

HAMPSHIRE CRICKET SOCIETY

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Whether as a player or TMS summariser, there have been few more popular men in the game over the past forty-five years than our speaker this evening.

VIC MARKS was an indispensable figure in that legendary Somerset team that captured the imagination in the late 1970s/early 1980s. They are still the most successful team in that County's history, having won five one-day trophies, including four Lord's finals between 1979-1983. They were a blend of vibrant local cricketers who had graduated through the club's youth system, two stellar overseas players in Viv Richards and Joel Garner (has there ever been a better one-day bowler than the latter?) and the odd import from another County. One of those was the legendary Brian Close, whom they nicknamed The Godfather, and who in effect was the Headmaster of their Finishing School. Our speaker was the omnipresent all-rounder, a fine off-spin bowler with great control of line, length and flight, and a savvy late middle-order batsman. It was a team that imploded in 1986, when Somerset chose not to re-engage the two West Indians; Ian Botham predictably left the club as a result. Throughout that cataclysmic episode, brickbats abounded, but no one uttered a bad word about Vic Marks. It was commented at the time that if he had replaced Brian Rose as captain, rather than Peter Roebuck, the outcome may well have been different. However, he felt he was not ready to assume the responsibility.

VICTOR JAMES MARKS was born in Middle Chinnock on 25 June 1955. Educated at Blundell's School, he made his first-class debut for both Oxford University and Somerset in 1975. He was an automatic choice for his County in all forms of the game until he retired in 1989 to pursue a career in journalism.

He was fortunate that his deeds were recorded by two great West Country writers, Alan Gibson and David Foot. Both described his approach and technique memorably. Of his bowling, Gibson once wrote:

"(it) has always looked more innocuous than it is. Every selector and every journalist, sitting comfortably round the ring, feels instinctively that he could have hit him for six every other ball. Perhaps Marks should cultivate a more menacing air".

He never did, and given his personality, was probably incapable of doing so, though in his autobiography *Rosey* published during the summer, Brian Rose commented:

(that) "beneath that genial exterior lurked a very competitive and very shrewd cricketer".

Foot referred to his "whimsical manner and school boyish giggle even in taut times" Those traits later endeared him to thousands of Test Match Special (TMS) listeners.

Foot wrote that: “he was the quietest member of that Somerset side As an off-spinner, he tweaked those Chinnock fingers teasingly. When he was punished, the shoulders hunched and the consoling ciggies helped him through the lunch or tea interval. Soon he was smiling again, if wishing privately, that the Taunton boundary fence had been less embracing to insensitive batsmen”.

By the close of his 275-match Somerset career he had lured 738 batsmen to destruction and, just to emphasise that he could take advantage of a turner, he once took eight for 17 against Lancashire (at Bath in 1985).

As a batsman (right-handed) he played straight, in the V, and unselfishly adapted his game to the situation. With experience, he widened his range of strokes, and by the end, according to Rose “could pull and cut with the best of them”. He scored 9742 runs (at the healthy average of 30.53), including four centuries, and garnered 1000 runs in a season twice, good figures for a late middle-order batsman. To demonstrate his quality, he scored half centuries (83, 74 and 55, against Sarfraz Nawaz and Abdul Qadir) in each of his last three Test innings.

Ian Botham felt he was hard done by at international level. He once said that “....he (Marks) was very much under-rated, not only by the public but also by the selectors. I felt he should have played far more cricket for England than his six Tests and 34 one-day internationals”.

He eventually captained Somerset after Roebuck decided, abruptly, that his tenure had run its course. He wasn't in the role long (1988-1989), but left his mark on Somerset's medium term future by bringing Chris Tavare, with whom he played at Oxford, and manager Jack Birkenshaw to the County. He also influenced the arrival of the prolific Jimmy Cook (who also, of course, went on to coach Hampshire).

His journalism career took him initially to *The Observer* in 1990 and then to *The Guardian*. In the last year or so, his articulate criticism of “The Hundred” has resonated with those who hold the values of the game dearly.

He first appeared on TMS in an emergency, during his playing days in December 1984, whilst on tour in India. In recent years, there has been an increasing turnover of commentators and summarisers but, thankfully, hitherto, he has survived, for which all TMS listeners are grateful. In his book *Squeezing The Orange*, Henry Blofeld wrote:

“He has an easy, relaxed voice....his comments are shrewd (that word again), but leavened with a light touch and a jolly sense of humour. When Vic is on (air) with Aggers I always think TMS is as good as it gets”.

Vic Marks' second volume of autobiography *Original Spin – Misadventures in Cricket* was published in the summer. (Coupled with the recent publication of the autobiographies of Fred Rumsey and Brian Rose, it has been an excellent year for Somerset cricket history). Our speaker's contribution is highly recommended.

The Society extends the warmest of welcomes to Vic Marks this evening.