

HAMPSHIRE CRICKET SOCIETY

Patrons: John Woodcock Shaun Udal James Tomlinson

NEWSLETTER No. 400 – MARCH 2021

COVID SUMMER 3

The Society's 400th Newsletter begins with some cheery news. The Government are permitting outdoor grass roots cricket to return in time for the start of the 2021 season from 29 March. Cricket followers will therefore be able to watch pre-season friendlies in club cricket and the entire cricket season. The opening fixtures in Southern Premier Cricket League and the Hampshire Cricket League will be played on Saturday 1 May.

Also, it was announced this week, that the BBC has agreed a new four-year deal, ie until the end of the 2024 domestic season, with the ECB to continue providing ball-by-ball commentary of every match in the County Championship, T20 Blast and the One-Day Cup. Those of us who listened to the radio last summer found it an enjoyable experience in the company of Kevan James of Radio Solent and his colleagues from other local radio stations. If rain intervened, we could find out what was happening elsewhere in the country. Cricket was usually being played somewhere.

Reading through the April Centenary edition of *The Cricketer* magazine, the optimism expressed by the Counties about the forthcoming season is striking. There are some ongoing financial issues, but some Counties made a profit in 2020, whilst others worked hard to minimise their losses. The government's furlough scheme was vital; some staff had to accept pay cuts and some non-playing staff were, unfortunately, made redundant as virtually all commercial activities, particularly entertainment, were severely curtailed, or ceased altogether. In some Counties, members agreed to donate their membership subscriptions.

Another common theme was that, with the cessation of Kolpak signings as a result of Brexit, Counties are investing heavily in their Academy schemes. One of the highlights of last season was the number of new young players not only making their first appearance, but contributing significantly in the Championship. The future of the game looks brighter than at any time for some years.

In terms of gaining admission to grounds, a series of pilot events are to be arranged in April with a view to opening grounds to limited audiences on 17 May. Attendances of up to 4,000 people or half of a ground's capacity, whichever is the lower, will be permitted in accordance with the government's roadmap, while larger stadiums will be allowed to welcome 25 per cent of capacity or 10,000 – whichever is the lower. One report has also stated that the ECB are in discussion with government about all drinks and meals being served to spectators in outside areas. Presumably, such arrangements will be trialled in the pilots, wherever they are staged. News on the latter issue is still awaited.

Unless, therefore, the matches concerned form part of the pilot, Hampshire's matches at the Ageas Bowl against Middlesex, Gloucestershire and Somerset will be devoid of spectators. In the period from 8 April, the opening of the Championship season, and 17 May, Hampshire will also play three away matches – at Leicester, The Oval and Lord's. Thus, there will be no spectators present in sixty per cent (6/10) of the group matches in the Championship.

A further two matches, after 17 May, against Leicestershire at the Ageas Bowl and Somerset at Taunton, may therefore be staged with some spectators present if the pilots are successful. The editor has been informed that Somerset will restrict admission to members only. This is entirely understandable.

Once people are released from captivity on 21 June, Hampshire will have two Championship matches to play, against Surrey at the Ageas Bowl and Gloucestershire at Cheltenham.

Just before the above date, the Ageas Bowl will stage the final of the World Test Championship between India and New Zealand. As the ground was selected on the basis of being a "bio-secure bubble", it is assumed that no spectators will attend the event. That the ground has been chosen is obviously a great honour for Hampshire.

The Vitality Blast is due to start on Wednesday 9 June. Hampshire are due to play seven matches – all away from home – between that date and 21 June. However, the matches will be vital sources of revenue for their opponents - (Kent (twice), Essex, Sussex, Middlesex, Surrey and Gloucestershire).

The two overriding factors from the season are, however, that spectators will be able to see, without any impediment, the Division Stage of the Championship, starting on 30 August. Also, the income which will derive from the much maligned The Hundred will be much more needed than originally envisaged.

MOHAMMAD ABBAS

Hampshire have signed Pakistan's right-arm medium-fast opening bowler, Mohammad Abbas, as their second overseas player for the forthcoming season. His accuracy is a byword and still makes him one of the world's most respected new ball bowlers. If there is any assistance for bowlers on early season pitches, he and Kyle Abbott will make a formidable pairing. He missed two recent home tests against South Africa, but he has otherwise been his country's first choice since his debut against the West Indies at Sabina Park, Kingston, in April 2017. He dismissed Kraigg Brathwaite with his second ball in test cricket. In his 23 tests to date, he has taken 84 wickets at the handsome average of 22.80, with best figures of five for 33 (10 for 95 match) against Australia in Abu Dhabi in October 2019. That match was a collector's piece. In their first innings, Pakistan were 57 for five but went on to win by the colossal margin of 373 runs.

Born in Sialkot on 10 March 1990, he made his first-class debut as an 18-year old in February 2009. His form was in – out for the next five seasons, but 61 wickets in 2015/16 and 71 wickets in only 10 matches in 2016/17 propelled him into the Pakistan squad.

