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ISSUE 79

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EDITOR'S LETTER

WISDEN CRICKET MONTHLY

All good things...

England's meek departure from last month's T20 World Cup jarred on a number of levels, with their dismantling by India coming relatively low down on the list. On that, by the way, they probably had it coming; the team has stagnated, certain players have not kicked on, while a few others, not least Jos Buttler, seemed oddly listless, almost as if the relentlessness of their rarefied lives – beholden as they are to deathly soul-emptying schedules and the contractual expectation to keep climbing ever higher because sport's industrial complex demands that the next bit be bigger and more magnificent than the last bit – just caught up with them and laid them out.

Buttler just looked knackered and bored by the end of it. But perhaps that's projection on my part. The event over here in England failed to catch fire; anecdotally, my mates' cricket WhatsApp group was pretty quiet, at least until the Test squad was announced, when, bang on cue, it cranked up again.



Just two years ago he was the grinning face of the rambunctious Stokesian era, a player irrepressibly reborn under an enlightened new approach embarking on a wild run of form which will go down in folklore

No cricketer energises the fingers of our little digital echo chamber quite like Jonny Bairstow, the one-man culture war of last summer's Ashes. He's always elicited strong opinions. He is one of those cricketers for whom it's impossible to be indifferent. Just two years ago he was the grinning face of the rambunctious Stokesian era, a player irrepressibly reborn under an enlightened new approach embarking on a wild run of form which will go down in folklore. For two months and five Tests against New Zealand (twice), India (once) and South Africa (twice) he was Bradman and Botham all at once, 664 runs at 94.8 struck at night on a run-a-ball.

Thereafter the story turned in on itself: a disastrous accident on a golf course, resulting in a broken leg in three separate places which led to him fearing he might never walk again, ruled him out for a whole winter and when he returned to active cricket just in time for the Ashes he was told he'd be keeping wicket.





The purists were aghast. The Ben Foakes appreciation society picketed outside Lord's. Everywhere was uproar. In the midst of it, Bairstow caught a couple of good ones, and dropped a few bad ones. The ludicrous stumping kerfuffle at Lord's – when he wandered out of his crease, saw his stumps disturbed, and everyone (except for the Australians) lost all sense of perspective – seemed to encapsulate the chaos that suddenly threatened to engulf him. That he came back hard in that series, making runs in the final two Tests, was testament to his deep reserves of willpower, which have often sustained him through a truncated, shapeshifting 100-Test career. He brought up the gallon – just the 18th England player to do it – in India, commemorating the feat with a couple of punchy if insufficient cameos as part of a series in which he failed to reach 40 from 10 attempts. From there he staggered on through

an IPL season and then to a little more T20 cricket. Twice a world champion, he was one of Buttler's bankers. It didn't work out that way. His flat-footed slap-waft to an Axar Patel arm ball in the semi-final spoke of a man whose heart was saying one thing and his mind something else.

I'm writing this a few days out from Lord's and the resumption of the Test summer (welcome back, old friend etc). The Jimmy carnival is being rigged up as we speak. The pre-event interviews and weepy montage packages will be recorded. The ceremonies will be carefully orchestrated for maximum feels. Finally Anderson will be brought out on a sedan chair, placed at the top of his mark, and left to roll in on a conspicuously green track one last time. In return, a few West Indian kids, facing him for the first time on a ground they've never seen before, will compliantly leave a couple of straight ones that angle down the slope. It will be quasi-religious, over the top and entirely irresistible. It will be remarked upon, once more with feeling, that he has received the send-off he 'so richly deserves'.

And all the while Bairstow will be looking on from somewhere, pleased for his mates yet enraged by the fates. It may well be that his time as an England cricketer is up. If so, it will be hard to argue with Rob Key's assertion that two years into the Stokes-McCullum project it felt like the time was right to shake things up. The new squad is forward-thinking and clearly carved out with a view to an Ashes scrap in 18 months. The future stops for no man, not even one as cussed, bloody-minded and resilient as Jonny Bairstow. Sometimes maligned, often misunderstood, the England team will be a little duller, a little less intense and unpredictable, for his absence. He will be missed.

Welcome to issue 79 of *Wisden Cricket Monthly*. There's always an extra frisson to a West Indies tour and this one is no different. Memories of the Gabba are still fresh enough for misty-eyed nostalgists to hope, perhaps against hope, that something magical may yet happen. Our coverage of the series and the rivalry itself kicks off on page 48. Look out in particular for Daniel Norcross, turning his hand to a cracking account of the 1984 Blackwash in conversation with Graeme Fowler, who opened that summer and lived to tell the tale.

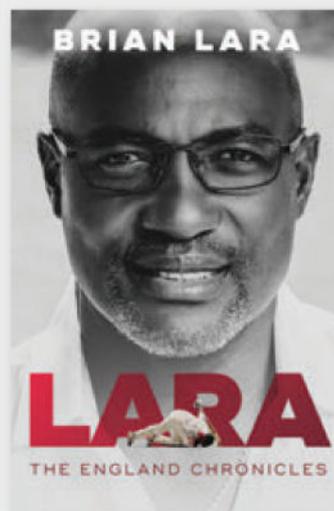
Enjoy the magazine.

PHIL WALKER
 EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

EDITOR'S LIST

LARA: THE ENGLAND CHRONICLES

I promise this is the only time I'll mention it (hmm), but Brian Lara's autobiography, co-written with me, is out now. It's been an interesting few months. Many have asked me what he's like, to which I might talk about the singular focus, or the wild mercury flashes; or perhaps the vampiric approach to sleep, or the off-the-cuff gift for narrative structure, and how it all seemed to spool out from a mind as restless as it's instinctively creative. Somewhere along the line I gained a little sense of what it might have been like to sit on your bat at the non-striker's when he was having one of *those* days. You can order a copy from the *Nightwatchman* website, and should you happen to be in or around London, we're doing a signing and a Q&A at Hatchards bookshop in Piccadilly on July 15. And do give the *Wisden Cricket Weekly* podcast a listen, the one with BCL. You can get it wherever you get your podcasts.



Timed to perfection

Introducing the Captain Cook High-Tech Ceramic x England Cricket, Rado's new limited-edition watch, launched in partnership with the ECB

In 2023, Rado announced a proud partnership with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), which is responsible for developing and supporting all levels of this great game. In celebration of its partnership with the sport's national governing body in England and Wales, the innovative Swiss watch brand has created the Rado Captain Cook High-Tech Ceramic x England Cricket.

Rado is excited to share the ECB's goal of 'Inspiring Generations' and to introduce a timepiece – in an edition limited to 150 pieces – that is a testimony to one of the world's greatest games.

Cricket has passionate fans across England and Wales, who enthusiastically demonstrate their lifelong loyalty to their favourite teams at every level. The Rado Captain Cook High-Tech Ceramic x England Cricket was created with these aficionados in mind.

The timepiece is a jaw-dropping expression of all the things that make Rado one of the world's most admired brands. It starts with the 43 mm monobloc case crafted from matt navy blue high-tech ceramic, the brand's signature material. The polished navy blue high-tech ceramic rotating bezel offers a bold contrast with its white high-tech ceramic insert with silver metallisation markers and a triangle at 12 o'clock.

The watch features a circular brushed navy blue-coloured PVD-coated titanium case back-fitted with a sapphire crystal. A special engraving on the case back includes the words 'LIMITED EDITION, No. XXX/150', a confirmation of the series size. On the sapphire crystal case back are the specially metallised words, 'Official Timing Partner', along with the ECB logo. The watch has a matt navy blue high-tech ceramic screw-down crown.

On display through the tinted sapphire crystal is a matt blue dial whose brushed rhodium-coloured applied indexes are filled with Super-LumiNova®. Rado's moving anchor symbol is also rhodium-coloured and is set against a synthetic ruby backplate. The white printed Rado and Captain Cook logos complete the watch's striking 'face'.

Powering this extraordinary timepiece is the Rado calibre R808, equipped with an antimagnetic Nivachron™ hairspring, which has been adjusted in five positions. This automatic movement also contributes to the watch's aesthetic allure: the dial side has nickel-colour horizontal brush decoration. There is also a nickel brushed-colour centre wheel bridge, and the back side of the movement continues the theme with its striking nickel colouring. The watch is water resistant to 30 bar / 300 meters.

The Captain Cook High-Tech Ceramic x England Cricket is presented on a matt navy blue rubber strap with a matt navy blue high-tech ceramic cover with brushed pushers. Its comfortable fit is ensured by an extendable stainless steel folding clasp. The timepiece is delivered in special packaging with a limited-edition certificate confirming that this is a very special Rado indeed.

As cricket's popularity continues to grow, Rado is thrilled to have the opportunity to help drive the ECB's goal of 'Inspiring Generations', and the Captain Cook High-Tech Ceramic x England Cricket is a bold statement of support from the ECB's first-ever Official Timing Partner.



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The month in cricket

No.1

PHOTO BY ROBERT CIANFLONE



Men's T20 World Cup final

Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, Barbados, June 29

India 176-7 (Kohli 76, Patel 47, Dube 27; Maharaj 2-23, Nortje 2-26) **v South Africa 169-8** (Klaassen 52, de Kock 39, Stubbs 31; Pandya 3-20, Bumrah 2-18, Arshdeep 2-20)
India won by 7 runs

Having already castled Reeza Hendricks in his opening burst with a peach of an outswinger that pegged back the opener's off stump, Jasprit Bumrah makes a decisive intervention in the 18th over, cleaning up Marco Jansen with a reverse-swinging nip-backer that dislodges the leg bail with laser precision.

Having appeared on course for victory, South Africa can't recover from the setback, slipping to a seven-run defeat as Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli sign off their T20I careers with a trophy that Rohit describes as his "greatest achievement".

Post-match, India's skipper pays tribute to the "magic" of Bumrah. "Whatever he wants to do, he executes it to perfection. Jasprit Bumrah is a class act."

International game reaps rewards from India's long-awaited triumph

After a T20 World Cup final of “scarcely conceivable drama” in Barbados, Andrew Miller argues we should all be thankful that India finally got over the line



ANDREW MILLER

Wisden Cricket Monthly columnist, UK editor of *ESPNcricinfo* and former editor of *The Cricketer*
● @miller_cricket

Last month, the World Cricketers' Association (formerly FICA) released a new poll which found that the T20 World Cup will soon be considered the most sought-after trophy in international cricket. Whereas in 2019, 85 per cent of respondents considered the 50-over version to be the pinnacle, that figure had dipped to a mere 50 per cent in 2024, with the numbers even more starkly skewed among under-26s.

India's cricketers are barred from joining players' associations, and so they did not contribute to the survey, but it's hard to imagine they'd have offered any redress to

those findings after the events of the past two ICC global tournaments. If the 50-over World Cup was dead to India from about the mid-point of Australia's buzzkill run-chase in Ahmedabad, then the T20 final will be alive in the nation's collective imagination for evermore, after a victory of scarcely conceivable drama in Barbados.



It was a final that tugged on the heartstrings, no matter which narrative thread you pulled. But, with apologies to the devastated South Africans, whose collapse over the final five overs was as crushing as anything they've endured in a benighted World Cup history, the pragmatic response to India's triumph should be relief. Those who still value the international game should be glad that the world's most powerful team has finally broken its decade-long trophy drought, because the ramifications of another failure might not have been healthy for the sport.

It's important at this point to separate the human stories from the political, because India's players are not only some of the best in the world across formats, but the individual plot-lines on display in the final were among the most compelling you could ever hope to witness. No one could fail to be moved by Hardik Pandya's vindication after the IPL from hell, while Jasprit Bumrah's coronation as the greatest fast bowler of modern times came after one of the most stunning overs of his career.

And that's before we consider the T20I retirements of two of the nation's all-time greats: Virat Kohli, the last remaining link to the mighty World Cup-winning team of 2011, and Rohit Sharma, whose big break came as part of the rookie squad that won the inaugural staging of the (then) World T20, way back in 2007.

Their glories deserve to resonate, just as Narendra Modi's shameless carpet-bagging at the 2023 final deserved to end in mockery, as he thrust the 50-over World Cup at Pat Cummins in front of an empty stadium bearing his name. But that experience, too, confirms just how interwoven cricket and politics have become in the modern Indian state, and therefore how important it is that the pressure on the sport is allowed sweet release every once in a while.

“Cry harder”, I think would be the Twitter retort, for none of this is exactly a new phenomenon. International cricket has always been ruled by self-interested overlords – in fact, the past masters, Marylebone Cricket Club, have spent the past week redefining their own soft power through their inaugural

LEFT: Relief for Rohit Sharma after India edge past South Africa at the Kensington Oval



PHOTO BY CHANDAN KHANNA

Those who still value the international game should be glad that the world's most powerful team has finally broken its decade-long trophy drought, because the ramifications of another failure might not have been healthy for the sport

World Cricket Connects symposium at Lord's. But it's worth considering what might have been at stake in this tournament had India not got its way in the end. For it was at another Caribbean World Cup, before even Rohit's debut, that the modern terms of ICC engagement were established – thanks to India's catastrophic group-stage elimination in 2007 that rendered the rest of that campaign a ratings lame-duck.

Instead of India versus Pakistan in the Super Eight, that year's marquee clash became Bangladesh versus Ireland, and from that moment onwards, the dice were loaded against the smaller nations, most particularly at the consecutive 10-team World Cups that the 50-over version has become.

Until, that is, the 20-team event that has just taken place. Yes, there were some grumblings about the TV-tailored start times in the Caribbean, as well as India's advance knowledge that their semi-final would be in Guyana, but these concessions to their financial might were a small price to pay for a tournament which featured just about the right mix of shock factor and sure bet.

Between the USA's defeat of Pakistan and Afghanistan's progression to the semi-finals, there was enough upheaval to satisfy the thirst for sporting novelty, but even when those campaigns fizzled, there was still sufficient quality elsewhere in the draw to prevent the tournament from fusing.

The one non-negotiable, however, would have been India's early exit, and as Pakistan, England and Australia

discovered to varying degrees in their own campaigns, a combination of capricious parkland pitches, poor weather and net run-rate issues could have left them more vulnerable than at any ICC event since 2007.

Instead, it required the first unbeaten campaign in T20 World Cup history to guard against such a mishap, and while that's hardly a unique achievement in ordinary sporting tournaments, it was an uncharacteristically laissez-faire approach for an ICC event to take. India's glory has probably spared the likes of Canada, Uganda and Papua New Guinea from being cast back out of these global jamborees, for fear that their big days out may prove to be too damaging to the bottom line.

Perhaps that paints too rapacious a picture of India's cricket machine. And yet, it's worth revisiting the circumstances of that inaugural T20 World Cup in 2007 – a tournament that was conceived, almost on the hoof, as an ICC apology for the dross that had preceded it, but which India, initially, had absolutely no interest in endorsing. After two weeks of enticing competition, however, MS Dhoni's scratch side lifted the trophy in another final for the ages in Johannesburg, and the die was cast for a revolution.

Whether or not you welcomed that revolution is neither here nor there. Without India, there is no global game. It doesn't hurt for the sport's paymasters to feel the joy from time to time. ■

ABOVE: Virat Kohli leads the celebrations after India's nail-biting World Cup final victory

Team of the Month

Jo Harman picks a team of the month's standout performers, including a trio from the Indian side which ended their 13-year wait for a World Cup trophy



1. Rohit Sharma

India

"I wanted this badly," said Rohit after retiring from T20 international cricket following India's World Cup triumph in the Caribbean. He bows out as the format's leading run-scorer and centurion, his T20I career bookended by the World Cup successes of 2007 and 2024. India's skipper led from the front in his swansong, finishing the tournament as the second-highest run-scorer (257 at a strike rate of 157) and notching three half-centuries including a sumptuous 92 against Australia followed by a 39-ball 57 to set the platform for his team's semi-final thumping of England.

2. Rahmanullah Gurbaz (wk)

Afghanistan

Only Gurbaz managed more World Cup runs than Rohit, the flamboyant opener playing a pivotal role in Afghanistan's historic run to the semi-finals. Opening the tournament with 76 and 80 against Uganda and New Zealand respectively, he demonstrated his developing maturity with a patiently compiled 60 from 49 balls to set up his country's famous victory over Australia and then scrapped his way to 43 from 55 against Bangladesh on a tricky surface in Kingstown to confirm his side's place in the last four.

3. Rishi Patel

Leicestershire

Having taken his game to new heights against the red ball, the Foxes strokemaker is now showing his class in the shorter format, topping the Blast run-scoring charts after eight matches. Patel hit a brilliant hundred in a thrilling tie at Northampton, making 104 from 45 balls to follow up his maiden T20 ton last summer, and has shown impressive consistency: he passed 30 in seven of his first eight Blast knocks this season, all while striking at 150-plus.



Team selected based on performances from May 28, 2024 to June 29, 2024

4. Michael Pepper
Essex

Pepper was the other standout batter in the first phase of the Blast group stage, scoring his maiden T20 hundred – 101 from 44 balls – as the Eagles chased down 207 against Middlesex at Chelmsford. At 26, the sparky keeper-batter’s career has been a slow-burner but he’s become a key player for Essex across all formats this summer and followed up that milestone with half-centuries versus Sussex and Kent.

5. Sahil Chauhan
Estonia

June 18, 2024 will stick in the mind of the Estonian right-hander. Chauhan

began the day by registering a golden duck in his country’s three-wicket victory over Cyprus, then, a few hours later, against the same opposition, he slammed the fastest ever T20 century, from 30 balls. Having broken Chris Gayle’s record which had stood since 2013, the 32-year-old finished unbeaten on 144 from 41 deliveries at the Happy Valley Ground in Episkopi, hitting 18 sixes, a T20I record. “Privileged to witness this innings and its precision execution,” posted Estonia coach Richard Cox. “18 sixes and let me tell you some of them were 100m plus – unbelievable!”

6. Kathryn Bryce
The Blaze

Selected in our XI last month following her heroics in helping Scotland qualify for their first women’s T20 World Cup, Bryce retains her place after inspiring The Blaze to their maiden trophy. The 26-year-old was the standout performer in the Charlotte Edwards Cup, comfortably topping the run-scoring charts with 478 at an average of 43.45 and picking up 10 wickets. Fittingly, she was Player of the Match in the final, steering the Nottingham-based outfit to victory over South East Stars at Derby, making 62 from 45 balls and sharing a match-defining partnership with her younger sister, Sarah.

7. Louis Kimber
Leicestershire

The Leicestershire right-hander played one of the most remarkable innings in County Championship history in his side’s helter-skelter encounter with Sussex at Hove, almost singlehandedly dragging his side to victory with a record-breaking double-century. For full details of Kimber’s staggering knock, turn to page 38.

8. Jasprit Bumrah
India

India’s kingpin makes our XI for the third time in the space of five months after a stellar T20 World Cup in which he was named Player of the Tournament. Bumrah’s 15 wickets

came at a ludicrous average of 8.26, while his economy rate across the competition was just a touch over 4. When it came to crunch time, with South Africa needing 30 from 30 balls and India seemingly sliding towards another World Cup final defeat, he conceded just four runs from the 16th to crank up the pressure. He returned to bowl the 18th, casting Marco Jansen with a jaffa and conceding just two singles in a tournament-defining over. Arguably the greatest white-ball bowler the game has seen.

