

HAMPSHIRE CRICKET SOCIETY

Patrons: Shaun Udal James Tomlinson Kevan James

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During the 1990s Mark Nicholas was a most supportive friend of the Society and has continued to keep abreast of our activities through receipt of the Newsletter as an honorary member. Memorably, he brought Malcolm Marshall to accompany him to our meeting at The Grange, Netley on 14 September 1998. Members twice voted him as their Player of the Season. We are delighted that he has accepted our invitation to celebrate the Society's 50th Anniversary this afternoon.

Only Lionel Tennyson and Desmond Eagar have captained Hampshire on more occasions than his 247 appearances in first-class cricket. During his eleven years as Captain from 1985 to 1995, he lead Hampshire to their first three Lords' Finals, as well a Sunday League title. Unfortunately, injury deprived him of an appearance in the second of those finals. He also skippered the County to victories over India in 1990 (Hampshire's first over a touring side since 1932) and the West Indies in a one-day game in 1995. He also came tantalisingly close on two occasions, in 1985 and 1993, to conquering the Australians.

He made telling contributions in the two finals in which he played. In the first, against Derbyshire in the Benson and Hedges Cup in 1989, he placed himself at short-leg, against match-winning bowler's Steve Jefferies' wishes. The ploy immediately brought the dismissal of Peter Bowler, and then the wicket of Bruce Roberts in the next over. The back of the Derbyshire innings was effectively broken.

His second in 1992, also in the Benson and Hedges Cup, was against Kent. First, he batted fluently as the Hampshire innings was played out in very poor light and weather on the Saturday. On the next day, he finally closed the door on Kent's competitive reply by taking a wonderful catch, high and wide to his left at mid-off to dismiss the increasingly threatening Matthew Fleming.

Given the presence of Marshall, Tim Tremlett, Cardigan Connor, Raj Maru, and, latterly, Shaun Udal, as well as arguably the most entertaining and consistent batting line-up in the County's history, it was surprising that Hampshire never won the County Championship in his

years in charge. As it was, they finished second in 1985, after leading at the end of August, and third in 1990.

He also captained England reserve sides to Sri Lanka in 1985/86 and Zimbabwe in 1989/90 and missed captaining England by a whisker against the West Indies in 1988.

He was an almost casual stroke-maker who was particularly strong on the leg side. Two centuries against the Australians were a benchmark of his quality. Hundreds versus all the Counties except Middlesex and Warwickshire demonstrated his adaptability. He always performed with panache and style, both as a batsman and a leader, and he brought these qualities to bear in his later career as a television commentator and anchorman, and writer.

His autobiography *A Beautiful Game-My love affair with cricket* is an indispensable read on what was a golden age of Hampshire cricket, which remains fondly remembered. His pen pictures of the members of the side during that period are invaluable to historians. The paperback version of the book was published fairly recently and is highly recommended.

In 2023 he was nominated by Stephen Fry to replace him as President of the MCC, where he brought his natural diplomatic skills to bear during his year in office.

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