He earned the plaudits for his outstanding performance against England at Lord's in May 2018 when he returned match figures of eight for 59 (in 31 overs), (4 – 13) and (4 – 36), as Pakistan recorded a nine wicket victory. The England players had problems laying bat on ball as he took full advantage of the overcast conditions in the first innings; he had to work slightly harder in the second, but crucially dismissed England's two highest scorers (Root 68 and Buttler 67) both leg before.

After the test series, he went on to plague second division batsmen for Leicestershire claiming 50 wickets (avge 17.72). He took five wickets in an innings on five occasions, including six for 48 against Kent at Grace Road, his best figures in county cricket. He was not so successful in 2019 when he took only 29 wickets. Richard Roe in Wisden wrote "that the nip and sharp movement had deserted him..... and his demeanour suggested fatigue was also a factor. He had been playing without a decent break for two years." Abbas commented, validly, that a reduced seam, the weather and the pitches made life more challenging.

He was due to play for Nottinghamshire last season, but Covid meant that his sole appearances were in the three tests against England, two of which were, of course, at the Ageas Bowl. He took two for 28 in bowler - friendly conditions in England's truncated innings in the first, but then remained wicketless in the face of Zak Crawley's unforgettable double-century in the second match.

He will not have played any first-class cricket since early January. Covid, though, still influences all. The Pakistan Premier League was curtailed a fortnight ago because of the pandemic. It must be hoped that he has eluded its attention. He should arrive fully refreshed.

A VIRTUAL WINTER

A year on from the initial lockdown and some part of daily lives have changed so much, and in many cases, perhaps for ever. The virtual world is upon us. The cashless society has almost become a reality. More and more goods are being ordered and purchased online. There has been a significant increase in the number of people working from home. Many are feeling the benefits of their daily walk. There is much else besides.

What has happened in the world of cricket societies? Andy Ray, our webmaster, has conscientiously kept members informed of zoom events to which people can log in, and view and listen to current cricketers, some of the greats of the past and authors of the plethora of excellent cricket books published in the last 12 months. Simon Hughes' World's Best Cricket Club (WBCC), Pitch Publishing and, more recently, The Cricket Society have marvellously reached out to the cricket community. In most weeks during the winter, members have received the opportunity to log into between one and three events a week. Only one, the WBCC, has made a charge

though the editor, as did others, joined The Cricket Society. The WBCC fee of £6 plus VAT, per month is a snip given the quality of speakers that Simon Hughes has been able to attract. Societies would not normally be able to either arrange or afford those who have made an appearance from both the men's and women's game. We really have been spoilt for choice. And if there have been counter attractions elsewhere, such as family and friends' meetings on zoom, and television, then there has always been the opportunity to catch up on what we have missed. The winter has flown by, and some of the adverse psychological effects of lockdown have been alleviated.

After a break, Pitch Publishing will be continuing their events for this summer's publications. The WBCC will continue with their Thursday evening events. Chris Woakes and David Gower are among those booked. The Cricket Society have stated that their future programme will include both "normal" and virtual meetings. The latter still currently have a programme of virtual weekly meetings until at least 20 April. This week, they held their annual MCC/Cricket Society Book of the Year Awards Evening for 2020. Normally, the meeting is held at Lord's. For the first time, there were joint winners: Duncan Hamilton's ***The Great Romantic: Cricket and the Golden Age of Neville Cardus***, and Christopher Sandford's ***The Final Innings: The Cricketers of Summer 1939***. The *Editor* reviewed Hamilton's book in Newsletter No. 381 – Summer 2019.

MIKE PROCTER and BARRY RICHARDS

For Hampshire supporters, the highlight of the rich mixture of meetings referred to above will have been the interview with Mike Procter and Barry Richards on 18 March. The event was a collaborative one arranged by the Mike Procter Foundation and The Cricket Society. The Foundation, which operates both in the UK and South Africa, is an important project "to enhance the lives of South Africa's most vulnerable citizens, using cricket and other sporting activities as a vehicle to improve self esteem, escape the hard realities of everyday life and provide an environment for children to be children". In the interview, conducted by Lungani Zama, who co-authored Procter's autobiography, he confirmed that the work was exacerbated by the Pandemic. The poorer communities suffered the most. However, through foodbox donations, the Foundation were able to provide six tons of food for the poor in South Africa.

The interview began by asking its two subjects about their view on the tests in Ahmedabad. Procter felt that host countries were free to prepare pitches to suit them but it looked as if India went over the top in the first test there. He also felt it was important to remember that England failed to take advantage of winning the toss. Richards' view was that the England batsmen did not use their feet enough.

They then talked about their season with Gloucestershire in 1965, when they were 18 year olds. They were well looked after. The County provided them with accommodation. They played in as many matches as possible in club and 2nd XI cricket. In colder weather than they were used to and a different ball which moved more, they had to adapt to new conditions and learn quickly. Gloucestershire were 2nd XI Champions that year; Procter headed the batting averages and Richards the bowling! They were very complimentary about their coach, Graham Wiltshire.