9. Fazalhaq Farooqi
Afghanistan

The left-arm seamer equalled the record for the most wickets taken in a single T20 World Cup, picking up 17 to lead the charge for Afghanistan. Eight of those came against fragile Ugandan and PNG batting line-ups, but he showed he can mix it with the best by taking 4-17 in the crucial win over New Zealand and 3-33 versus India. Known for their top-class spinners, Afghanistan now have a fast bowler worthy of that tag.

10. Arshdeep Singh
India

The 25-year-old left-arm seamer has taken 79 wickets in 52 T20Is since making his debut in 2022 and he matched Farooqi’s record-equalling tally of 17 World Cup scalps after taking the key wickets of Quinton de Kock and Aiden Markram in the final. Operating in Bumrah’s slipstream, Arshdeep took two or more wickets in six of his eight appearances in the tournament and consistently made crucial early breakthroughs.

11. Kirstie Gordon
The Blaze

The Scotland-born spinner was in inspired form throughout her team’s triumphant Charlotte Edwards Cup campaign, taking 22 wickets in 12 matches – including a career-best haul of 5-12 against Thunder – and captaining Blaze to 11 wins from 12. Five years since her last England appearance, the 26-year-old left-armer must be in contention for a recall. ■

Defused and confused

Once the crown jewel of the domestic white-ball calendar, it seems the Blast is being set up to fail after years of neglect, writes Mark Ramprakash



**MARK
RAMPRAKASH**

Former England batter and
current Middlesex batting coach
● @MarkRamprakash

“We’re going to bowl first, because I haven’t got a clue what’s going to happen.” Adam Hoolioake, our captain at Surrey, summed up what we were all thinking on the opening night of the Twenty20 Cup back in 2003. We’d had hardly any preparation and didn’t really know how we were going to play. We just rocked up on the day and went with the flow.

There was a bit of scepticism from some players, and traditionalists had reservations about how the competition would be incorporated into the domestic schedule, but for the most part the tournament was embraced. There were only five group matches in that first season – they didn’t over-egg the pudding, as they subsequently have done. It was a nice distraction from first-class cricket but not overly so. It was fresh and exciting and big crowds turned up to watch, including lots of kids.

At Surrey we were fortunate to have powerful strokemarkers like Ali Brown and Hoolioake, and canny bowlers who would vary their pace, such as Azhar Mahmood. We had extroverts who enjoyed the big stage and the dynamism of T20. The team quickly adapted to the new format, winning the competition in its first year.

I played another seven seasons of T20 and saw the competition evolve. It became much longer – by 2008, teams were playing 10 group games; by 2010, it had risen to 16 – and players were much savvier about the format.

Personally, I regarded the 50-over cup final at Lord’s as the premier limited-overs competition – it used to be such a big day, a bit like an FA Cup final – but increasingly it was T20 Finals Day that players wanted to be part of. They absolutely loved it, and it became the crown jewel of the domestic calendar.

Fast forward to 2024, and the landscape looks very different. With The Hundred dominating the heart of summer, the Blast has been forced to the margins, beginning at the end of May and not finishing until September 14. The six-week gap between the group

stage finishing and the quarter-finals starting is ludicrous – for the tournament to build any momentum, it needs to be packaged into a much smaller window with Finals Day taking place before The Hundred begins.

The counties understandably want to elongate the tournament to maximise income through ticket sales, but 14 group games is too many and a more compact Blast would be more attractive to overseas stars and avoid a clash with Major League Cricket in the US, which threatens to lure away our top domestic players.

The ECB talk about ‘Super September’, but in the case of the Blast it’s just not. Finals Day takes place in the middle of England’s T20I series against Australia, reducing player availability and stealing the spotlight.

In hindsight, the writing was on the wall when Colin Graves, the ECB’s then chair, described the Blast as a “mediocre” competition in 2016. Given his position, it was an extraordinary statement to make. Graves is a very commercially focused individual and it seems now that he was preparing the ground for the new competition they wanted to shoehorn into the domestic structure.

Prior to The Hundred, 93 per cent of the ECB’s income was generated by the national team. It’s therefore understandable that they wanted to

BELOW: Surrey skipper Adam Hoolioake runs out Warwickshire’s Neil Smith in the inaugural Twenty20 Cup final in 2003





PHOTO BY HARRY TRUMP



In hindsight, the writing was on the wall when Colin Graves, the ECB's then chair, described the Blast as a “mediocre” competition in 2016. Given his position, it was an extraordinary statement to make

create a new revenue stream, but the Blast has been relegated to a secondary position as a result, becoming The Hundred's poorer relation, and I'm sad that the game's governing body has taken actions which are detrimental to its success. The number of spectators at Blast matches had increased for three consecutive years before the arrival of The Hundred. With a tenth of the investment that The Hundred has received, the Blast could have been greatly improved and given a more prominent platform.

It feels like the Blast is being set up to fail and it would seem there are people at the ECB who would be quite happy to see it wither away, which is a great shame.

Encouragingly, from speaking to players and coaches on the county circuit, the Blast still means a great deal to many of them. A lot of counties view it as the number one trophy, and that's reflected in the time dedicated to white-ball skills over the winter and where their resources are spent. The planning and preparation that goes into the tournament is extensive, and there is a collective agenda at clubs to try and win the trophy.

An individual agenda has also developed alongside that. I've seen examples of particularly poor batting across the competition this year, with some players hiding behind this attitude of 'go hard or go home'. There are players seeking out franchise deals who are looking to score runs as quickly as they can to boost their strike rate, which at times is actually detrimental to what their team requires on the day.

A statement performance can now land someone a life-changing contract with an overseas franchise. Understandably, priorities have shifted. But in county cricket we play on a lot of different surfaces and the best players adapt to the conditions in front of them. I've not really seen much adaptation in the Blast this summer. It's often a case of 'all or nothing', using the excuse that it's the 'brand of cricket' they want to play.

The Blast remains a highly competitive tournament, and players are desperate to do well in it. But can it live amicably alongside The Hundred, which has brought a huge boost to the women's game and put cricket back on the BBC? Is there even a will for it to do so? Fans will judge that not by the ECB's words, but by their actions. ■

ABOVE: Lewis Gregory's Somerset side celebrate winning the 2023 T20 Blast final at Edgbaston last July

County umpires face 'trial by social media'

The livestreaming of county cricket has brought many benefits, but it has put unreasonable scrutiny and expectation on domestic umpires, writes Yas Rana



YAS RANA

Host of the *Wisden Cricket Weekly* podcast
● @Yas_Wisden

'Adjudged' is a loaded word in the world of county cricket social media. At face value its innocuous enough, but when used by official county accounts, its meaning is clear: "Our player has received a stinker from the umpire." Sometimes, there's not even an attempt at subtlety. Back in 2022, one county tweeted that their opener could "consider himself incredibly unlucky as he is adjudged lbw for 54". The public undermining of domestic umpires on official channels has become widespread.

The Laws clearly state that "showing dissent at an umpire's decision" constitutes a Level One offence that could potentially lead to a side incurring a five-run penalty. If players show any form of a dissent, there are guidelines in place for how they are dealt with. County social media accounts, however, can and do openly question umpiring decisions to their followers – often numbering more than 100,000 – with no obvious repercussions.

Open dissent is likely to have consequences, not just in the professional game but trickling down to recreational level, too. Some counties have taken steps to censor their social media output, but others are not so stringent. Since the start of the 2023 season, seven counties – Kent, Surrey, Yorkshire, Middlesex, Essex, Derbyshire and Durham – have refrained from using 'adjudged' to describe the fall of a wicket on their channels. Others are more liberal in their editorial practices. One now-deleted tweet from a county openly criticising a decision earlier this year has been used privately as an example of the kind of dissent the ECB want stamped out.

"We want the game played with respect," says Hamish Grant, the ECB's professional umpires' manager. "We've been doing a lot of work with the counties to try and help build that education and just help them get the buy-in for how we want cricket to be played.

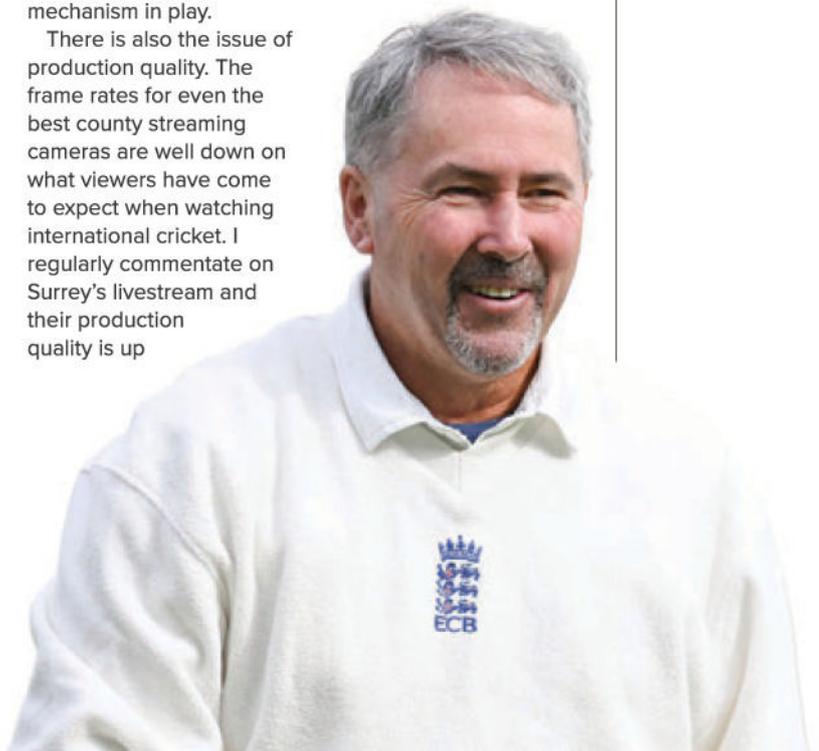
"It's a world of high-performance sport. We know we make mistakes and we can't hide from that, but there needs to be a level of fairness. There's still going to be

some errors in there but our elite umpires are getting 90-plus per cent of their decisions correct. We can't expect that of our recreational umpires, and therefore recreational players can't expect that [of umpires]. If we set the [wrong] tone across the whole game that's not ideal. That level of respect needs to be there from players at The Oval on a Friday night as well as on a Sunday morning in the park."

Part of the issue in county cricket is that umpires can be scrutinised through the livestream, giving fans the opportunity to form views on individual decisions, but there is no safety net in the form of the decision review system. In international cricket, if there is an umpiring mistake, players, fans and social media accounts move on because technology generally intervenes and ensures that the correct decision is made. In the domestic game, there is no corrective mechanism in play.

There is also the issue of production quality. The frame rates for even the best county streaming cameras are well down on what viewers have come to expect when watching international cricket. I regularly commentate on Surrey's livestream and their production quality is up

BELOW: Richard Illingworth, the ICC Umpire of the Year for 2023, doesn't have the help of DRS when he officiates in county cricket





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We know we make mistakes and we can't hide from that, but there needs to be a level of fairness. Our elite umpires are getting 90-plus per cent of their decisions correct

Hamish Grant, the ECB's professional umpires' manager

there with the best in the country. They're able to show slow-motion replays from various angles in the immediate aftermath of any appeal. But even with that level of production quality, it is extremely difficult to draw firm conclusions on any individual umpiring decision given the absence of the technology we're used to seeing in the international game, yet people are quick to judge calls with an unreasonable degree of certainty.

Even with the use of iHawk, the Go-Pro cameras that umpires now wear to help provide ball-tracking data on players to the ECB, DRS on non-televised county games is not currently realistic given the frame rates and number of cameras that are generally used.

Ultimately, county cricket viewers need to reconsider their expectations of what they can determine from

streams. "The danger is that you end up with a sort of trial by social media, which is just not fair," adds Grant. "There was a really good example last year in one of the games where Marnus Labuschagne was given not out lbw. And you look at the livestream fixed camera, and it looks absolutely stone-dead – the comments that came in on social media were not particularly positive towards the umpire. But what that obviously didn't show was everybody in the ground heard the big inside edge."

Umpiring is one of the hardest and most important jobs in the game. Pre-DRS, their mistakes were an accepted part of the game. They happen, move on. In a world where we have livestreaming but no decision review system, there needs to be a greater appreciation of that. ■

ABOVE: "That level of respect needs to be there from players at The Oval on a Friday night as well as on a Sunday morning in the park"

England's limp title defence squanders Morgan's legacy

After underperforming at a World Cup for the second time in the space of eight months, Matthew Mott and Jos Buttler appear to be in denial about how far England have fallen, writes Lawrence Booth



LAWRENCE BOOTH

Wisden Cricketers' Almanack
editor and *Daily Mail* writer
● @BoothCricket

BELOW: Jos Buttler suggested he wants to stay on as England's white-ball captain following their semi-final defeat to India

After their exit from a T20 World Cup in which his side had beaten Oman, Namibia, West Indies and the USA, but lost to Australia, South Africa and India, England's head coach Matthew Mott offered a novel perspective. "Sometimes," he said, "it's not all about results." This might have carried some weight at the end of an instantly forgotten three-match bilateral series. But at the conclusion of a World Cup, with England no longer champions in either white-ball format for the first time in five years? Not so much.

Yet the first part of his next sentence suggested that the media criticism which has dogged Mott and Jos Buttler ever since England's miserable defence of the 50-over World Cup in India had been wide of the mark. "Obviously, we're in a results-driven business," he said, "and you guys will have your fun at our expense, I'm sure..."

At the time of writing, Mott was still in the job, and had two years left on his contract. Buttler was in situ, too, having led his side to three wins out of 12 against Test-playing opposition in successive World Cups. Yet to listen to both after the semi-final in Guyana, where India had squashed England like mosquitoes from the nearby Amazon, was to wonder whether their oft-stated aversion to "outside noise" had turned into something more insidious.

Mott claimed to have learned from the Indian misadventure, in which he felt the players grew too introspective as they lurched between defeats. And so his T20 dressing-room acquired safety valves, the better to spread the pressure. There was Andrew Flintoff, who had helped out the team the previous summer, and by all accounts had gone down well with the players. There was Kieron Pollard, the T20 maestro who had captained West Indies and knew the conditions like the back of his giant hand. And there was David Young, the Manchester City psychologist who had worked with Eoin Morgan's white-ball sides, most famously at a crucial moment of the 2019 World Cup.

Yet from the eve of England's first game, against Scotland at Bridgetown, it was clear that no amount of helping hands could smooth the feathers ruffled in India. Buttler's tetchy response to a harmless question from a BBC reporter went viral, and England ended up grateful for rain after the Scottish openers put on 90 in 10 overs.

A little over three weeks later, Mott claimed that his relationship with Buttler had been "galvanised in the last six months". He added: "If you asked around the dressing-room, we've got a lot of people in the support staff that have given credit to the leadership group for the way we've stuck together in tricky circumstances."

This mutual affirmation will have been of little consolation to England fans upset by the squandering of Morgan's legacy. To have followed the white-ball teams over the past eight months has been to hear constant promises of regeneration, and repeated invocations of



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**From the eve of
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hope. And if you were concerned about the tactical and strategic nous of Buttler before the Caribbean, you were left in little doubt after it.

The decision to leave out Reece Topley from the first two games felt like a mistake at the time, not just in retrospect; Topley finished as England’s only seamer with an economy-rate below seven. Handing the second over of the game against Australia to Will Jacks was simply a brain-fade. Then there was the failure to adapt – first with ball, then with bat – to the sluggishness of the surface in St Lucia against South Africa. Finally, Buttler chose to bowl against India on a pitch likely only to slow, and declined to use Moeen Ali at all while his seamers leaked 10 an over. He was honest enough to admit his error, but wrong to ascribe it to “hindsight”.

It was no coincidence that managing director Rob Key returned to the Caribbean so soon after he had left it. Concerned that England might fail to qualify from the group stage, he rejoined the jamboree towards the end of the second week, in Antigua, just in case tough decisions needed to be made on the spot. Since Mott was appointed by him in the first place, Key’s own reputation was at stake.

When England’s rain-splattered win over Namibia was followed by Australia’s high-wire chase against Scotland, Buttler’s team were through to the Super Eights. Yet even there, the good work of their win over West Indies, where Pollard’s inside info proved invaluable, was undone by the careless performance against South Africa. As in the group stage, England qualified for the next phase only after duffing up an Associate.

With the best will in the world, one win out of four against the teams they had to be measured against was not a ratio that screamed ‘job security’. England’s white-ball sides have gone backwards at an alarming rate since the heady days when they could call themselves double world champions. Fun at their expense? The only people laughing have been England’s opponents. ■



NEWS CYCLE

It never rains, but it pours, writes Ben Gardner

ISSUE 79

If you’re not English, it was the perfect story. Scotland and Australia, the enemy’s enemies turned into the best of friends, faced with the possibility that a marginal Aussie win could send both sides through the T20 World Cup group stage, and knock England out. Could they? At first, Josh Hazlewood seemed keen: “If we can get them out of the tournament that’s in our best interest as well as probably everyone else’s.”

English indignation and Aussie sniggering followed. Minds were cast back to the 1999 World Cup, when Australia won as slowly as possible against West Indies to try and knock out New Zealand, though it’s probably best not to take too many cues from the Nineties when it comes to the rights and wrongs of fixing the results of cricket matches. And it was at this point that someone decided to actually look at the rules and realised that “the inappropriate manipulation of net run rate... in order to affect the standings of other teams” was explicitly barred, with a two-match ban the maximum punishment.

Pat Cummins was quickly sent out to tow the party line, insisting that his seam-bowling teammate had been joking. “I think it got taken a little bit out of context,” Cummins said. Either Hazlewood has comedy’s best straight face since Michael Bluth, or this was another bit of kidology.

As it was, England won by such a margin as to render NRR immaterial, Australia beat Scotland, and that was that. Or at least it was until the Aussies themselves needed an NRR favour in the Super Eights to overtake Afghanistan. “We’re hoping that Bangladesh can get the job done,” said Hazlewood.

Afghanistan have had their own run-rate run-ins in the past, infamously blocking out an over in the 2023 Asia Cup when a boundary would have seen them progress. This time, they were all too aware of the scenarios at play. With rain around and Afghanistan ahead on DLS, head coach Jonathan Trott instructed his team to slow things down. At which point Gulbadin Naib, at slip, sustained an extraordinarily timed – and extraordinarily acted – bout of cramp, sticking his hand in the air as he went down in stages.

