HAMPSHIRE CRICKET SOCIETY

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Alan Gibson on Barry Richards: *They must have felt like honest Trojan soldiers competing with Achilles, mortals struggling with the god-like.*

The Society are privileged to welcome Barry Richards to this afternoon's special meeting. When a member of the Committee mentioned that he never saw him bat, as he was working elsewhere in the country at the time, the editor decided that he would do his best to illustrate just what he had missed. I hope the words in this Newsletter (many of which were written 40 years ago) will help fill the void, and resonate with those who were fortunate to see him at the wicket.

Many of my generation still regard Barry Richards as the finest batsman they have seen, or are ever likely to see. He was a genius of rare quality, a batsman who could cut, late, from outside his leg stump to fine third man, glance from outside off stump to the finest of long legs, who would dance down the wicket to bowlers of genuine pace and hit them straight, or back away to the leg side to any bowler and hit him anywhere on the off side. He remains, indisputably, the best player of spin bowling the editor has ever seen. Remember that he was an opening batsman, who generally have some fallibility against spin. He seemed to stand above the ball on its arrival with inordinate time to spare. The ramp and scoop were still years from being invented; his contemporary, Mushtaq Mohammed was pioneering the reverse sweep. But, because of the excellence of his technique, which was founded on classical lines, he did not need to depart too far from the conventional.

His technique was founded on classic lines. He stood sideways on, and remained still until the ball was halfway through the air on its way to him. Hence he hit the ball late, which in turn, led to a wondrous sense of timing. He picked up his bat straight and, normally hit through the line. He possessed all the shots; his off and cover driving were resplendent and unsurpassed; he played superbly off his legs. He made it look so easy. Tony Lewis once observed that he could bat with a walking stick. A mere turn of the wrists and the ball was away with just enough speed to beat the field. He was elegance personified.

More than any other batsman he could drive crowds wild with hysteria through the sheer cheek and improvisation of his stroke play. Even experienced observers like John Arlott were heard to utter, "Did you see that?" or "Oh my word!" When he was on song he seemed to set himself a series of objectives, each more outrageous than the last, and more often than not he was dismissed only when he decided he had had enough.

How great a batsman was he? Some commentators have suggested that he cannot be placed in the highest bracket because he never faced the continual barrage of fast bowling with which Test players have had to contend during his era. However,

that view was very firmly dispelled by his performances in the cauldron of Kerry Packer's World Series Cricket, when he was past his best, but still averaged 79. His record shows that he overcame every hurdle – and usually at the first time of asking. He scored 2,000 runs in his first season in county cricket (after famously failing to get off the mark in his first innings), 1,500 runs (including 300 in a day) in his only Australian season in first-class cricket, and scored 500 runs in his only Test series (incorporating one of the most masterful centuries ever seen in Test cricket). He set any number of records in South African domestic cricket.

For Hampshire, over a ten-year career, he averaged 50.50 in first-class cricket. No man who batted in so many games has matched that rate. He first batted in the middle-order, but when he moved up to open, he immediately struck a century in each innings at Northampton. When his parents came to visit him in 1976, he promised each that he would score hundreds for them both in the match against Kent at the County Ground. He duly delivered on his pledge; one on Saturday and the other on Monday!! He scored one hundred runs before lunch on no fewer than eight occasions. He also headed the Hampshire averages in each season from 1968 to 1976.

He carried his bat three times. In 1969, he made an unbeaten 127 out of 192 against Northants at Bournemouth; the next highest individual score was 17. At Trent Bridge in 1974, he registered 225 out of 344. The two Notts innings just exceeded his tally (98 and 145). Finally, against Middlesex at Southampton a year later, he battled on a raging turner against Fred Titmus and Phil Edmonds to 71 out of 179. He had top-scored with 59 in the first innings. It was a performance that was vividly remembered by Mike Brearley in the July edition of *The Cricketer.*

There were many other memorable innings, none more so than that against Northants at Southampton in 1973. It was a duel in the sun against that supreme artist Bishan Bedi, on a dust bowl, and amounted to only 37 not out. Each man held the outcome of the Championship in their own hands and it was Richards who eventually prevailed. Hampshire were crowned County Champions in the following week. Earlier that summer he made his highest score for the County - a headlong 240 in only four and a half hours against Warwickshire at Coventry.

Two years later, he produced a series of inventive, commanding innings in the run-in to the County's winning of the John Player League in 1975. That sequence, which included two centuries in less than 25 overs, were broadcast on BBC television, with whom he seemed to possess an affinity for scoring memorable hundreds.

He was an outstanding slip fielder. The editor can never remember him dropping any chances but the odds are that a few must have eluded him. He held 264 catches in 204 matches. He was also a talented off-spin bowler with a best of 7 for 63 against the Rest of the World at Bournemouth in 1968.

If any member would like to know more about Barry Richards' life and career, then the editor recommends his biography, *Sundial In The Shade,* written by Andrew Murtagh, who will accompany him, this afternoon.

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