When overseas players were able to play county cricket, without prior residential qualification, Procter, a bona fide all-rounder was quickly snapped up by Gloucestershire. They were obtaining, in effect, two players for the price of one. Sussex chased Richards but Hampshire offered more. He was in fact, the latter's second choice. Hampshire were originally trying to recruit Clive Lloyd and he was on the verge of signing before Lancashire came calling. Procter was quickly accepted by the Gloucestershire players. Richards took time to win over his Hampshire teammates. They felt he was taking the place of an English player. He originally batted at four, and struggled, and it wasn't until he moved up to open the innings that he prospered and became accepted. (Editor's note: In his first match as an opener he scored a century in each innings at Northampton).

When asked about who was the most difficult bowler he faced, he gave an analytical response. It depended on the pitch: Derek Underwood on a broken wicket; Dennis Lillee on a quick track and Mike Hendrick on a green one posed the most problems for him.

The conversation moved on to their appearances in test cricket. Procter was selected for the final three tests against Australia in South Africa in 1966/67. He felt that his friend should have been selected but Richards was allegedly left out on disciplinary grounds, after an incident when he was refused admission to a night club. He later said that his appearances in four tests were a minor disappointment – compared to the tragic loss of a son and partner. Life has clearly been tough for him in recent years.

Both men felt that though South Africa were a strong team at the time of their test ban in 1970, they would have been even more formidable in 1972, when Vincent van der Bijl, the young Clive Rice and leg-spin bowler, Denys Hobson were on the scene. Richards went on to say, though, that playing against the West Indies of the late 70's would have been a challenge. Run scoring would have been difficult against four fast bowlers being rotated at thirteen overs an hour.

They felt the hardest cricket they played was in Kerry Packer's World Series. They always felt they were having to prove themselves because South Africa had been ostracised from the test arena. Barry went on to score an unbeaten 101 not out for the WSC World XI against WSC Australia at the SCG in the final in February 1979. His side required 224 to win and at one stage were 84 for four. However, he and Procky then added 91 for the fifth wicket. In partnership with Imran Khan, he guided the World XI to a five wicket victory. The game ended in acrimony as Ian Chappell deliberately bowled a no ball with the scores level; the abrasive Australian captain was miffed that Australia were going to lose and that World XI captain, Tony Greig, decided to move himself down the order. Rod Marsh immediately took Chappell to task. Understandably, Richards was dismissive in reconciling the standard of cricket in those WSC matches, which have never received any form of recognition in either first-class or test records, with the standard of cricket in the recent Afghanistan/Zimbabwe test series.

The pair also touched on Procter's four wickets in five balls in the Benson and Hedges Semi-Final at Southampton in 1977. He decided early on to switch to

bowling round the wicket, whereupon the ball started swinging prodigiously. Previously, from over the wicket there had been no swing at all. He bowled Gordon Greenidge and John Rice, and dismissed Richards and Jesty leg before. He then hit the pads of Nigel Cowley. Richards said it was the most plumb of the lbws, but umpire Tom Spencer felt he couldn't give another such decision! Cowley went on to make Hampshire's top score of 59. Procter thought, though, that the most important over he bowled was the penultimate one which was a maiden, when Hampshire needed eight to win with the last pair at the wicket. Andy Roberts was forced to chance his arm in the final over and was bowled by Brian Brain.

They concluded by touching upon the impact of social media, the fact that pitches did not produce a fair context between bat and ball, but that DRS has made the game more interesting. Of the current players who they enjoyed watching, Richards nominated AB de Villiers and Virat Kohli, and Procter selected Rishabh Pant, citing his outrageous ramp shot off James Anderson with the new ball in the final test at Ahmedabad earlier in the month.

It was a most nostalgic and enlightening event; the perfect accompaniment to lunch. Oh, what happy days! The two organisations hope to arrange a sequel towards the end of April.

MICHAEL BATES

At the WBCC evening on 18 March, Alex Hartley and Kate Cross, both members of England Women's International Squad, talked about their popular podcast. The Editor logged into their website and found they had interviewed Michael Bates in February.

Michael is now England Women's fielding and wicket-keeping coach and was then with the squad in New Zealand. He worked initially as their wicket-keeping coach, in which he did some work with Sarah Taylor, but expanded his role to include fielding. The two women had clearly researched his career very well. They covered his superb keeping in the Clydesdale Bank 40 Final at Lord's, especially his take off the final ball, a yorker, bowled by Kahir Ali. Bates, commenting that Kabir "wasn't slow" had stood up to the stumps for the whole of the final over and remained there for the last ball as he knew Warwickshire would otherwise try and steal a match winning single.

They weren't fully aware that he had some success with the best. They thought that he was simply a wicket-keeper. He said "he had his moments", which included a century against Yorkshire. He felt that had he been able to remain in the game for a couple of more years he would "have worked his batting out". Both women were, however, extremely complimentary about his batting for the fielding drills; they said he "always nails it".

It was gratifying, however, to learn that he has stayed in the game and is now working at international level. It was evident that Alex Hartley and Kate Cross held him in very high regard.