After a short delay, he was back on the field, and back bowling. Celebrating Afghanistan’s win, he posted a picture of himself and the team physio captioned: “Wonders can happen.” Here’s hoping Hazlewood saw the funny side. ■

**THE MEL FARRELL
INTERVIEW**

PHOTO BY GARETH COPLEY

**EOIN
MORGAN**

LEADER, BROADCASTER, STRATEGIST, MODERNISER



MEL FARRELL

Australian writer and broadcaster

● @melindafarrell

The former England captain insists Jos Buttler and Matthew Mott should keep their jobs despite their latest World Cup disappointment and shares his thoughts on what the future holds for T20

BELOW: Morgan believes Rob Key should keep faith in the leadership duo of Matthew Mott and Jos Buttler despite another underwhelming World Cup campaign

The settings for two conversations with Eoin Morgan could hardly have differed more. For the first, during the lead-up to the Men's T20 World Cup, we sat in a classroom at King's Avenue School in Brixton, after Morgan had spent the morning at a Chance to Shine coaching session.

The second took place in the final stages of the tournament after India's victory over South Africa in the final was followed by a frantic race to escape Barbados before the arrival of Hurricane Beryl.

As it turned out, we were on the last flights out before the airport and country closed down. But there was enough time for England's 2019 World Cup winning captain to throw his support behind his successor, Jos Buttler, and coach Matthew Mott after the semi-final drubbing by India.

"I do think Jos and Motty should stay on," Morgan tells WCM. "Given they came into the tournament with the least amount of expectation, they made the semi-final and you have to acknowledge that. You shouldn't take that for granted - it's not a given you can get there, with the likes of Australia not making it and New Zealand being knocked out in the group stage. There were various challenges other teams couldn't overcome and England did, so a lot of credit has to go to both of them in that instance.

"The addition of Andrew Flintoff and Kieron Pollard in the backroom staff, I believe that's aided both of them, and the team. It was a good decision to get them on board. One thing that will be flagged is that they only beat West Indies out of the Full Member nations but, still, they managed to get to a semi-final. So, for me, Mott and Buttler stay in their positions, particularly when I don't see any obvious replacements. Giving them more time to get better and grow is the decision that should be made."

Morgan's endorsement is in sharp contrast to his public criticism of Mott and England's management after last year's dismal World Cup campaign in India. He is adamant there are some "huge positives" for England to take home from the Caribbean, but believes a natural refresh is on the way.

"The likes of Moeen Ali, Chris Jordan, Jonny Bairstow, guys coming towards the twilight of their career, a plan will have to be drawn up by the leadership group and the selector Luke Wright as to what's the best way forward for the team, and what their ultimate goals are. Who are their best talents going forward? Try and identify who can fill those roles.

"Phil Salt and Harry Brook have played a second World Cup now and seem to be growing in stature, which really bodes well, so they're key members for me. There's a Champions Trophy next year and another T20 World Cup the following year and you need players better equipped to deal with the challenges in the latter stages of a tournament. That's very important. The most successful sides in the world have players who have been there

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For me, Mott and Buttler stay in their positions, particularly when I don't see any obvious replacements. Giving them more time to get better and grow is the decision that should be made



THE MEL FARRELL INTERVIEW

BELOW: Morgan was appearing at a Chance to Shine event in Brixton

RIGHT: Morgan playing for London Spirit in The Hundred in 2022, a year before his retirement

and done that. It doesn't necessarily guarantee you'll win but it positions you to overcome the same pressures and the same challenges.

"There's a lot of talent in English cricket and that's why expectation is high in this English team. But when you look at the [World Cup squad] there's nobody I would have had ahead of anybody here. Ben Stokes' omission and choosing to focus on Test cricket this summer - he's someone you cannot expect to be there, just the demands he has on his body and as Test captain. That will continue to be his priority. So they have to plan for a future without Ben Stokes and give more opportunities."

Morgan made his own decision to step aside in 2022, retiring after leading England through a white-ball revolution that transformed them from 2015 World Cup punching bags to title fighters - and champs - four years later. He also changed the way 50-over cricket was played. ODIs were suddenly sexy again, especially when England were involved. Their hyper-aggressive style was a reflection of Morgan's philosophy, supported by then ECB director of cricket Andrew Strauss and head coach Trevor Bayliss, but there was never any doubt Morgan was the driving force, inspired by his experience of T20 cricket.

The drop-in pitches of New York, in particular, and sluggish surfaces elsewhere made this year's World Cup a generally low-scoring affair. Morgan believes the IPL that preceded it, a record-breaking run-fest, is more representative of what the future holds for the format. The Impact Player rule - allowing sides to make a substitution during the match - received criticism for tipping the scales too far in the favour of batters, but Morgan is a fan.

"Players have been forced to think outside of themselves yet again and this is just the game continuing to develop. We witnessed some astonishing games of cricket [in the IPL], high-scoring, high-octane, and bowlers didn't seem to have an answer. Wickets were good, the quality of batting was on a completely different level.

"From afar, you can give throwaway comments about it being boring, but in my opinion it's absolutely brilliant. It is a level of skill and consistency that batters are bringing, but bowlers will definitely come back. It always recalibrates and balances itself out and it'll take another different knuckleball or somebody bowling around the wicket across the stumps or slower-ball bouncers to try and counter what the batter is doing."

As for matters back home, where The Hundred has squeezed the rest of the county calendar, Morgan, one of the tournament's earliest and most vocal supporters, treads more softly. Asked what the main purpose of the counties is, he is consciously equivocal.

"This is the big question. Ask county members, you will get one answer. Ask county chairmen, you will get another answer. And then ask an England cricketer, the England CEO or managing director of cricket, you will get another answer. And when everybody isn't on the same page things become muddled... because everybody is trying to achieve their own goal. The game isn't aligned... and the big job is aligning everybody and getting things working in the right direction because clearly there is quite a big disparity in what everybody thinks is right for the game or the function of county cricket.

"I'm not in a position to change things and I don't want to add another opinion. I loved playing county cricket, I really did. I had a magnificent time of it at Middlesex. And the bit that always gets me is when you hear stories of the old days of county cricket, where you had the best players in the world, the great West Indies players, great South African players, everybody flocked here because it was the best, the land of opportunity. And it's not that anymore.

"Are we making it more attractive for people to come and play, or for our players who want to play more of it? If you take that as a general premise, are we attracting the best players in the world? Are we producing the best players in the world and testing them enough at a level for them to go, 'Jeez, I absolutely loved playing in this because this is the best'. So that's where I would start."





PHOTO BY ALEX DAVIDSON

For now, Morgan is happy to observe from the sidelines as he concentrates on family life and a steady stream of commentary gigs. But he harbours ambitions to coach at some point in the future.

"I've loved broadcasting, it's given me an opportunity to follow the game like I did when I was a kid. I still rock up to every game now and think somebody is going to have a great day. I don't have an angle, I don't have an agenda. I like taking a view on things.

"There is an aspiration to coach at some stage. But again, coaching takes you away from home more. It's like you haven't stopped playing so I'm trying to find a little bit of a balance now, where for 17 years of my life cricket has been at the forefront. For the moment I'll take a bit of a back seat."

There is still time to inspire the next generation at schools like Kings Avenue. Morgan sits on the board of trustees for Chance to Shine and is in his element in the playground, a natural with the children. It's a role he embraces passionately.

"I've always had a close affiliation with Chance to Shine, simply because of the background that I came from, growing up in Ireland where cricket wasn't necessarily that popular. In a school like Kings Avenue, cricket

isn't taught. Since Chance to Shine have come in, they've done an excellent job integrating a new coach and, over the course of the next five or six weeks, kids will be introduced to it.

"Chance to Shine do an incredible job introducing a million kids a year to the game in areas that fall outside of the structure of English cricket, and that plays such a huge part in its evolution since the introduction of T20. Cricket has outgrown its infrastructure. The sport continues to be challenged about how it creates opportunity for boys and girls up and down the country. Chance to Shine play a huge part in that."

While the game faces enormous challenges both domestically and internationally, Morgan is optimistic about its future.

"I've travelled a lot. I continue to follow cricket around the world and cricket is bigger and better and evolving more. It's just ridiculous, the level of popularity that it continues to generate. And that's only a good thing. Ask anybody who says otherwise, they will have an agenda about something down the road. If you look at cricket as a game broadly, it's absolutely flying. It will mean change down the line, whether that's other things taking priority over international cricket, whether that's right or wrong. But the sport is thriving, and that's always healthy." 🏏

'Grow the game with private investment'

Morgan believes the ECB's decision to open up The Hundred to private investment is the right one, in order to grow the women's game and ensure sufficient funds for grassroots cricket.

"Infrastructure in the women's game is costly," he says, "it doesn't just come from nowhere. Getting cricket in more schools, getting more facilities for, not only counties or minor counties, but drip feeding all the way down. Either outside investment or generating more revenue through The Hundred supports the game in general.

"One of the main reasons The Hundred was started was to generate revenue to support the ECB and the counties, outside of bilateral cricket. Thankfully, it happened. And, thankfully, we're in a place where we're questioning whether we should grow the game or not. For me, there's only ever one answer, and it's yes.

"The terms of any private investment are always important, the nitty gritty. But if the game was doing so well, we wouldn't have to talk about it. We'd be talking about each and every ground owning 100 per cent of each and every team because they would generate the money themselves. But I think private investment might allow you to do that. Where that comes from and how due diligence is done is obviously a hugely significant part of that, and how the money is utilised. But ultimately the main thing for me will be trying to grow the game and make it bigger and better."

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An all-flair left-hander, smallish but chunky, with strong wrists and minimal technical complications, Jacob Bethell has got a touch of Eoin Morgan about him

PHIL WALKER



RE:VIEW

With England's T20 World Cup defence falling flat, three *Wisden* writers pick out an emerging talent they'd like to see given an international 20-over debut in the near future



ADAM HOPKINS

Wisden Cricket Monthly
staff writer

Maybe not the name that immediately springs to mind when you think of English cricket's next great leg-spinning hope, with Rehan Ahmed already establishing himself on the scene, but given Adil Rashid probably still has a couple of years left in an England shirt, **Luke Hollman** has more time to cook. The 23-year-old leggie already has plenty of T20 experience under his belt, having debuted for Middlesex in 2020 and taken 52 wickets in 49 innings, including a career-best 5-16 against Surrey in this year's Blast. He doesn't bowl many bad balls, impressively few for a young wrist-spinner, and gets the ball to drop from height, extracting bounce from most surfaces. He will benefit from working closely with Ian Salisbury, who joined the Middlesex staff last year. Hollman was picked for England under-19s shortly after his 17th birthday in 2017 and was the youngest member of their squad for the Under-19 World Cup in New Zealand the following January, playing alongside the likes of Harry Brook and Will Jacks. A handy ball-striker down the order with five first-class fifties to his name, he'd slot into Rashid's position nicely.



PHIL WALKER

Wisden Cricket Monthly
editor-in-chief

I was surprised and bemused not to see Ben Duckett get a hit in the Caribbean. I think there's a good, unusual T20 middle-order engineer in there. I think it's ironic that Zak Crawley's ultra-modern ability to slap a new cricket ball around when it's bowled by the world's quickest bowlers has yet to be afforded the stage it's most obviously attuned for, and obviously Jamie Smith's time has come for everything. But if we're after a bolter, a name from outside the established ones, then **Jacob Bethell** is the one. An all-flair left-hander, smallish but chunky, with strong wrists and minimal technical complications, he's got a touch of Eoin Morgan about him, and has been making waves since the Under-19s World Cup of 2022, when he took South Africa for 88 in 42 balls en route to the final, before finishing his under-19s stint with an exceptional Youth Test hundred against Australia in early 2023. This year he's hitting at a strike-rate of 167 and an average of 54 in T20 and, as mentioned elsewhere in this magazine, his 15-ball fifty against Northants is the second fastest by an English player in the history of domestic T20 cricket. Expect a breakout year in The Hundred, and then a dip in the big stuff before too long.



BEN GARDNER

Wisden.com managing editor

If England selected on self-confidence, **Jordan Cox** would be the first name on the team sheet. It was clear inside the Kent dressing room as he extended his maiden first-class half-century to a mammoth 238, telling the likes of Sam Billings and Joe Denly he would tick off their career-best scores, which he duly did. It was clear too at Essex's media day ahead of the 2024 season. "Hopefully this is the year I do a Harry Brook," he told journalists. Having left Canterbury for Chelmsford in search of a fresh start, so far he has delivered on the promise, averaging 69 in the County Championship and striking at 178 in the T20 Blast. There's the modern range of strokes imbued with a first-class orthodoxy, and it doesn't hurt that he's already one of the world's best fielders, lighting up the Pakistan Super League final at the end of a winter spent globetrotting. Cox has got close to England honours before, carrying drinks during a seven-match T20I series in Pakistan in 2022, and while injuries and the vagaries of form stalled his progress somewhat, the sense of a proper player always remained. The signs are there that it is all clicking. If nothing else, his brash talent being tested on the international stage should be fun to watch. ■

Greener Futures

1. LORD'S

In the first of a new series examining how cricket is tackling the climate crisis, Jo Harman speaks to Stuart Dunlop, MCC's sustainability and accessibility manager, about the steps being taken at Lord's



“Cricket is f***ing useless,” Dr David Goldblatt, the sportswriter and academic, told WCM last year.

“It is obviously going to be one of the most threatened sports in the world by climate change, but it's been so hopeless at getting on top of this. You want cricket for the next 30 years? It's time to get real.”

Goldblatt's 2021 report, *Playing Against the Clock: The Climate Emergency and the Case for Rapid Change*, laid out in chilling detail the impact that global warming could have on cricket. Yet three years later, the ICC have still failed to sign up to the UN's Sports for Climate Action Framework, which requires its 350-plus signatories – including the ECB, FIFA and the International Olympic Committee – to “adhere to a set of five principles and incorporate them into strategies, policies and procedures”, and achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2040.

Meanwhile, in May of this year, the ICC announced an extension to its “global partnership” with Aramco, “one of the world's leading integrated energy and chemical companies” – or, to put it in another way, the biggest corporate polluter in the world. In 2023, the Saudi Arabian state oil giants reported an annual profit of £93 billion.

But while cricket's governing body buries its head in the desert, action is being taken within the game to try and counter the impact of the climate crisis.

In 2009, Lord's became the first UK sports venue to employ a dedicated sustainability manager. That responsibility now falls on Stuart Dunlop, who took on the role in November 2022 after leading the sustainability team at Hackney Borough Council.

He accepts that the game has been slow to act, and says MCC has a responsibility to be a flagbearer for sustainability.

“We're role models in so many different aspects of the sport,” says Dunlop, “and there's no reason why we can't translate that into sustainability. We've got membership spanning 60 different countries. I feel it's incumbent upon MCC to use that platform to spread social change as effectively as possible.”

MCC signed up to the UN's Sports for Climate Action Framework in 2022 and last year released their net zero carbon strategy, but they've been leaders in sustainability within the sport for some time.

The club's electricity has been 100 per cent wind-generated since 2016, leading to a decrease in greenhouse emissions of 81 per cent since 2010, and a ground-sourced heat pump on the Nursery Ground heats and cools the Warner, Compton and Edrich stands

from entirely zero-carbon sources. The Tavern and Allen stands, which are being redeveloped, will be heated and cooled using solar panels.

Dunlop acknowledges there are obstacles, not least the famous curved roofs across the ground which make the installation of solar panels problematic, but MCC are teaming up with Loughborough University this summer to investigate the renewable energy and battery storage capacity at Lord's. “We're pushing hard to futureproof the ground,” he says. “The aim is to become 100 per cent electric by 2030.”

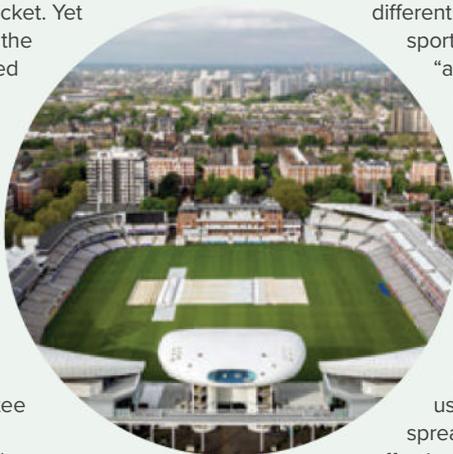
As an 17-acre estate with capacity for 32,000 fans, Dunlop describes the ground's waste management as a “huge operation”.

“Post-pandemic, our waste management statistics weren't where we wanted them to be. Now we have no more single-use plastic, our food waste is turned into fertiliser, our grass waste goes into composting, and our general waste goes to an energy recovery facility, powering local homes in the community and the recycling trucks that collect the waste. We've not sent any waste to landfill since 2010.”

Collaboration will be key if cricket is to make up for lost time, says Dunlop.

“We're not claiming to be the world's best at this. It's important to show humility and understand we're all on a journey. We need to work with the media and governing bodies and our members and fans to collectively be where we want to be.

“There aren't too many examples in this country of sports stadia which are fully embracing the electrical revolution, so there's not necessarily a blueprint we can follow. We want Lord's to be a venue for another couple of hundred years and it needs to embrace sustainability to be in that position.” ■



LETTERS



Mailbox



In association with Chapel Down, the letter of the month receives a bottle of award-winning English sparkling wine - Chapel Down Brut. Based in Kent, Chapel Down is England's leading wine producer and the official sparkling wine of the ECB

An alternative prize will be provided if the winner is aged under 18, or if requested
*Only available to UK residents

★ LETTER OF THE MONTH



Don't blame the BCCI

It has become fashionable to flog the BCCI for everything and anything happening in world cricket. Every cricket writer worth his name puts blame at their door for any wrong thing in cricket.

But what has the BCCI done except become more and more powerful by astutely creating wealth with smart business moves, which the other countries could not do.

With the very successful launch of the IPL, cricket has become more popular and global. The ICC has become richer and can share more funds among the member countries (though not proportionately, as highlighted by critics).

The IPL is making cricketers across the world more affluent than they ever dreamt of. Not only players but coaches, support staff, broadcasters, media, business houses and vendors have been tasting the sweet fruits of more and more money.

It is a case of sour grapes as the dominance of the countries holding the upper-hand in the ICC until recently have found themselves out of power. The shifting of power is the real issue.

Deepak Odhekar



Poor T20 vision

At 28, I may be at the younger end of your demographic, hence a slightly different view. Overall across your podcast and magazine, you do cover all formats of cricket well.

However, there's this ongoing thread in your magazine and the media at large that T20 is a less nuanced, less intellectual and poorer version of the game.

This was particularly emphasised by Mark Ramprakash's column [WCM78] where he repeated some very common tropes from the cricket old guard when dismissing T20, which don't even make any sense. Yes, in the recent IPL scores were incredibly high, and people repeatedly claim that this makes bowlers irrelevant. Do pundits not understand that in cricket both teams have to bat and bowl? And that good bowlers actually stand out even more in higher scoring games? Maybe

the fact that four out of the five top-paid players in the last IPL were bowlers and many of the most in-demand players on the franchise circuit are bowlers, such as Rashid Khan and Jofra Archer (when fit), would make that clear.

Finally, where on earth has this comment – said even by Sam Curran in the IPL and also repeated in Ramps' column – of cricket becoming like baseball come from? The average home runs per match in the MLB is two...

Matt Roller wrote brilliantly in your magazine a few months ago about the IPL and this line will always stick with me: "Who's to say that the millions following the IPL are somehow less enlightened than everyone else?"

All cricket is brilliant.

