew Hayden	1998	Dimitri Mascarenhas	1999	Peter Hartley
2000	Will Kendall	2001	Derek Kenway	2002	Shaun Udal
2003	Simon Katich	2004	Dimitri Mascarenhas	2005	Nic Pothas