Martin Shine



ABOVE: Pakistan and India have been drawn in the same group for every men's ICC event since 2013

LEFT: Rashid Khan shows the value of world-class bowling in T20

BELOW LEFT: BCCI secretary Jay Shah hands Rohit Sharma his World Cup winners' medal

World Cup falls flat

I am so turned off by this World Cup. I love all formats, so there's no anti-T20 bias here or anything like that. However, the realisation that the groups were selected, rather than drawn, and that the Super 8s are seeded has left a very sour taste.

Cricket seems to feel the need to engineer drama rather than let it happen. I really wish the decision makers would allow the game to breathe, drama and narratives to grow naturally, and trust this amazing game to produce. It would be so much more exciting and genuine if this was the case.

Instead, I know that at every World Cup England are less likely to be drawn with India or Pakistan and more likely to be drawn against other teams, as India and Pakistan must be in a group together. It just all feels too predictable.

I'm a cricket devotee, but this World Cup has left me feeling a bit dejected. I'm sure there will be an amazing finish to the tournament which will put my feelings to rest temporarily, but it feels like cricket has a broader problem.

In a vaguely related topic, why can't there be a Test World Cup? Felix White's idea is genuinely excellent, and I'm furious that this is generally treated as a joke. Use the WTC league for the seeding, then straight into quarter-finals: seed 1 v 8, 2 v 7, etc. for one-off Test matches, with an extra day to increase likelihood of results, defaulting to seeding if there's a draw after six days. Done and dusted in four weeks.

I don't understand why this can't happen every four years. This is the hit that Test cricket needs!

Lee Beresford

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Women's cricket on crest of a wave

Further to Katya Witney's article on England women's cricket ['Five takeaways from England's tour of New Zealand', WCM77], women's sport in England is currently on the crest of a wave with rugby union, football (at club and international level), and right down to lesser recognised sports like boxing, rowing etc.

It's nothing less than sheer hard work and determination that means as a country we are at the top in most sports. In cricket, the talent of players like Nat Sciver-Brunt and Sophie Ecclestone make for exciting times and cricket you just want to watch, with power and finesse. Roll on the rest of the summer.

Patti Sutton

Wide delivery

I just wanted to note that since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, it's been common practice to spell the capital city as Kyiv, rather than Kiev [as it appeared in WCM78].

This is a small but symbolic show of solidarity, as the former is the Ukrainian spelling, rather than the Russian version.

James White

Surrey stumpers

I recollect from my early years following cricket that when Roy Swetman was selected for the 1958/59 Ashes tour, he was not Surrey's first-choice wicketkeeper but was deputy to Arthur McIntyre. He was deputy to Godfrey Evans but made his Test debut during the tour. The difference [between Jamie Smith getting selected for England ahead of his Surrey teammate Ben Foakes] was that McIntyre was not at that stage a serious candidate for Test selection.

Keith Burley

COACHING CORNER

WCM's recommendations for the season ahead

Falcon Cricket Coaching

www.falconcricket.co.uk | [@falconcricketuk](https://twitter.com/falconcricketuk)

Falcon Cricket Coaching offers 1-2-1 coaching and cricket camps across London & Bucks. They also sell their own performance diaries and have Easter Camps at Amersham CC. See website for details and booking.

Academy North

www.academynorth.co.uk | [@academynorth1](https://twitter.com/academynorth1)

Academy North have bases across Liverpool, Merseyside and Cheshire, and strive to create opportunities and experiences for cricketers. They offer a variety of options including coaching, festivals, camps, tours and masterclasses, with coaching going significantly beyond technique into developing the whole person.

The Martin Bicknell Cricket Academy

www.mbcricquetacademy.co.uk | [@martinbicknellcricketacademy](https://twitter.com/martinbicknellcricketacademy)

The Martin Bicknell Cricket Academy has been in operation for some three years and runs Easter, half-term and summer camps as well as winter academies.

Hutch Cricket

www.hutchcricket.com | facebook.com/hutchcricket

Owned by Paul Hutchison and established in 2020, this highly experienced professional coach covers coaching from beginners all the way up to Test players. A range of specialist coaches allows Hutch Cricket to cater for all your cricketing needs.

The Rikki Clarke Cricket Academy

rikkiclarkecricketacademy.co.uk | [@rikkiclarkecricketacademy](https://twitter.com/rikkiclarkecricketacademy)

The Rikki Clarke Cricket Academy has been around for nearly four years and has cricket camps throughout the year during half terms and summer holidays. We also do 1-2-1 sessions and masterclasses with former and current county and international cricketers. We also run elite academy programmes that aim at a county standard process.



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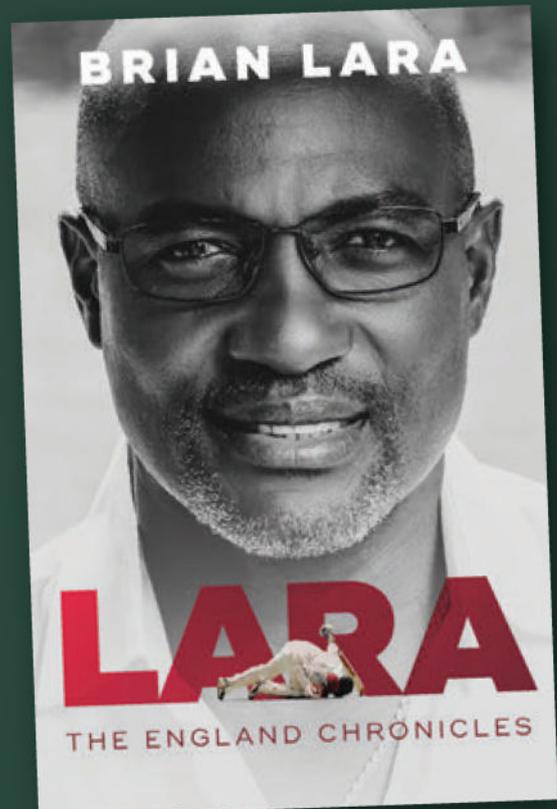
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BOOKSELLERS SINCE 1797



THE COUNTY FILES

PHOTO BY JAN KRUGER



A week before his valedictory Test match, James Anderson, aged 41 years and 336 days, turns out for Lancashire in their Championship match with Notts at Old Trafford. On day three, he delivers a masterclass, collecting the first six wickets to fall and finishing with innings figures of 7-35.

Covering all 18 first-class counties in every issue, including news, interviews and stats, as well as the oddities which make county cricket what it is



Derbyshire

NEXT MATCHES: Lancs, T20 (H), July 11; Birmingham, T20 (A), July 14; Worcs, T20 (A), July 18; Durham, T20 (H), July 19; Northants, ODC (A), July 24; Middx, ODC (H), July 27; Lancs, ODC (H), July 31; Worcs, ODC (H), Aug 2; Somerset, ODC (A), Aug 4; Hants, ODC (A), Aug 7; Kent, ODC (H), Aug 9; Durham, ODC (A), Aug 14

Donald finds his spark

“You’re making me feel old, I think I’m officially on the downslope now,” says Aneurin Donald, wearing a huge grin. Back in 2016, a baby-faced Donald bludgeoned Derbyshire’s bowlers to Penrhyn Avenue’s every corner. He was a Glamorgan starlet in those days, equalling Ravi Shastri’s then record for the fastest double-century in first-class cricket. The 19-year-old’s innings included him zipping from 100 to 200 in just 7.1 overs.

Eight years on, a still cherubic Donald is scoring runs at a fair lick in Derbyshire colours. Having broken the county’s record for the quickest T20 half-century – a 19-ball effort at Headingley that he turned into 94 from 41 – within a week he had equalled his own landmark during a brutal 68 from 26 deliveries against Northamptonshire. By comparison, the 21 balls it took him to reach 50 against Nottinghamshire soon after was sedate.

Having missed the opening stages of the Blast with concussion, and then fallen for a golden duck on his T20 debut for the county, Donald



ABOVE: Aneurin Donald hit two 19-ball half-centuries in the space of five days

tells WCM it was “nice to get back on the horse quickly – especially after lobbing my first ball up the chute! I’ve always felt like I’ve had that top level to my game. It’s been about how often I can I do it. I certainly feel in a position to do it more and more often now.”

His eye-catching form is already opening doors, earning him a wildcard pick to represent Birmingham Phoenix in The Hundred.

Back in 2019, Donald departed Glamorgan citing stagnation. Hampshire was seen as the ideal destination to push his international claims but that winter Donald suffered an ACL injury playing five-a-side football. Then, with a first-team return approaching, the same knee buckled ahead of the 2021 campaign. “It was a really dark time,” he admits.

Some 952 days later, Donald returned to professional cricket, but a place in Hampshire’s red-ball team eluded him and after a 2023 summer of just six Blast outings and a handful of

50-over games, he decided to move on.

Still just 27, Donald should have his best years ahead of him. There would have been suitors considered more glamorous. Why then did he pen a two-year deal at Derby?

“It was a no-brainer. To be hand-selected by Mickey [Arthur, Derbyshire’s head of cricket] and the guys here is a real privilege. It’s early days, but I feel like my game’s already gone to the next level.

“I’m sure he could have had his pick of things around the world,” Donald adds of Arthur. “But he chooses to be here at Derbyshire. This is his home and his project.”

Success at Derbyshire will always be relative given their resources, but the emotional outpouring after a first Blast victory in almost a decade over neighbours Notts indicates how much the club still means to its players and supporters. In Donald, they have a player who will have those fans on the edge of their seats. **SD**



DURHAM CRICKET



Durham

NEXT MATCHES: Yorks, T20 (A), July 11; Notts, T20 (H), July 12; Northants, T20 (H), July 14; Derby, T20 (A), July 19; Lancs, ODC (A), July 24; Worcs, ODC (A), July 28; Somerset, ODC (H), July 31; Northants, ODC (H), Aug 2; Middx, ODC (A), Aug 6; Hants, ODC (H), Aug 9; Kent, ODC (A), Aug 11; Derby, ODC (H), Aug 14

Durham find T20 rhythm

After stumbling to defeat in their first two Blast games, during which they made just 176 runs, Durham bounced back with four victories in their next five completed matches to make themselves strong contenders for the quarter-finals.

It was further evidence of the bold approach they have adopted since Ryan Campbell's arrival as

ABOVE: David Bedingham has translated his red-ball form into T20 runs

head coach. The Australian takes that same approach when it comes to selection, with overseas star Ben Dwarshuis appearing in only three of Durham's eight group games before the mid-tournament break.

The left-arm quick has the fourth most wickets in Big Bash history, as well as three T20I caps for Australia, but after Durham's early batting struggles, David Bedingham has largely been preferred as the second overseas player alongside Ashton Turner. The South African's returns? 210 runs at a strike-rate of 164 from six matches.

Meanwhile, Durham will be without Brydon Carse until late August after the fast bowler was suspended for three months for placing 303 bets on cricket between 2017 and 2019. In total, a 16-month ban was handed down, with 13 months suspended for two years.

The 28-year-old, who has 17 white-ball caps for England, will miss out on a potential Test debut this summer and will also be unavailable for Northern Superchargers in The Hundred.

"Whilst these bets were several years ago, that is no excuse and I take full responsibility for my actions," Carse said in a statement. "I would like to thank the ECB, Durham Cricket and the PCA for their support during this difficult time for me. I will be working hard in the next 12 weeks to ensure that I repay that support on the field when I am able to return to playing." **SD**



Essex

NEXT MATCHES: Kent, T20 (H), July 11; Sussex, T20 (A), July 13; Surrey, T20 (H), July 14; Hants, T20 (A), July 19; Warks, ODC (H), July 24; Gloucs, ODC (A), July 28; Leics, ODC (H), July 31; Glam, ODC (H), Aug 4; Yorks, ODC (A), Aug 6; Surrey, ODC (H), Aug 9; Notts, ODC (A), Aug 11; Sussex, ODC (A), Aug 14

Essex face nervous wait

The news that Essex have been charged by the Cricket Regulator with failing to address the alleged historical use of racist language and conduct between 2001 and 2010 sent further shockwaves through the club.

Nonetheless, it was not unexpected. Essex's own independently-commissioned Newton Report – published in December with numerous allegations of racist conduct upheld but no names made public – was a separate enquiry to the regulator's own investigation. With those findings now concluded, the case has been referred to the ECB's Cricket Discipline Commission, which will decide what further action to take against the club.

It's an anxious time. The club has promised to "participate willingly" with the Discipline Commission, but as the club's CEO John Stephenson acknowledges, the threat of penalties, both financial and in

terms of points, is very real. "It's hanging over our head," he told BBC Essex Sport. "But I would say we're in a pretty good position because of everything we've done the last couple of years, the transparency we've displayed, so there's a lot of mitigation and that's what we'll be going into the meetings with."

With four wins from their first eight games, Essex were in second place in the Championship going into the top-two showdown at The Oval in the first week of July, just 12 points behind leaders Surrey.

While the club are hoping that any title tilt isn't derailed by sanctions, arguing that their case is different to others and should be considered in isolation, they will know that last year Yorkshire were fined £400k (£300k of which was suspended for two years) and docked 48 Championship points over their handling of allegations of discrimination by their former player Azeem Rafiq, and their failure to address the systemic use of racist and discriminatory language between 2004 and 2021.

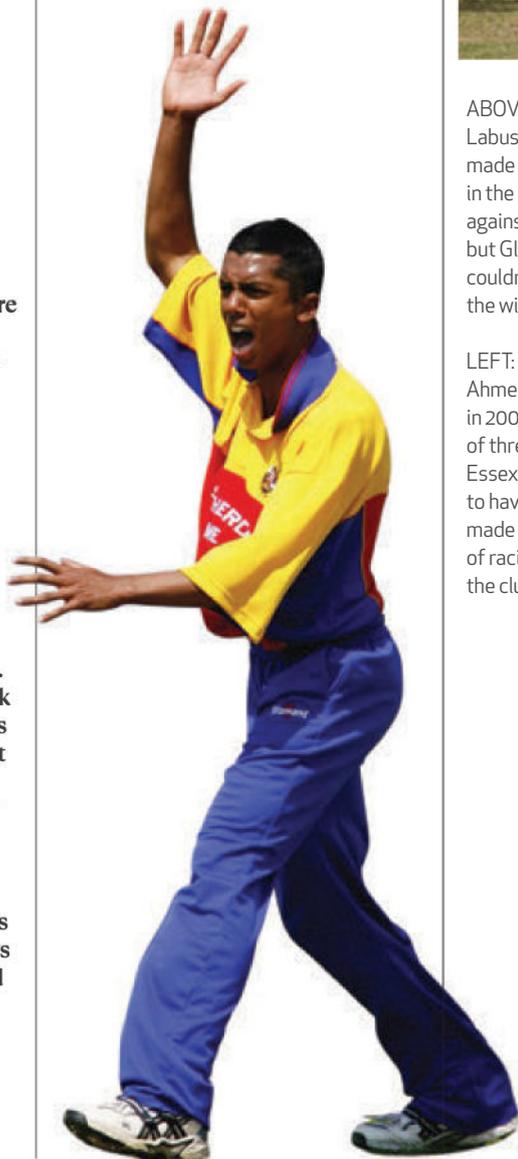
Perhaps the most contentious issue is the club's decision to withhold the identities of the individuals concerned. While the names of three complainants, former players Jahid Ahmed, Maurice Chambers and Zoheb Sharif, are well known, the report does not officially name them, nor any of the alleged perpetrators. Stephenson said: "We have to think about the welfare of the individuals – we've taken a lot of advice on that in terms of data privacy and there will be nothing more said on that."

The former Kent and England quick bowler turned lawyer Amjad Khan, who now represents both Ahmed and Chambers, spoke of his clients' "vindication" at the findings of Newton's report, and recognised the considerate way that the club has treated them since its publication.

"With regards to punishment, Jahid is a devout Muslim and he believes there is an element

of forgiveness in this if people take responsibility, and he feels that Essex have taken a lot of responsibility," Khan said. "It's a completely different scenario from Yorkshire. The way Essex are doing things is more humble, much more transparent and honest. It's hard to say that the club hasn't done enough – they actually have. They've been very kind to Jahid."

It remains to be seen whether the ECB's Disciplinary Commission concludes that the club's contrition is sufficient. **PW**



ABOVE: Marnus Labuschagne made 157 runs in the match against Northants but Glamorgan couldn't force the win

LEFT: Jahid Ahmed, pictured in 2006, is one of three former Essex players to have publicly made allegations of racism against the club



Glamorgan

NEXT MATCHES: Middx, T20 (H), July 12; Gloucs, T20 (A), July 14; Kent, T20 (A), July 16; Somerset, T20 (H), July 19; Gloucs, ODC (H), July 25; Surrey, ODC (A), July 28; Northants, ODC (H), July 31; Sussex, ODC (H), Aug 2; Essex, ODC (A), Aug 4; Warks, ODC (A), Aug 8; Leics, ODC (A), Aug 11; Yorks, ODC (H), Aug 14

Glamorgan frustrated by Northants

Glamorgan took a break from their latest underwhelming Blast campaign for a rollercoaster Championship fixture against Northants at Sophia Gardens that ended in a thrilling draw.

The county haven't progressed to the knockout rounds of the T20 competition since 2017 and have



only reached Finals Day twice since the tournament's inception. Eight games into the current campaign, that didn't look like changing, with Glamorgan seventh in the North Group with two wins from eight.

Their Championship season could prove more fruitful. With six matches remaining they are nestled in fourth, 27 points behind second-placed Middlesex, but they will be frustrated the gap isn't smaller after failing to land the killer blow against Northants. After Glamorgan took a first-innings lead of 211 - Marnus Labuschagne top-scoring with 93 in their total of 490 - Northants fought back by posting 472-8 declared in the second dig to leave their hosts needing 262 at a run-rate of 6.7.

Labuschagne's 61-ball 64 left them well-placed at 74-1 but wickets tumbled at the other end and when the Aussie departed with the score 162-5, the game was finely balanced.

Chris Cooke continued to push for the win with a rapid 27, but when he was caught at long-off Glamorgan were forced to shut up shop, finishing eight down as Northants almost pulled off an unlikely victory.

"It was a tough chase but a fair one, and one we were prepared to have a good crack at," Glamorgan's coach Grant Bradburn told BBC Sport Wales. "It wasn't to be, but fans will go away seeing a brand of cricket they're excited by." **JH**

RIGHT: Will Brown has left Gloucestershire after more than a decade as chief executive



Gloucestershire

NEXT MATCHES: Middx, T20 (H), July 11; Hants, T20 (A), July 12; Glam, T20 (H), July 14; Middx, T20 (A), July 18; Glam, ODC (A), July 25; Essex, ODC (H), July 28; Surrey, ODC (A), July 30; Yorks, ODC (A), Aug 2; Warks, ODC (H), Aug 4; Sussex, ODC (H), Aug 7; Notts, ODC (A), Aug 9; Leics, ODC (H), Aug 14

Brown sets out on new path

When Will Brown, Gloucestershire's outgoing chief executive, was seriously injured in a bike accident in January last year, suffering a broken neck in the process, it gave him pause for reflection. Having served the club for 11 years and experienced the highs and lows as keenly as anyone, he realised it was time to pursue other avenues.

"I'm sad and excited in equal measure, really," he tells WCM ahead of his departure on June 30. "I've been supporting the club my whole life so to get the job was very special. It's been a real privilege to have worked here, but for personal reasons, and for the club as well, it's come to a natural end."

He admits to being quite "fidgety" about what the future holds but is taking the time to reset this summer and work through a "long list of DIY" before diving into his next role.

"I've got two or three things that I'd like to do. My top three would be to stay in sport,

I'd like to look at charity stuff in a bit more detail, and anything in environmental sustainability. If there's an ability to combine a couple of those, that's where I hope I'll end up."

Brown isn't your typical chief exec. On first impression he's more amiable geography teacher than boardroom boss but he speaks with passion and clarity about the game and leaves a proud legacy at Bristol. On the pitch, his tenure included the One-Day Cup final triumph at Lord's in 2015 and promotion to the top tier of the Championship in 2019, but it's the work that's been done off the field of which he's proudest.

"The cricket has been wonderful," he says. "Getting promoted, winning the Royal London, and the two titles with Western Storm. Hosting two World Cups, men's and women's, was also a real highlight. But for me, it's the social purpose stuff. I firmly believe that working in sport is a privilege, I believe it should be fun, and I believe you should use your profile in the best way you possibly can." >



For Brown, that has meant embedding environmental sustainability in everything the club does and making it “as reflective of the community we serve as possible”.

“Sport is so much more than just sport, it’s about the community around it and the freedom and enjoyment that it gives people. We’ve had 150 years of cricketing history, the club will constantly evolve and revolve, and there’ll be moments of great cricketing success and disappointment. But if you can do something good, and give people the opportunity to do something they wouldn’t usually do, that’s the key.”

As he reflects on his time at Gloucestershire, his major frustration is that the ECB haven’t fully embraced the game’s potential in the Bristol area.

“The headline disappointments are the ones where you see the team working really hard around you to achieve something and then when you don’t achieve it, it can feel quite irrational and quite personal. So when we didn’t get The Hundred, that was a real blow to many at the club because we couldn’t understand – and still don’t – why Bristol was overlooked. And the same with the women’s Tier 1 stuff.

“I personally feel that the role of the national governing body is to enable opportunity – pure and simple, that is what it should do. But time and time again we tend to focus on infrastructure that’s already there. Somewhere like Bristol presents such an opportunity for the game. A genuinely diverse city, one of the biggest cricket cities in the country. The frustrations are when the game doesn’t seize the opportunities that are there.

“Plymouth and Sheffield, too – these are huge population masses that just get overlooked because they haven’t got the cricketing history that other cities have. So often the default is: we’ve got eight fantastic venues, let’s just create a framework around those. It’s probably cheaper and easier. That’s still my frustration and will be for a while.” **JH**



Hampshire

NEXT MATCHES: Gloucs, T20 (H), July 12; Somerset, T20 (H), July 14; Surrey, T20 (A), July 18; Essex, T20 (H), July 19; Northants, ODC (H), July 26; Somerset, ODC (H), July 28; Kent, ODC (A), July 31; Lancs, ODC (H), Aug 4; Derby, ODC (H), Aug 7; Durham, ODC (A), Aug 9; Worcs, ODC (A), Aug 11; Middx, ODC (A), Aug 14

Bears dent Hampshire’s title hopes

Hampshire’s Championship title bid took a hit when they were thwarted by Warwickshire’s rearguard effort at Edgbaston.

First Championship hundreds of the season from James Vince (166*) and Liam Dawson (120) had taken the visitors to 453-6 in their second innings, Vince declaring late on day three to set the Bears a nominal target of 498.

Hampshire looked on course for the win when they reduced their opponents to 123-6, but a dogged stand of 183 between Sam Hain (111*) and Michael Burgess (79) steadied the ship before three quick wickets tipped the game back in their favour.

However, Hain and last-man Olly Hannon-Dalby survived the remaining five overs to deny Hampshire a third win of the season and leave them fifth in the table, 40 points behind leaders Surrey.

“We got so close – as close as it gets really,” Hampshire seamer James Fuller told BBC Radio Solent. “Fair play to Hain and Burgess, they batted so well for 300 balls and that session got really hard as the ball got old and the sun was beating down.

“We never gave up and kept coming in hard, but they repelled us for so long. Then there was still a sniff for us at the end – what a great game of cricket.” **JH**



Kent

NEXT MATCHES: Essex, T20 (A), July 11; Sussex, T20 (H), July 12; Glam, T20 (H), July 16; Surrey, T20 (H), July 19; Somerset, ODC (A), July 26; Lancs, ODC (A), July 28; Hants, ODC (H), July 31; Middx, ODC (H), Aug 4; Worcs, ODC (A), Aug 7; Derby, ODC (A), Aug 9; Durham, ODC (H), Aug 11; Northants, ODC (H), Aug 14

Agar blow leaves Spitfires in tailspin

Kent's season threatened to spin off the rails after the Division One strugglers suffered an innings loss on home soil to Lancashire to follow a miserable run of six straight defeats in the Blast.

The Lancs fixture was their third red-ball loss on the bounce and summed up their season so far. After Kent posted a below-par 244, the visitors racked up 549-9 declared against a toothless attack. On his Championship debut, Australian all-rounder Charlie Stobo was the only player to pass 50 in Kent's second innings, as they were dismissed for 222 and slumped to defeat by an innings and 83 runs.

The announcement ahead of the match that Wes Agar, their overseas quick, has been forced to return

to Australia due to a shoulder injury only compounds their problems, with seam trio Matt Quinn, Michael Cohen and Fred Klaassen already sidelined. Agar – who has signed a deal to return next season – had not been prolific, but he has the best average of any Kent seamer this season (12 wickets at 34.25). Matt Parkinson is their leading wicket-taker, but the leg-spinner's 20 wickets have come at 54.10 apiece.

The defeat to Lancs left Kent rooted at the bottom of Division One, with one victory from 10 matches.

“We were just second best in everything really,” said captain Daniel Bell-Drummond. “It’s a shame, it’s been happening before now. With the ball we have a few injuries, and I don’t want to keep going on about it, but it is a fact. I genuinely can’t fault the bowlers’ effort, but it’s not good enough in this division, to be honest, and the scoreboard shows this.

“We have, I shouldn’t say punched above our weight in Division One, but when you compare us to some of the other teams with countless resources, it is different. That’s no excuse but we’ve been here before and it’s about fighting and being better as players.” **JH**

BELOW: A shoulder injury curtailed Wes Agar's stint at Canterbury



Lancashire Cricket

Lancashire

NEXT MATCHES: Derby, T20 (A), July 11; Yorks, T20 (H), July 12; Notts, T20 (H), July 17; Northants, T20 (H), July 19; Durham, ODC (H), July 24; Kent, ODC (H), July 28; Derby, ODC (A), July 31; Somerset, ODC (A), Aug 2; Hants, ODC (A), Aug 4; Middx, ODC (H), Aug 8; Northants, ODC (A), Aug 11; Worcs, ODC (H), Aug 14

Rocky pulls no punches

“**T**he resemblance is quite remarkable,” said Mark Butcher of Rocky Flintoff, son of his former England teammate Andrew, after the 16-year-old bludgeoned his first century for Lancashire's Second XI in April, including a straight-arm pull shot for six that was eerily familiar. “The Flintoff genetic make-up is so strong that his movements are almost identical to those of his dad's.”

Rocky is yet to make his senior debut for the county but it surely won't be long after he made a match-winning hundred for England under-19s a fortnight after signing his first professional deal at Old Trafford.

Flintoff was playing alongside Luc Benkenstein – son of Lancs head coach Dale – and Haydon Mustard – son of former England stumper Phil – while the England Young Lions side they were up against featured Michael Vaughan's son Archie, a right-handed strokemaker on the

books at Somerset who made an easy-on-the-eye 85.

“Cricketers with a physical presence always catch the eye,” continued Butcher, speaking on the *Wisden Cricket Weekly* podcast, “particularly if they hit the ball as hard as Rocky does, and there will be a temptation to fast track him as quickly as possible.”

Mark Chilton, the club's director of cricket performance, describes the teenager as a “grounded individual”, but Lancs have so far resisted the temptation to throw him in at the deep end, with a marked improvement in their form negating the need for changes.

They're well-placed to qualify for the Blast quarter-finals, sitting second in the North Group after eight matches, and the innings victory over Kent in late July was their second win in three Championship fixtures after they opened the campaign with a five-game winless streak.

“Any game you win by an innings is brilliant, but to win by an innings and nearly a hundred runs is even better,” said Keaton Jennings, Lancashire's skipper. “I thought the lads kept fighting all the way through and to get 20 wickets on that surface was top drawer.” **JH**



RIGHT: Louis Kimber produced an innings from nowhere

BELOW: Chip off the old block: Rocky Flintoff is a building a reputation in his own right



Leicestershire

NEXT MATCHES: Worcs, T20 (A), July 11; Northants, T20 (H), July 12; Notts, T20 (H), July 14; Birmingham, T20 (A), July 19; Notts, ODC (H), July 24; Warks, ODC (H), July 26; Essex, ODC (A), July 31; Sussex, ODC (A), Aug 4; Surrey, ODC (H), Aug 6; Yorks, ODC (A), Aug 8; Glam, ODC (H), Aug 11; Gloucs, ODC (A), Aug 14

Kimber rewrites the record books

When Louis Kimber walked out to bat with Leicestershire 144-6 in the fourth innings of their Championship clash with Sussex at Hove, still needing another 320 runs for victory, there was no hint of the fireworks that were to follow.

Kimber, a 27-year-old who had a solitary first-class hundred to his name and an average hovering the wrong side of 25, had passed 50

once in 10 red-ball knocks in 2024. A century for the second XI a week earlier suggested he was in good nick, but he'd only shown brief glimpses of his potential in his six-year professional career.

By the time he departed the field on day four, bowled, heartbreakingly, by Nathan McAndrew with the Foxes 19 runs short of their target, he had amassed 243 from 127 balls in one of the most extraordinary innings in Championship history.

His innings featured 21 sixes (“It felt like 41,” said Sussex head coach Paul Farbrace), breaking the Championship record of 17 set by Ben Stokes in 2022, including five off a chaotic nine-ball Ollie Robinson over which leaked 43 runs – believed to be the most expensive over in first-class history when discounting declaration bowling.

Kimber also smashed the record for the fastest double-hundred in Championship history, reaching the landmark from 100 deliveries, 23 fewer than Aneurin Donald in 2016.

His eighth-wicket stand of 239 with Ben Cox, who made 34, was a club record and put Leicestershire in touching distance of a stunning first. But Robinson pinned Cox lbw before Ben Mike chipped tamely to mid-off and Kimber was the last man out when he was castled by McAndrew after dragging the ball onto his stumps.



“You don’t get many days like that in your career, it was unbelievable really,” said Kimber. “It’s just a shame we couldn’t get over the line, but, personally, you have to enjoy days like that. It was good fun.

“My phone has been buzzing and the records I have broken are pretty cool. All the Sussex players congratulated me and told me I didn’t deserve to be on the losing side. They were very gracious and over four days probably deserved to win.

“I can’t remember hitting the ball as cleanly as I did today. I got into a kind of weird zone when I wasn’t thinking too much except trying to hit the ball where I wanted to. It was an amazing feeling. There wasn’t too much running going on, I was just trying to hit the ball as far as I could.” **JH**

INCOMING: The Foxes have signed Ajinkya Rahane for the second half of the season as cover for Wiaan Mulder. The Indian right-hander, who will be available for the duration of the One-Day Cup and the final five Championship matches, had been due to play for the club last season before international commitments scuppered the deal. Kiwi all-rounder Jimmy Neesham will step in for the Foxes’ final six Blast group fixtures.



MIDDLESEX
CRICKET

Middlesex

NEXT MATCHES: Gloucs, T20 (A), July 11; Glam, T20 (A), July 12; Gloucs, T20 (H), July 18; Sussex, T20 (A), July 19; Worcs, ODC (A), July 24; Derby, ODC (A), July 27; Northants, ODC (H), July 29; Kent, ODC (A), Aug 4; Durham, ODC (H), Aug 6; Lancs, ODC (A), Aug 8; Somerset, ODC (H), Aug 11; Hants, ODC (H), Aug 14

Seaxes maintain promotion push

While Middlesex’s T20 record continues to be woeful – bottom of the South Group in 2023, at the time of writing they’re bringing up the rear once again with one win from eight matches – their Championship promotion bid is gaining momentum after a commanding victory over Derbyshire, their third win in six red-ball games.

“It was a hard-earned win,” said captain Toby Roland-Jones after bottom-placed Derbyshire succumbed to a 194-run loss at Lord’s. “One of the better feelings you get in the first-class game is when you feel like you’ve really worked over four days and played some really good cricket.

“On the second day, we found ourselves pretty far short of our standards which we like to

set ourselves as a bowling group, but I’m pleased with the way we wrestled back the initiative. Today was a good old-fashioned, hard-working day, and we got our rewards in the end.”

Ryan Higgins starred once again, making 163, his fourth Championship ton of the summer, and 67, while Leus du Plooy impressed with a brace of half-centuries against his former county.

With the ball, Roland-Jones, who made a crucial 52 from N^o9 in the first dig, picked up his first five-for of the season to restrict Derbyshire to 339 in their first innings, giving Middlesex a lead of 94, before Ethan Bamber and Henry Brookes took three wickets apiece to wrap up a victory which left the Seaxes 25 points clear of third-placed Yorkshire. **JH**



RIGHT: Toby Roland-Jones led the way with a first-innings five-for against Derbyshire



LEFT: Ravi Bopara has led from the front as Steelbacks skipper

BELOW: Farhan Ahmed has signed his first professional deal at the age of 16



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
COUNTY CRICKET CLUB

Nottinghamshire

NEXT MATCHES: Durham, T20 (A), July 12; Leics, T20 (A), July 14; Lancs, T20 (A), July 17; Yorks, T20 (A), July 19; Leics, ODC (A), July 24; Sussex, ODC (H), July 26; Yorks, ODC (H), July 28; Glam, ODC (A), July 31; Surrey, ODC (A), Aug 4; Gloucs, ODC (H), Aug 9; Essex, ODC (H), Aug 11; Warks, ODC (A), Aug 14

Rehan's kid brother breaks out

Farhan Ahmed, the younger brother of the still very youthful England leggie Rehan Ahmed, has signed a three-and-a-half-year contract with Notts.

Farhan, 16, is a Trent Bridge academy graduate who impressed hugely with England under-19s at January's World Cup. A conventional off-spinner with preternatural control, Farhan has been tearing it up in youth and second XI cricket.

Across 2021 and 2022, he took 128 wickets for Notts' pathway teams and in 2022 he was awarded the Sir Jack Hobbs Memorial Prize by The Cricket Society, given to the most outstanding under-15 schoolboy cricketer in England.

"Farhan has been with us for seven years now, and his talent has been obvious across that time," says Matt Wood, the club's elite pathway manager. "He is a clever bowler - he's very mature in that sense - and his trajectory over the last couple of years has been exceptional."

"I'm obviously very happy and excited to have signed this contract - it is something I've been working towards since I started playing cricket," Farhan said. "For it to be



est. 1878
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
COUNTY CRICKET CLUB

Northamptonshire

NEXT MATCHES: Leics, T20 (A), July 12; Durham, T20 (A), July 14; Birmingham, T20 (H), July 18; Lancs, T20 (A), July 19; Derby, ODC (H), July 24; Hants, ODC (A), July 26; Middx, ODC (A), July 29; Durham, ODC (A), Aug 2; Worcs, ODC (H), Aug 4; Somerset, ODC (H), Aug 7; Lancs, ODC (H), Aug 11; Kent, ODC (A), Aug 14

Ravi's evergreen class

Ravi Bopara is one of the great survivors of English cricket. After serving Essex with distinction, and then Sussex, he accepted the role of T20 captain at Northants this term and has

shown his enduring class for a team going nicely in the competition.

A scene-stealing home debut - the old stager took his side home from the final ball of the match, 56 not out - set him up for a return of nine wickets and 212 runs across his first eight matches, helping secure four wins in that time to leave the Steelbacks fourth in the North Group of a tournament they routinely prioritise. "I'm still learning a great deal about this game at my age," he told the club's website. "I have a burning desire and hunger to upskill my game to new heights and I still feel like a young man in the game."

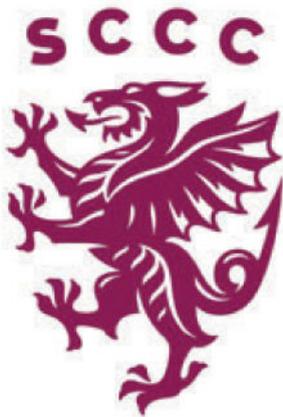
Bopara's form helped secure him a wildcard selection for The Hundred. He will return to London Spirit alongside their other wildcard pick, Ryan Higgins. **PW**

SAVE THE DATE: On July 14, Wantage Road will host their second African Caribbean Cricket Festival, a day-long celebration of cricket and community in partnership with the ECB and the ACE programme. The day will feature two T20 games, All Stars and Dynamos kids' coaching sessions, DJs and Caribbean food stalls. And it's free.

for my home county is a dream come true. The history of the club is clear, and to be part of it myself is something I am looking forward to.

"I've seen other players make that step from the Academy onto the pro staff then play first-team cricket, which gives me confidence that I can do the same in the years ahead."

In a further sign of his growing reputation, Farhan, who is yet to make his senior debut for Notts, was selected to play against the touring West Indians as part of a First-Class County Select XI. **PW**



Somerset

NEXT MATCHES: Surrey, T20 (H), July 12; Hants, T20 (A), July 14; Sussex, T20 (H), July 18; Glam, T20 (A), July 19; Kent, ODC (H), July 26; Hants, ODC (A), July 28; Durham, ODC (A), July 31; Lancs, ODC (H), Aug 2; Derby, ODC (H), Aug 4; Northants, ODC (A), Aug 7; Worcs, ODC (H), Aug 9; Middx, ODC (A), Aug 11

Green takes centre stage

For all the glitzy sheen to Blast kings Somerset, the man who Lewis Gregory so often turns to when he needs a wicket is a player who tends to slip under the radar, despite him boasting a world-beating record.

Since the start of 2023, no bowler in world cricket boasts a better strike-rate than Ben Green's 10.5. The seamer

has taken 47 wickets in that period, including 30 in last summer's Blast, a tally bettered only by teammate Matt Henry. Eight matches into the ongoing campaign, with Somerset sitting third in the South Group, only Gloucestershire's Matt Taylor has taken more wickets than Green's 15.

"Stats are stats," says Green with a shrug, mullet and moustache twitching. "The boys were ripping into me a little as that one came out before the Middlesex game [at Lord's] and then I took wickets with my first two balls. But it's an exciting stat and suggests I'm doing something right."

So what's clicked? "I'd say it's more about experience. I'm not blessed with Riley [Meredith's] 90mph pace, nor do I have long fingers, so the knuckleball is a tough one. Jason Kerr [Somerset's head coach] is always challenging me to see if I can expand my skills **and stay ahead** of batters. I have to **be as smart as possible**, try to read **what the batter** is going to do, set fields **accordingly**, and take the ground **into account**. I use all these bits and bobs to my advantage as best I can."

A turning point for Green came in 2021. Then **23**, the all-rounder had made **20** appearances in the **five** seasons since his debut. Then Somerset's **director** of cricket Andy Hurry called Green up to his office **for a meeting**, with coaches Kerr and Paul Tweddle also present.

"I'm thinking, 'Shit, I could be done here'. When Sarge [Hurry] calls you in, it's hard not to fear **the worst**."

Instead, Green was **offered the 50-over captaincy**, "and my heart rate went down!".

It was, he explains, a "**huge moment**" for his **white-ball cricket**, giving him reassurance **about his** role in the side.

While Green is yet to **make** the same impact in **red-ball** cricket - spending **time on loan** at Leicestershire to gain **valuable** game time - a knack of **taking key** wickets and the ability to **hit big** ensures he is one of **the first**

names on Somerset's T20 teamsheet. Given the depth of their squad, that is no mean feat.

The reigning champions have a queue of batters - including Tom Lammonby, James Rew and Andy Umeed, who enjoyed a sensational 50-over campaign last summer - who are unable to break into the side. Their impressive stable of seamers rotate and are supported by the wily left-armer Roelof van der Merwe, while fellow spinners Shoaib Bashir and Lewis Goldsworthy are both out on loan.

"From the outside, it probably looks like quite a settled side," Green explains. "But what's brilliant is that we've got guys champing at the bit who are definitely good enough to be playing."

With such riches at their disposal, Somerset becoming the first county to retain their T20 crown feels distinctly possible. **SD**

BELOW: Ben Green has taken 15 wickets at a strike-rate of 8.86 in this season's Blast





Surrey

NEXT MATCHES: Somerset, T20 (A), July 12; Essex, T20 (A), July 14; Hants, T20 (A), July 18; Kent, T20 (A), July 19; Yorks, ODC (H), July 25; Glam, ODC (H), July 28; Gloucs, ODC (H), July 30; Warks, ODC (A), Aug 2; Notts, ODC (H), Aug 4; Leics, ODC (A), Aug 6; Essex, ODC (A), Aug 9; Sussex, ODC (A), Aug 11

Lawrence takes his shot

Timing is everything for a batter, and Dan Lawrence made his dip for the line at just the right moment, hitting a scintillating 175 in Surrey's innings win over Worcestershire in late June, a week before England announced their first Test squad of the summer.

It was Lawrence's second red-ball century since arriving at The Oval, and his fifth 50-plus score in 10 knocks, but there was no guarantee he would be included in the squad to face West Indies. It's more than two years since the 26-year-old played the most recent of his 11 Test matches and he'd been struggling for rhythm in Surrey's Blast campaign, with five single-figure scores in eight innings.

At Worcester, he provided a timely reminder of his rare talent. Pre-lunch on day two, with his side eight wickets down, Lawrence was refusing singles to a field

BELOW: Dan Lawrence dominated Shoaib Bashir at Worcester



of nine boundary-riders. It wasn't the most thrilling cricket, but it was perhaps what the game required.

Then, post a refuel, something special unfolded. After the third consecutive ball of an early afternoon Shoaib Bashir over disappeared for a straight six, the former Essex right-hander reached 150.

"After three, I was going to try and go for all of them," he said. "It was downwind, a short boundary, and I fancied my chances."

Lawrence was denied six consecutive maximums when Bashir sent his sixth ball for five wides and he could only take a single off the next delivery, but it was a brutally brilliant takedown of England's first-choice spinner.

For a few days, until Leicestershire's Louis Kimber took Ollie Robinson to the cleaners at Hove, the 38 runs taken from Bashir made it the joint most expensive over in County Championship history – sharing the record with Andrew Flintoff's blitz off Alex Tudor in 2008.

Lawrence's 'no look' six off Tommy Taylor encapsulated in one shot what Ben Stokes' England are about, and, sure enough, he was named in a 14-strong squad for the first two Tests of the summer.

England's 'batter in waiting' since the 2022 tour of the Caribbean, Lawrence's off-breaks could help tip the scales in his favour. He bowled 47 overs at New Road, taking four wickets, and ahead of Surrey's top-of-the-table clash against Essex at The Oval, he'd claimed 15 Championship wickets in 156.2 overs. He also took 15 red-ball wickets for Essex, but those came across nine seasons.

"It's something I'm really working hard on," Lawrence tells WCM. "I didn't have the opportunities I'd have liked in the past, but I'm having the opportunities now here."

Now a more rounded cricketer with another string to his bow, further England opportunities surely beckon. **SD**



Sussex

NEXT MATCHES: Kent, T20 (A), July 12; Essex, T20 (H), July 13; Somerset, T20 (A), July 18; Middx, T20 (H), July 19; Notts, ODC (A), July 26; Warks, ODC (H), July 28; Yorks, ODC (A), July 31; Glam, ODC (A), Aug 2; Leics, ODC (H), Aug 4; Gloucs, ODC (A), Aug 7; Surrey, ODC (H), Aug 11; Essex, ODC (H), Aug 14

Robinson reaches a crossroads

It's been a curious month for Ollie Robinson. Pigeonholed as a red-ball specialist to such an extent that he was permitted just 50 deliveries with a white ball in two seasons before this one, he has become a key member of Sussex's T20 side in this campaign, taking the new ball and returning good numbers, picking up eight wickets with an impressive economy rate of 6.62.

He bowled sharply at times, orchestrating Sussex's big win at The Oval over a previously undefeated Surrey side. Eight games in, they're well-placed for quarter-final qualification, sitting second in the South Group.

Trent Rockets duly came calling, selecting Robinson as one of their two wildcard picks ahead of this year's Hundred. However, a week after that announcement, the England seamer was taken for 43 from a single over by a rampant



LEFT: Ollie Robinson has been short of his best red-ball form

BELOW: Jacob Bethell on his way to a 15-ball half-century against Northants

Louis Kimber in Sussex's wild Championship game against Leicestershire.

Robinson picked up five wickets in the match to help Sussex to their fourth win in eight, keeping them top of the table with six games remaining, some 33 points clear of Yorkshire in third place. But his humbling at the hands of Kimber was symptomatic of a bowler who's lost a little of his sparkle with the red ball, even while claiming 27 Championship wickets this season at the time of writing.

When England named their squad for the first two Test matches of the summer he was a notable absentee, with the uncapped duo of Dillon Pennington and Gus Atkinson and the recalled Matt Potts selected ahead of him.

At the age of 30, there is plenty of time for Robinson to come again, particularly with James Anderson departing the Test arena. His England record remains impressive. But having previously been touted as their attack leader, he now has ground to make up. In the meantime, Sussex will be happy to have his services as their promotion bid gathers pace. **PW**



Warwickshire

NEXT MATCHES: Worcs, T20 (H), July 12; Derby, T20 (H), July 14; Northants, T20 (A), July 18; Leics, T20 (H), July 19; Essex, ODC (A), July 24; Leics, ODC (A), July 26; Sussex, ODC (A), July 28; Surrey, ODC (H), Aug 2; Gloucs, ODC (A), Aug 4; Glam, ODC (H), Aug 8; Yorks, ODC (H), Aug 11; Notts, ODC (H), Aug 14

Jacob climbs the ladder

As the dust settles on England's underwhelming T20 World Cup campaign and

the search for new talent begins, certain well-timed performances get thrust into the spotlight.

Step forward Jacob Bethell, the Barbados-born-and-raised southpaw who took the Warwickshire pathway into the professional game via a scholarship to Rugby School and a series of eye-catching performances for England under-19s.

Against Northants in the T20 Blast, the 20-year-old hit a 15-ball half century (seven sixes), the second fastest by an English player in the history of domestic T20 cricket, just two deliveries shy of Marcus Trescothick's 13-baller for Somerset in 2010.

A day later he strummed an unbeaten 71 against Worcestershire to consolidate Warwickshire's place at the top of the North Group, before transferring his white-ball form into the Championship with a measured 69 from 140 balls against Hampshire. Top-scoring in the



first innings, Bethell's knock ensured the Bears would keep a foothold in a game in which they just managed to avoid defeat, nine-down at stumps on the final day.

Another draw has been the story of Warwickshire's red-ball season. A lack of incisiveness with the ball has cost them dear; after eight matches they were one of only two sides, the other being Worcestershire, to remain winless in the top division. Of the seamers, only Olly Hannon-Dalby had claimed 10 or more wickets.

Chris Woakes' return for the second half of the summer will help their cause. The England all-rounder chose to take some time away from the game following the death of his father in May, returning in late June. **PW**



Worcestershire

NEXT MATCHES: Leics, T20 (H), July 11; Birmingham, T20 (A), July 12; Yorks, T20 (H), July 14; Derby, T20 (H), July 18; Middx, ODC (H), July 24; Durham, ODC (H), July 28; Derby, ODC (A), Aug 2; Northants, ODC (A), Aug 4; Kent, ODC (H), Aug 7; Somerset, ODC (A), Aug 9; Hants, ODC (H), Aug 11; Lancs, ODC (A), Aug 14

Pears face injury crisis

It's proving to be a traumatic summer at New Road, with the tragic death of Josh Baker casting a shadow over the club.

The loss of the homegrown spinner puts any struggles on the field in perspective, but the Pears can't catch

BELOW: Brett D'Oliveira missed Worcestershire's defeat to Surrey at New Road due to a shoulder injury

a break, sitting one off the bottom in the Championship with an injury crisis depleting their already limited resources. Skipper Brett D'Oliveira was forced to miss the innings defeat to Surrey in late June with a damaged shoulder, Joe Leach is unlikely to bustle in again until late summer, while fast bowler Yadvinder Singh has a stress fracture.

Adam Finch was unable to bowl after day one of that loss to the reigning champions, with a pair of loanees – Shoaib Bashir and Ben Allison – included in the attack. New Zealand all-rounder Nathan Smith was deemed too valuable to risk in back-to-back first-class games and held back for the visit to Durham, while Ethan Brookes and Tommy Taylor were making their red-ball bows for the club. The latter had missed the start of the campaign after colliding with teammate Ben Gibbon under a catch in pre-season. Gibbon is yet to return.

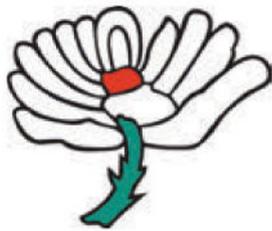
If the Pears thought the Blast would provide some relief from their red-ball travails, they were mistaken.

Having lost Usama Mir's services on the eve of the tournament when the PCB refused to provide a No-Objection Certificate despite the leg-spinner's omission from their T20 World Cup squad, they prop up the North Group after two wins from eight matches.

They have at least returned to New Road after the early-season floods. One of the last bastions of county cricket, the ground is a glorious pick 'n' mix of stands, with afternoon tea in the Ladies' Pavilion needing to be seen and tasted to be believed.

How long will they remain there, though? Ashley Giles, the club's chief executive, has assured the 3,000-strong membership that they will be consulted before any decision is reached, and he insists "option one" is staying put. But the findings of an ongoing report could force their hand. New Road sits on a flood plain, and the combined cost, including lost revenue, of its unavailability for the early stages of the season was £250,000. Few businesses can survive that financial hit. **SD**





THE YORKSHIRE
COUNTY CRICKET CLUB

Yorkshire

NEXT MATCHES: Durham, T20 (H), July 11; Lancs, T20 (A), July 12; Worcs, T20 (A), July 14; Notts, T20 (H), July 19; Surrey, ODC (A), July 25; Notts, ODC (A), July 28; Sussex, ODC (H), July 31; Gloucs, ODC (H), Aug 2; Essex, ODC (H), Aug 6; Leics, ODC (H), Aug 8; Warks, ODC (A), Aug 11; Glam, ODC (A), Aug 14

Forgotten man McKerr pushes his case

The depth of talent runs so deep at Surrey that good cricketers often find themselves unable to break through. Such was the case

with Dan Moriarty, who chose to head north to Headingley in search of opportunities, and the same path has been taken by the strapping South Africa-born seamer Conor McKerr.

He is an interesting bowler. Strong, quick and athletic, his virtues are obvious. Surrey had high hopes for him, and as a British passport holder he was registered as homegrown. But with the 26-year-old's chances limited in south London, he took loan moves to Derbyshire, Kent and Notts in previous seasons before landing up at Yorkshire for this campaign.

Since arriving, he has made waves, offering pace in the T20 side and spearheading Yorkshire's first red-ball win of the year against Gloucestershire at Scarborough in late June, a victory that took the Tykes up to third in Division Two. "Winning four-day cricket is the best feeling," McKerr said afterwards. "That's why we all play."

His match figures of 5-76 included being on a hat-trick twice in the game and then claiming the final wicket. His coach Ottis Gibson was thrilled with what he saw. "He adds a different dimension to the bowling attack. He's a big, tall guy who is quite imposing. He has that physicality you like to see in a fast

bowler. If the opportunity's there to keep him, that's something I'd certainly like to look into."

McKerr is in the final year of his contract with Surrey and it seems likely that he will move on. Yorkshire would seem the perfect fit, with McKerr acknowledging the presence of his "best friend" Moriarty as a further reason to up-sticks.

"The reality is that Surrey have the best bowling attack in the country," he said after the Gloucestershire win. "I personally think they could go and play in the Test Championship and compete. That's just the reality. I'm at the age where I need to be playing cricket, and this is a big opportunity for me." **PW**

PADDING UP FOR PRIDE: Leeds Pride takes place on July 21 and Yorkshire CCC will be marching with Leeds Kites CC, the first LGBT+ cricket team in Leeds, and members of the club's Yorkshire and Proud supporters' group. Steve Gillies, the chair of Leeds Kites, said: "The club is a high-profile brand in the city and globally and Yorkshire Cricket choosing to be an active supporter of Leeds Pride - a time of celebration and visibility for the LGBT+ community - is so very powerful." 🏏

ABOVE: Conor McKerr is enjoying a successful loan spell at Headingley and considering a permanent move

Regional Round-Up

Raf Nicholson picks out the top stories from the Charlotte Edwards Cup, with Scotland-inspired Blaze picking up their first trophy following their defeat in the final last year

Queens of Scotland

Step aside, Southern Vipers – there's a new name on the Charlotte Edwards Cup. The Blaze, who are only in their second season in their current guise (they moved to Trent Bridge from Loughborough at the start of 2023, having previously been known as Lightning), picked up a trophy at the third time of asking, having lost to Vipers in last year's 20-over and 50-over finals. Their seven-wicket win in the final at Derby, against South East Stars, came off the back of a near faultless run in the group stages, Blaze winning nine out of 10 matches.

Their victory is also proof of the debt English women's cricket owes to Scotland, who supplied three of Blaze's star performers: captain Kirstie Gordon, who finished as the competition's leading wicket-taker (22 in total), and sisters Kathryn and Sarah Bryce, who scored a half-century apiece in the final to overhaul Stars' 141 in what Gordon described as "a masterclass in how to do a chase". Years spent batting together, from the back garden through to a professional final this summer, meant they were able to make it look easy.

It's really no wonder that a member of the crowd at Derby felt it appropriate to blast out a rendition of *Flower of Scotland* from the stands during the final.

Charlotte Edwards Cup Finals Day

June 22, County Ground, Derby

1st semi-final

Central Sparks 140-9 (Webb 45*, Perrin 32; Groves 2-16, Ballinger 2-34) v The Blaze 142-5 (K Bryce 44, Beaumont 39; Baker 3-24)

The Blaze won by 5 wickets (with 12 balls remaining)

2nd semi-final

South East Stars 162-5 (Dunkley 49, Redmayne 39; Smith 1-20) v Southern Vipers 157-9 (Dean 43, Wyatt 34; Corteen-Coleman 2-23, Gregory 2-25)

South East Stars won by 5 runs

Final

South East Stars 141-9 (Redmayne 25, Davidson-Richards 21; Graham 3-16, Groves 3-33) v The Blaze 144-3 (K Bryce 62, S Bryce 52*; Gregory 1-26)

The Blaze won by 7 wickets (with 8 balls remaining)



ABOVE: Sarah and Kathryn Bryce steered The Blaze to their first trophy

BELOW: Tilly Corteen-Coleman has made an instant impression

Sweet Sixteen for Tilly

Tilly Corteen-Coleman, the Stars' 16-year-old left-arm spinner, was unleashed in the Charlotte Edwards Cup after signing her first pro contract in April and she grabbed the headlines by taking four wickets in four balls against Diamonds in late May.

By Finals Day she had become a mainstay of their attack, tasked with opening the bowling. Stars missed out on the trophy, but Corteen-Coleman's 2-23 helped them overcome Vipers in the semi, winning by just five runs. The teenager bamboozled Maia Bouchier after the England opener moved across her stumps to make room to play a sweep but was bowled after failing to read her arm ball. Corteen-Coleman's 16-wicket haul put her second only to Gordon in the competition's bowling charts. With the initials MCC – her full first name is Matilda – was the spinner destined to be a professional cricketer from birth?



England absentees

Blaze and Stars might have reached the Charlotte Edwards Cup final, but their biggest names – Nat Sciver-Brunt and Alice Capsey – didn't play a single match in the competition, with the availability of England players restricted more than ever before.

This is a trend which is only going in one direction, mimicking what we've witnessed in the men's game, but is it the right direction of travel? One thing is for sure: teams like The Blaze, who fielded an almost unchanged team throughout the tournament, will increasingly be at an advantage.

Farewell, Lottie

Finals Day at Derby was Doomsday for the Charlotte Edwards Cup, which looks set to be consigned to history after just four editions. The ECB have yet to make a formal announcement, but the most likely outcome is that – with regions morphing into counties at the end of the season – next year's 20-over comp will be a Women's Blast played alongside the men's version.

That would mean more double-headers, which have proved a mixed bag this season. Some counties seem to have figured out how to make them work (Surrey got 5,000 people to one Stars game), but too often there's been lengthy gaps between matches, with women's games starting far too early (10.30am on a Sunday anyone?) to ensure the men get the prime-time slot.

The disappointing crowd of approximately 1,000 at Finals Day is another indication that the ECB and the counties have never quite got on board with treating regional cricket as a commercial entity which deserves proper marketing. Let's hope things look different come this time next year. 🏏



PHOTO BY HARRY TRUMP

Perrin has the sauce

The first Charlotte Edwards Cup in 2021 launched the career of a certain Alice Capsey and the final edition in 2024 looks to have done the same for another teenage starlet. Davina Perrin, 17, caused a stir two years ago when she was picked up by Birmingham Phoenix for The Hundred, becoming the youngest player in the competition; but she had a tricky season in 2023, averaging just 13 across six matches for Sparks in 20-over cricket and warming the bench throughout The Hundred.

However, a winter of hard work, including an England under-19 tour

to Sri Lanka, looks to have paid off. Central Sparks had enough faith in the teenager to promote her to the top of the order in the Charlotte Edwards Cup and she seized her opportunity, scoring 245 runs at a healthy strike-rate of 133, including a sparkling innings of 79 from 48 balls in their tournament opener against Sunrisers.

In their semi-final against Blaze, she oozed confidence and class with a knock of 32 off 19 balls to get Sparks off to a flyer. If she can carry that form into The Hundred then Northern Superchargers, who have signed her for 2024, are in for a treat. 🏏

ABOVE: Davina Perrin's shotmaking caught the eye in the Charlotte Edwards Cup





WEST INDIES AND ENGLAND

THE LATEST CHAPTER OF A TITANIC RIVALRY

INSIDE:

SERIES PREVIEW

**JAMIE SMITH
EXCLUSIVE**

ENGLAND'S QUICKS

SEALES: WHEELS

**LARA: HIS ENGLAND
CHRONICLES**

BLACKWASH '84



PHOTO BY ALEX DAVIDSON

Everybody's talking about **Jamie**

In an exclusive interview, Jamie Smith, England's new keeper-bat, speaks to Jo Harman about his maiden Test call-up, taking the gloves off his Surrey teammate, and how Bazball opened his eyes to new possibilities



JO HARMAN
Wisden Cricket
Monthly
magazine editor
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Sometimes you see players who you think are rare talents, and Jamie Smith is one of those," said Rob Key after revealing the Surrey stumper had won the race to keep wicket in England's Test team. "You're selecting people for what they're going to be and where you think they can progress to. We feel that he's going to be a fantastic international cricketer. He just needs opportunity."

It's been an open secret that the England selectors have been waiting for their chance to thrust Smith into the Test arena for some time. With Jonny Bairstow's form on a downward curve and Ben Foakes not fitting the Bazball blueprint, the identity of England's keeper for the series against West Indies had been the major talking point ahead of the squad announcement. Ollie Robinson, Jordan Cox and Phil Salt were all namechecked by Key, but Smith's pedigree with the bat always made him the selectors' preferred option.

"Who's going to be the best player to do it in the cauldron of Test cricket against the best players in the world?" asked Key. "You don't see the likes of Cummins, Starc, Hazlewood, Bumrah, Shami in county cricket. So our call really is who we think is the best player to play against those sorts of bowlers. We've seen a lot of Jamie Smith, and we feel he's got the game to be able to do that."

A few hours after England named their 14-strong squad, Smith walked out to bat in Surrey's top-of-the-table clash with Essex at The Oval. On a green pitch against a high-class attack, he eased his way to a 10th first-class hundred. No other Surrey batter made more than 26.

Late on day two, he returned to the crease in the hosts' second innings and was unbeaten at stumps. The third day was punctuated by rain breaks but Smith was unfazed, cruising to 70 in 91 balls including a flurry of stunningly crisp strokes in the mid-afternoon mizzle which brought him five boundaries in the space of 14 deliveries, a masterclass in controlled aggression.

Shortly after he unexpectedly holed out to deep square-leg, Smith sat down with WCM to reflect on a whirlwind few days which began with a call from Brendon McCullum on his way home from training.

"It was a very nice call to receive on my drive home," he says with a grin. "When your name's bandied around it's quite hard to miss these things, on social media it's quite relentless at times. You're always hopeful but I'm not the sort of person who feels you have a divine right to play."

Ben Foakes, his Surrey teammate who had the gloves during England's Test tour of India, was one of the first to congratulate him on his call-up, immediately offering advice on the bowlers he will be keeping to when he makes his Test debut at Lord's.

"He was very supportive, as he always is. Since I joined the staff he's been amazing at teaching me little tips and tricks, the small details which a lot of people might miss he seems to pick up on, and he's very open in sharing that advice. It's obviously very disappointing for him [to get dropped]. No one doubts that he's the best keeper in the country and I don't think that's going to change."

Smith admits that watching Foakes' silky glove-work "doesn't always give you the most amount of confidence at times", such are the lofty standards that he sets, and he accepts that he has much to learn.

A regular behind the stumps for Surrey in white-ball cricket, he's only kept wicket in 19 of his 59 first-class matches, and just twice in the County Championship since the start of the 2023 season. Speaking to *The Telegraph* in May, Smith said he felt his Test breakthrough was more likely to come as a specialist batter, but he insists he's ready for the challenge.



RIGHT: Smith says Ben Foakes (left) was "supportive, as he always is" after he usurped him as England's Test keeper



SMITH IN NUMBERS

19

First-class games in which he's kept wicket, from 59 matches overall

46.74

First-class average in matches in which he's been the designated keeper, compared to an overall average of 41.65

2

ODI caps, both against Ireland last September

76.67

Strike-rate in first-class cricket in 2024, compared to a career strike-rate of 58.64

10

First-class hundreds

3

Smith will be the third Surrey player to keep wicket for England in Test cricket since 2022, following Ben Foakes and Ollie Pope

205.03

Strike-rate in the Blast this summer, the highest of any player to have scored more than 110 runs

"It's not something I've done too many times in my career to date," says Smith. "But I'm very happy to keep wicket. It's an opportunity I'm looking to take and it's not one of those things where suddenly overnight I'm going to become Surrey wicketkeeper and the best wicketkeeper in the world - it will take a bit of time to build into things and hopefully game by game I keep getting better."

At 6ft 2in, Smith is unusually tall for a keeper, but Key says the selectors have done their due diligence, consulting specialists such as Chris Read and James Foster about his suitability for the role.

His lack of experience undoubtedly brings an element of risk - Bairstow's sub-par performances with the gloves in last summer's Ashes demonstrated the damage that can be done when a keeper doesn't hold their catches - but the belief among the England management is that any weakness in Smith's glovework is negated by his irresistible ability with the bat. And, at the age of 23 (he will turn 24 on day three of the Lord's Test), he has the opportunity to grow into the role, as Matt Prior and Alec Stewart, his boss at Surrey, did before him.

Smith's record suggests the responsibility of keeping wicket has a positive impact on his batting - he averages 46.74 in first-class matches in which he's kept wicket, compared to an overall average of 41.65 - but he will have to get to grips with a new role, coming in behind Ben Stokes at N^o7 having spent the season at N^o4 for Surrey. It's not something he's unduly concerned about.

"I feel like my game is pretty versatile. If you bat with the tail and need to score quick runs, it's something I'd be looking to do anyway. It's exciting. There's an opportunity to go out and express yourself."

Even sitting outside the Test set-up, he says the way that England have approached the format since Stokes and McCullum took charge has had a profound influence on his own game.

"At times, pre-2022, when they came in, I was pretty tentative at the crease. I was worried about getting out sometimes and it probably held me back a little bit. The messaging that has come back to me since I went on the Lions trip to Sri Lanka in the winter before the

“**He's been amazing at teaching me little tips and tricks, the small details which a lot of people might miss he seems to pick up on. No one doubts that he's the best keeper in the country and I don't think that's going to change** Jamie Smith on Ben Foakes

2023 season was really positive, and the way I looked to play was a lot more dominant, looking at positive options. Suddenly, that opened my eyes, and took me away from worrying about getting out. I think that was massive for me.

"It does help when you're being successful - and we've had a great time as a team here, winning back-to-back Championships and we're not doing too badly this year - but I've really enjoyed playing cricket over the last couple of years, even when I've failed. That fearless approach has brought the best out of me at times, so hopefully that can continue."

Smith has averaged 48.59 in first-class cricket since that mediocre season in 2022, a run which began with a brutal 82-ball 126 (eight sixes) for the Lions in Galle against Sri Lanka A. Key was in attendance on that tour in early 2023 and marked him down as a Test player in waiting.

Now, that time has come. For anyone who's followed Smith's progress, it will come as no surprise to see him walk out to make his Test debut at Lord's on July 10.

Granted a cricket scholarship at Whitgift School, alma mater of Rory Burns, Jason Roy and Dom Sibley, Smith blossomed in the Surrey hothouse and has moved seamlessly through the England pathway.

He fits the model, even if the role is slightly awkward at this point. England could wait no longer to unleash him. 🏏



Pennington, Atkinson & the eternal search for

real quicks

With the inclusion of Gus Atkinson and Dillon Pennington in the summer's first Test squad, England's intentions have been made clear, writes Phil Walker



PHIL WALKER

Wisden Cricket Monthly editor-in-chief
● @Phil_Wisden

Anyone who was shocked by the inclusions of the uncapped Dillon Pennington and Gus Atkinson for the start of England's Test summer hasn't been paying attention. Outside of the known unknowns of Mark Wood and Jofra Archer, they are the most disconcerting of the new battery of quicks kicking around the English game. Their selections were inevitable.

Neither man offers irrefutable numbers, at least not by the old and increasingly outdated metrics. They both, at a tick over 27, share uncannily similar averages for wickets in red-ball cricket; good but not great, and certainly not compelling. Notts' wobbly trundler Brett Hutton, for example, has considerably more wickets at a much lower average than either man, while Northants' Ben Sanderson (389 at 22) and Jamie Porter of Essex (500 at 23) put them in the shade. And as for Sam Cook... well, we'll come to him in a moment.

No matter. Pace has become a national obsession. The troika of McCullum-Stokes-Key are in no doubt. Seeking it, harnessing and unleashing it - via those precious few athletes who possess the necessary physiology - has come to dominate the discussion. Other styles have been tried and tested and shown, where it *really* matters, to be inadequate. High-class medium-fast seamers, purveyors of quality seam and cut and swerve on the fertile plains of England, have been exposed on the unforgiving tracks outside of their natural zones. Chris Woakes, king of the Dukes, refuses to touch another red Kookaburra cricket

“Pennington has that little bit of pace, he's relentless in his consistency, the angle that he bowls as well, and he's really kicked on this year

Rob Key

ball. Even the great Stuart Broad could only muster a wicket every 32 runs away from home. And these are the good ones.

So here's the message: without pace, you've got no chance. It's become an almost existential question. What is Test cricket for, in this day and age, if it can't provide drama and the occasional shock result in unbreachable territories? If the big three nations and their hopelessly underfunded support chorus can't put up a fight when they play away from home, then what's the point? Australia and India have realised that and strived to build a cohort of versatile cricketers who can each step in when conditions suit their particular set of skills. India, the benchmark, boast an enviably diverse Test attack, one that can now win anywhere, while Australia aren't interested in you unless, at the very least, you can bowl sharp and rag it off the straight. England have belatedly got the memo: slow on the uptake they may have been, but there is no time to waste.

ABOVE: Dillon Pennington is this season's Test bolter



BELOW: Gus Atkinson has played only five first-class matches this season

Rob Key understands this. He is the man for his time and place, concerned overwhelmingly with protecting the quality and competitiveness of Test cricket; consequently, at times he gives the look of a man waging a personal war against some of the more pedestrian elements of county cricket. Take this, from a conversation with *The Telegraph* earlier this year: “I don’t care how many wickets you take. I want to know how hard you are running in, how hard you are hitting the pitch and are you able to sustain pace at 85-88mph.”

With provocative bluntness he was telling us about the future make-up of England’s attack, and if in the process he veers into iconoclasm, puts a few noses out of whack, then so be it. To anyone who argues the case for the county supremacy, for the value of cold, hard numbers scavenged in the shires, he’s likely to shrug, point to a record of one Test series win apiece in India and Australia since the 1980s, and assert that if Test cricket is to maintain its primacy over here, then his teams have to be successful over there.

And so, with this latest squad, we see the argument extended. We saw it with the raw, tall, potential-heavy spinners selected for India and we’ve seen it again now, albeit in a much more contested and populated talent pool, as the numbers generated by county seamers are effectively discarded in favour of a series of informed hunches – data-driven but hunches nonetheless – coalescing around the traits of sizeable speed merchants who rely on bounce to discomfort the best back-foot players in the business. While other kinds of physical challenges present themselves to the travelling Test match bowler, none these days are quite so unforgiving as those to be found in India and Australia. As the five-day game gets squeezed, these hothouses are increasingly where the jeopardy lies.

More generally, England’s Test team feels ripe for renewal. Last year (Ashes at home, India away) felt like a series of endpoints. While the batting is easier to manage – a good player is a good player regardless of surface or continent, and thus easier to identify – the bowlers are an altogether more complex movement, and

England’s stocks are uneven. As Key says, “We’ve either got guys in our bowling attack at one end of the spectrum, or we’ve got guys right at the beginning. No one, or very few, in the middle.”

He’s right. With Wood, Woakes and the departing Jimmy Anderson at one end and Atkinson and Pennington at the other, there is a notable absence of sturdiness in the middle. Ollie Robinson was meant to grow into that role and was given a good run but has been conspicuously overlooked for this first squad, with Key warning him, a little darkly, that it’s “not the time to be taking his foot off the gas, because there’s some very good bowlers around”.

Atkinson has tasted international cricket, with a dozen white-ball appearances for occasional reward. At 26, he is a relatively late developer, a bowler who found an extra gear after overcoming three stress fractures of the back and remodelling his action. He has played just 19 first-class games. At the moment he is a rhythm bowler, capable of ramping it up when the relatively placid-looking run-up clicks and the high, whippy action unfolds, but not yet a guarantee.

“While Atkinson’s white-ball credentials are more established at this stage, it’s his ability in Championship cricket to generate zip in the middle overs with an ageing ball which has grabbed the selectors’ attention

In the case of a bowler like Atkinson, who touched 95mph last year in The Hundred and averaged 89mph across the tournament, it may look effortless, leading pundits such as Alastair Cook to wonder if there’s a bit more “untapped pace” in there. But the reality, as Atkinson’s keen to point out, is that every sinew is being strained. While his white-ball credentials are more established at this stage, it’s his ability in Championship cricket to generate zip in the middle overs with an ageing ball which has grabbed the selectors’ attention. With his quick arm action, he can access reverse-swing, but it’s more about the lengths he bowls and the angle of delivery. Surrey have used him as a session-disruptor this season, a short, sharp partnership-breaker when the going’s got tough. This year he has returned decent numbers, but put his 14 wickets at 29 in the context of him rarely getting a bite of the new ball, and they improve markedly.



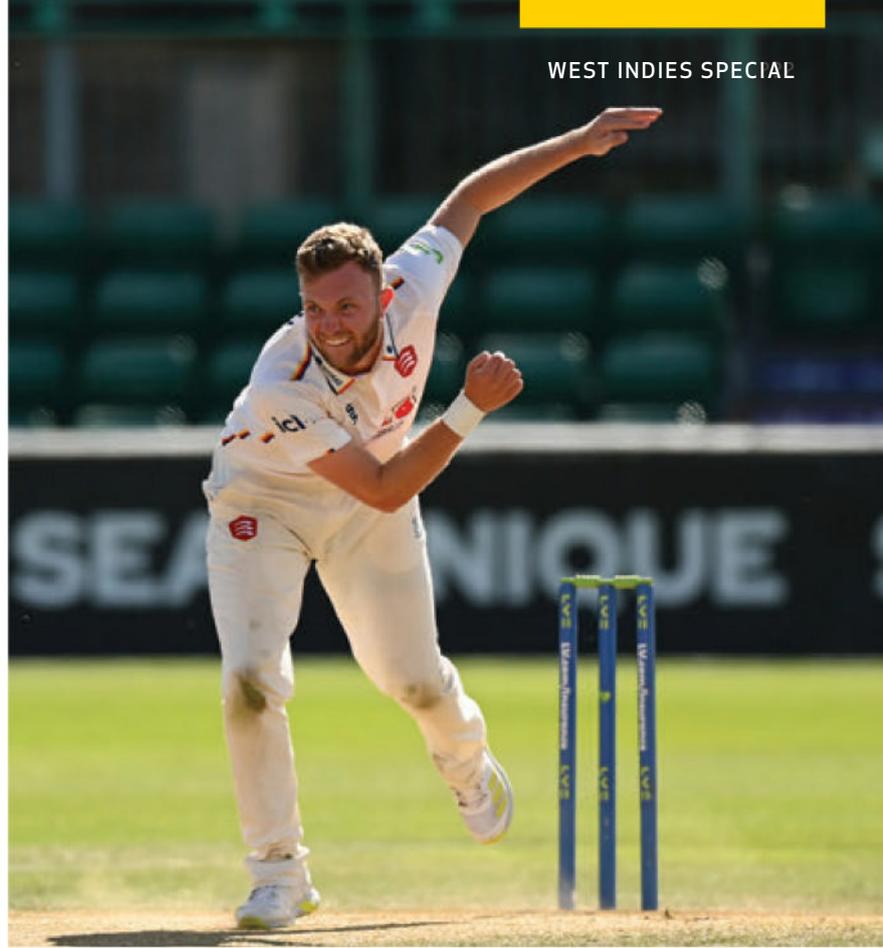
The selection of Pennington was less expected, but it feeds into the old cricketing adage about pace stopping for no man. Only the truly quick bowlers can go from obscurity to scrutiny in literally a matter of days. All other cricketers – openers, stylists, seamers, keepers, tweakers, the lot – need time and a body of work to confirm their value; a good quick just needs an afternoon or two.

Thus Pennington – fast enough but no Mark Wood – has gone from obscure pretender, albeit a vast, springy, wardrobe-shouldered specimen who passes the eye test, to a real contender. Moving from Worcestershire to the more inviting tracks of Trent Bridge ahead of this season has pushed him into contention. With 31 wickets at 23, he is the breakout story of the summer.

“He’d not really been on our radar at all,” admitted Key. “We saw him in under-19s cricket and all that stuff, but this summer, watching him in the county game, I’ve loved watching him bowl, as have all of us involved in selection. He has that little bit of pace, he’s relentless in his consistency, the angle that he bowls as well, and he’s really kicked on this year.”

Much as Key and others may rail against it, this is still dear England, home of the artist-seamer, the top-of-off merchant, and one can never truly deny one’s nature. The case for Sam Cook, Essex’s bequipped magus of the medium-fast, is so strong that numbers ultimately have to count for something.

The burble before that first Test squad was announced was that his name would be in it. Certainly he and his club thought it would be, and a pesky hamstring injury could only partially rationalise the disappointment when it wasn’t. At 26, with 294 first-class wickets at 19.3 and an economy rate of 2.6, the old-fashioned data speaks for itself; the feeling around the game is that his time is imminent, and that he will feature in a Test squad before the summer is out.



Bowlers of his type still have a future outside of England; they just have to be exceptionally good. Cook could still be that bowler. His accuracy is *remarkable*. But the job specs are shifting, and this archetype of old-world English virtues is now cast as the throwback, the exception that proves the rule.

It will be fascinating to see if Cook ends up as a victim of changing attitudes, held back by his relative lack of pace and thus described as an awkward symbol of the English system’s limitations, or whether his undisputed but not especially edgy skills turn out to be the most effective after all. It’s hard to argue that he doesn’t deserve a chance to find out. 🏏

ABOVE: Sam Cook was overlooked for the Lord’s Test despite his outstanding record for Essex

FACTFILES

GUS ATKINSON

BORN: Chelsea, London

AGE: 25

HEIGHT: 6ft 2in

CLUB: Surrey

CAREER STATS: 19 first-class matches, 59 wickets at 27.38, strike-rate 48, 1 five-wicket haul

2024 STATS: 14 wickets at 29.78, strike-rate 58

DILLON PENNINGTON

BORN: Shrewsbury, Shropshire

AGE: 25

HEIGHT: 6ft 5in

CLUB: Nottinghamshire

CAREER STATS: 52 first-class matches, 169 wickets at 27.26, strike-rate 50, 2 five-wicket hauls

2024 STATS: 31 wickets at 23.80; strike-rate 43, 1 five-wicket haul

SAM COOK

BORN: Chelmsford, Essex

AGE: 26

HEIGHT: 6ft 2in

CLUB: Essex

CAREER STATS: 80 first-class matches, 294 wickets at 19.32, strike-rate 44, 14 five-wicket hauls

2024 STATS: 29 wickets at 13.62; strike rate 31, 2 five-wicket hauls



Different strokes: the dilemmas of West Indian batting

Ahead of the Test series, Phil Walker considers the state of Caribbean batsmanship

It's been the glaring problem for the West Indies Test team for years, perhaps even decades. The stratification of red balls and white and the ever-widening financial gulf between these dislocated worlds has resulted in a talent drain of stromakers away from the longer format.

This reality, exacerbated by a threadbare first-class competition running for just two months a year, has made it harder than ever to identify and develop hardened Test batters with the skills and experience to survive. What remains then, as evidenced by this latest squad, is a strikingly uneven mix of the raw, the very raw and Kraigg Brathwaite.

Which is not to say there is a dearth of talent. Far from it. Alick Athanaze, the willowy left-hander, has more than a touch of the good stuff. Mikyle Louis, the young opener from St Kitts and Nevis, is a tidy technician who's started his career on fire. Kirk McKenzie opens up for Jamaica, and blunted the Australians across four stolid knocks last winter as the Windies shared that series with a win-for-the-ages at Brisbane.

But therein lies the problem. These players, all possibles to start the series, boast seven Test matches between them. They emerge in spite of the system. The expectation to survive the unique contours and especial atmosphere of a Lord's Test match - which also doubles up as their first actual first-class match in England - is preposterously difficult. There's learning on the job, and then there's being expected to navigate one of the toughest assignments in

the world game with basically no training at all.

"I feel a lot of sympathy with these modern batters," Brian Lara recently told the *Wisden* podcast. "The environment they're growing up in and the expectations, it's so tough. If you averaged 30-odd in the Caribbean 30 years ago you wouldn't even get a look-in. Now you're pretty much considered to be promising and you're in."

As the Test team's head coach, Andre Coley is tasked with an almost impossible job. Pragmatism is the game here. "The Test arena is new to a high percentage of the players," he tells WCM. "Any Test match they play now is going to be a test. Even at home it's going to be a test. Australia away was a test. So, it's really about managing those expectations and making sure that we're facing everything with a clear mind.

"It's about how you keep moving. It's not called Test cricket for the sake of it. It's about mental strength, your ability to adapt. I think the biggest thing is being open to that challenge. **It definitely will be a test but I'm sure everybody is up for it.**"

Extracting Test cricketers from a culture in **thrall** to the white ball is hard enough without the added hassle of trying to hold onto them. Take Shai Hope, says Lara. Seven years

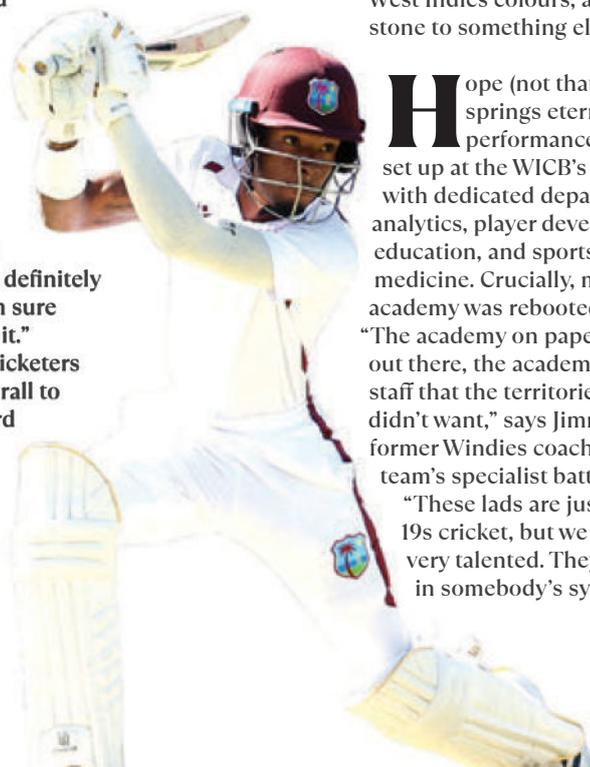
ago he was the great new hope of Caribbean batting. Twin tons at Leeds that summer of 2017 underscored a stirring against-the-head victory that seemed to signal a new kind of optimism. Since then, Hope has stagnated in Test cricket to the point of inertia, while advancing his career elsewhere. He last played a Test match in 2021, with an average of 25 from 38 games. And yet he boasts a 50-over average of 50, with 16 hundreds. The talent is not in question.

RIGHT: Kirk McKenzie withstood Australia's quicks over the winter
BELOW: Alick Athanaze is likely to slot into the Windies middle-order

"Hope? He was considered to be a future great," says Lara. "He had so much promise. Today, we are trying to ease him back to Test cricket and I'm not sure he's that interested, because he's got these opportunities elsewhere, he's going to be in the auction for the IPL and so on. I see a lot of these youngsters using the Test arena for the opportunity to wear the West Indies colours, and as a stepping stone to something else."

Hope (not that one) still springs eternal. A high-performance unit has been set up at the WICB's headquarters, with dedicated departments for analytics, player development, coach education, and sports science and medicine. Crucially, moreover, the academy was rebooted two years ago. "The academy on paper wasn't the best out there, the academy was outcast staff that the territories themselves didn't want," says Jimmy Adams, the former Windies coach and now the team's specialist batting coach.

"These lads are just out of under-19s cricket, but we think they're very talented. They should be in somebody's system." The





“I feel a lot of sympathy with these modern batters. The environment they’re growing up in and the expectations, it’s so tough. If you averaged 30-odd in the Caribbean 30 years ago you wouldn’t even get a look-in. Now you’re pretty much considered to be promising and you’re in

Brian Lara

coaching team gave the territories “tangible evidence” of what can be done with young players if they are given proper support. And the hoped-for upshot? “That we’ll have tangible evidence at the front end, which is our international team.”

It’s early days, warns Coley, but the shoots are there. “We’ve seen a number of young players who have transitioned into their national teams, or their West Indies franchise teams, on the back of having spent so much time at the academy.”

The state of Caribbean pitches is another thorny topic that needs attention. “Outside of potentially one or two venues across the Caribbean, most of the pitches are generally devoid of grass,” says Coley. “That is definitely something we’re looking forward to address.

“Back in the day when we were dominant in world cricket, I remember watching our

first-class cricket. It was very competitive and the pitches were so good. They were lively and you could trust the bounce. You know, you had to actually be a really top spinner to break in and spin the ball just because the pitches didn’t necessarily offer a lot very early.

“And there’s no doubt that our facilities need to be built out and improved upon. When the guys travel around and experience the different levels of facilities [in other countries] it’s an eye opener for them.”

In isolation this Test series looks as hard as it gets. But then so too was Australia in January and look what happened there. Still, while that beautiful win at the Gabba felt seismic at the time, the joy was tempered a little by the essential freakishness of the result. What every true cricket fan craves is a shock or two to solidify what happened on that magical afternoon at Brisbane. 🏏

West Indies Test tour of England, 2024

THE SQUAD Part I

BATTERS

Kraigg Brathwaite

AGE: 31

ROLE: Right-hand opening bat; captain

TESTS: 89 matches; 5,513 runs at 34.24, 12 hundreds; 29 wickets at 52.41; 1 five-wicket haul

FC STATS: 210 matches, 13,664 runs at 38.70, 32 hundreds; 48 wickets at 44.93

BEST TEST BATTING:

212 (447) v Bangladesh, Kingstown, 2014

BEST TEST BOWLING: 6-29 v Sri Lanka, Colombo, 2015

Kirk McKenzie

AGE: 23

ROLE: Left-hand top-order bat

TESTS: 3 matches, 170 runs at 28.33, 1 fifty

FC STATS: 22 first-class matches, 1,231 runs at 30.77, 1 hundred

BEST TEST BATTING: 50 (94) v Australia, Adelaide, 2024

KEEPER-BATS

Joshua Da Silva

AGE: 26

ROLE: Right-hand middle-order bat; wicketkeeper

TESTS: 26 matches, 992 runs at 26.10, 1 hundred

FC STATS: 66 matches, 3,295 runs at 33.28, 5 hundreds

BEST TEST BATTING: 100* (257) v England, Grenada, 2022

Tevin Imlach

AGE: 27

ROLE: Right-hand top-order bat; wicketkeeper

TESTS: 0

FC STATS: 22 first-class matches, 1,097 runs at 32.26, 3 hundreds

THE MATCHES

First Test

Lord's, July 10-14

Second Test

Trent Bridge, July 18-22

Third Test

Edgbaston, July 26-30

Alick Athanaze

AGE: 25

ROLE: Left-hand top-order bat

TESTS: 4 matches, 168 runs at 24.00

FC STATS: 39 first-class matches, 2,297 runs at 34.80, 2 hundreds

BEST TEST BATTING: 47 (99) v India, Roseau, 2023

Mikyle Louis

AGE: 23

ROLE: Right-hand top-order bat

TESTS: 0

FC STATS: 7 first-class matches, 682 runs at 48.71, 3 hundreds

Zachary McCaskie

AGE: 27

ROLE: Right-hand top-order bat

TESTS: 0

FC STATS: 18 first-class matches, 994 runs at 30.12, 1 hundred



JAYDEN SEALES

In The Blood

After injury halted his rapid emergence, Jayden Seales is back in the groove and ready to launch his bid to become the world's No1 fast bowler

INTERVIEW BY KATYA WITNEY

As Shamar Joseph was bowling West Indies to one of their great modern Test wins at the Gabba, Jayden Seales was back at home, rapt as he watched it all unfold.

Joseph's story, taking seven wickets with a broken toe in his maiden series, instantly inscribed itself into cricketing folklore. In another world, Seales would have been on that outfield, tearing through the Brisbane golden hour after Hazlewood's off-stump had been pegged back. But injuries, the fast bowler's curse, have put the brakes on his career, with knee surgery followed by a shoulder injury restricting him to just three ODI appearances since the end of 2022. "It's been frustrating, emotional, and depressing," he tells WCM on the eve of his international comeback.

Before the setbacks, Seales was the Caribbean speedster whose name was on everyone's lips. One look at him bowl is all you need to see why: operating in the slippery-quick speed range, delivering from height, and with the accuracy and skill to tie it together. Ian Bishop led the early hype: "This kid is ready," he said simply at the 2020 Under-19 World Cup.

Seales tasted immediate success after an early elevation. Called into the Test side with just one first-class appearance to his name, the Tobagonian bowled West Indies to a rousing win in his second match, taking eight wickets against Pakistan in Kingston in August 2021 before standing at the non-striker's end as Kemar Roach sealed a one-wicket victory. He has played just six Tests since. Now, he's back and raring to go.

An early-season spell at Sussex saw batters rattled and stumps sent flying, Seales taking 24 Championship wickets at 24.25 and confirming his readiness to take on England. He is now set to join a West

Indies pace attack, alongside the Josephs, Alzarri and Shamar, that ranks as one of the most exciting in world cricket.

The 22-year-old has tasted success against England before, claiming 11 wickets as West Indies secured the Botham-Richards Trophy in the dying days of Chris Silverwood's reign. With the Windies resurgent, still riding high on their triumph down under, he's gearing up for something similar. "We've done it in Australia, why can't we do it in England as well?"

What did that victory over Australia mean for West Indies cricket?

I don't think I can explain it, because beating Australia in Australia, and levelling the series 1-1, is something we haven't done for how many years I can't even remember. That is how big it is for us, and to do it the way we did it, and [for Joseph] to bowl the way he did after getting hit on his toes, is obviously very special. Just the fact that we could beat Australia, and as a young team, with really not many experienced players in the squad, doing that showed not only to ourselves but all the other teams out there that if you believe in yourself and have togetherness, we can be a force to be reckoned with.

Do you feel the weight of history when you're playing for West Indies, given the players who have preceded you?

You see those guys and what they did for West Indies cricket, what they did for themselves, you want to emulate that and you want to do better for yourself as a cricketer growing up. It does add pressure. At times, we take it on too much. Me personally, I used to look at the footage and what others did and compare it to myself. But now it's a matter of just enjoying the game, taking

it ball by ball. Because if I'm on the field and I'm fit, that's the main thing for me.

Were you ever going to be anything other than a fast bowler?

I mentioned to my dad once that I would bowl off-spin, and he said, "The minute you bowl off-spin is the minute I'll deal with you". He said, "You could never ever be a spinner, you're too tall, you have all the attributes to be a fast bowler. The entire family did it, you're going to do it too." So I just got into it. My father, he played cricket as well. He was a fast bowler, my cousin plays, he's a fast bowler, and my uncles all played.

What was it like growing up in a cricket-obsessed family?

I started playing with the family in our backyard when I was three years old. And from there I was never given any easy road. It was always, "You're playing with the big boys now, so you have to take what the big boys are dishing out". So I would get hit on my head, on my chest and my neck, just because I was young and I couldn't really cope with the pace. But I had to stick it out and I think that helped me a lot in terms of character building, it helped me be able to take on a challenge regardless of what age group or the difference in size was. It was something that allowed me to become better and stronger at a young age.

How did you deal with your rapid rise to stardom?

I had my parents, my girlfriend, they always found a way to keep me humble. Not



THE SQUAD

Part II

BOWLERS

Alzarri Joseph

AGE: 27

ROLE: Right-arm fast; right-hand bat; vice-captain
TESTS: 32 matches, 92 wickets at 35.04, 1 five-wicket haul; 616 runs at 12.57, 2 fifties
FC STATS: 66 matches, 206 wickets at 28.91, 8 five-wicket hauls; 1,291 runs at 14.83, 5 fifties

BEST TEST BOWLING: 5-81 v South Africa, Centurion, 2023

BEST TEST BATTING:

86 (125) v New Zealand, Hamilton 2020

Shamar Joseph

AGE: 24

ROLE: Right-arm fast; left-hand bat

TESTS: 2 matches, 13 wickets at 17.30, 2 five-wicket hauls; 57 runs at 28.50

FC STATS: 7 matches, 34 wickets at 20.08, 4 five-wicket hauls; 122 runs at 11.09

BEST TEST BOWLING: 7-58 v Australia, Brisbane, 2024

Gudakesh Motie

AGE: 29

ROLE: Left-arm orthodox; left-hand bat

TESTS: 5 matches, 22 wickets at 20.86, 2 five-wicket hauls; 56 runs at 14.00

FC STATS: 46 matches, 160 wickets at 21.26, 6 five-wicket hauls, 2 ten-wicket matches;

877 runs at 21.92, 1 hundred
BEST TEST BOWLING: 7-37 v Zimbabwe, Bulawayo, 2023

Jayden Seales

AGE: 22

ROLE: Right-arm fast; left-hand bat

TESTS: 10 matches, 37 wickets at 24.24, 1 five-wicket haul; 41 runs at 5.85

FC STATS: 22 matches, 91 wickets at 24.04, 4 five-wicket hauls; 175 runs at 7.29

BEST TEST BOWLING: 5-25 v Pakistan, Kingston, 2021

Jeremiah Louis

AGE: 28

ROLE: Right-arm medium-fast; right-hand bat

TESTS: 0

FC STATS: 57 matches, 151 wickets at 25.43, 2 five-wicket hauls; 1,581 runs at 23.25

ALL-ROUNDERS

Kavem Hodge

AGE: 31

ROLE: Right-hand bat; left-arm orthodox

TESTS: 2 matches, 115 runs at 28.75, 1 fifty

FC STATS: 63 matches, 3,211 runs at 29.73, 2 hundreds; 62 wickets at 36.8, 1 five-wicket haul

BEST TEST BATTING: 71 (194) v Australia, Brisbane, 2024

Jason Holder

AGE: 32

ROLE: Right-arm medium-fast; right-hand bat

TESTS: 64 matches, 2,797 runs at 29.44, 3 hundreds; 157 wickets at 29.21, 8 five-wicket hauls, 1 ten-wicket match

FC STATS: 103 matches, 3,836 runs at 26.27, 4

hundreds; 258 wickets at 26.9, 11 five-wicket hauls, 1 ten-wicket match

BEST TEST BATTING: 202* (229) v England, Bridgetown, 2019

BEST TEST BOWLING: 6-42 v England, Southampton, 2020

Kevin Sinclair

AGE: 24

ROLE: Right-hand bat; off-spinner

TESTS: 1 match, 1 wicket at 53; 64 runs at 64, 1 fifty

FC STATS: 29 matches, 80 wickets at 25.81, 4 five-wicket hauls; 1,548 runs at 38.7, 1 hundred

BEST TEST BATTING: 64 (157) v Australia, Brisbane, 2024

“I mentioned to my dad once that I would bowl off-spin, and he said, “The minute you bowl off-spin is the minute I’ll deal with you”. He said, “You have all the attributes to be a fast bowler. The entire family did it, you’re going to do it too”

saying I’m the type of person to get swell-headed, but they always made sure that I remembered where I came from. They always instilled that in me from when I was very young; to not ever forget my background, where I came from, what I went through. So it wasn’t hard for me to always come back down to the ground after doing well, having a good series or having commentators make comments about me.

Do you see yourself as a predominantly red-ball player?

I want to say yes, but I would branch off into white ball. Not right now because I think, and this is my opinion, I’m not saying this is how it’s supposed to be but, I believe that for me to become a better white-ball player I need to play a lot of red-ball to understand my game and develop my skills. So I will play red-ball for as long as I possibly can.

How does the state of Test cricket in the world affect you right now?

It is frustrating at times. Not me, but it can obviously make a lot of players question why they want to play Test cricket for much longer because if we’re averaging 10, 12 Test matches a year and most of the series are two matches, sometimes one, it’s not much cricket to play, so it’s not much fun anymore. A lot of the big nations get three or four-match series, and sometimes 20 Test matches a year. I hope it changes somewhere down the road, because Test cricket is where players can become great.

Where would you like to be in the next five to 10 years?

I would still be playing for West Indies, all formats, and my goal when I was a young boy was to be N°1 in the world for at least three to five years. So maybe up there at some point or at least break into the top three in Test cricket. 🏏



LARA

Brian Lara has a new book out, written in conjunction with WCM's editor-in-chief Phil Walker. Here we introduce an extract from *LARA: the England Chronicles*

Ask Jimmy Adams about Brian Lara and he'll tell you about Lara's elephantine memory. He'll detail what fascinates him about his hyperactive, restless mind, and he'll wonder out loud if even now, some 17 years after Lara's retirement, his friend will ever truly disentangle himself from the unreality of his strange existence and convoluted legacy.

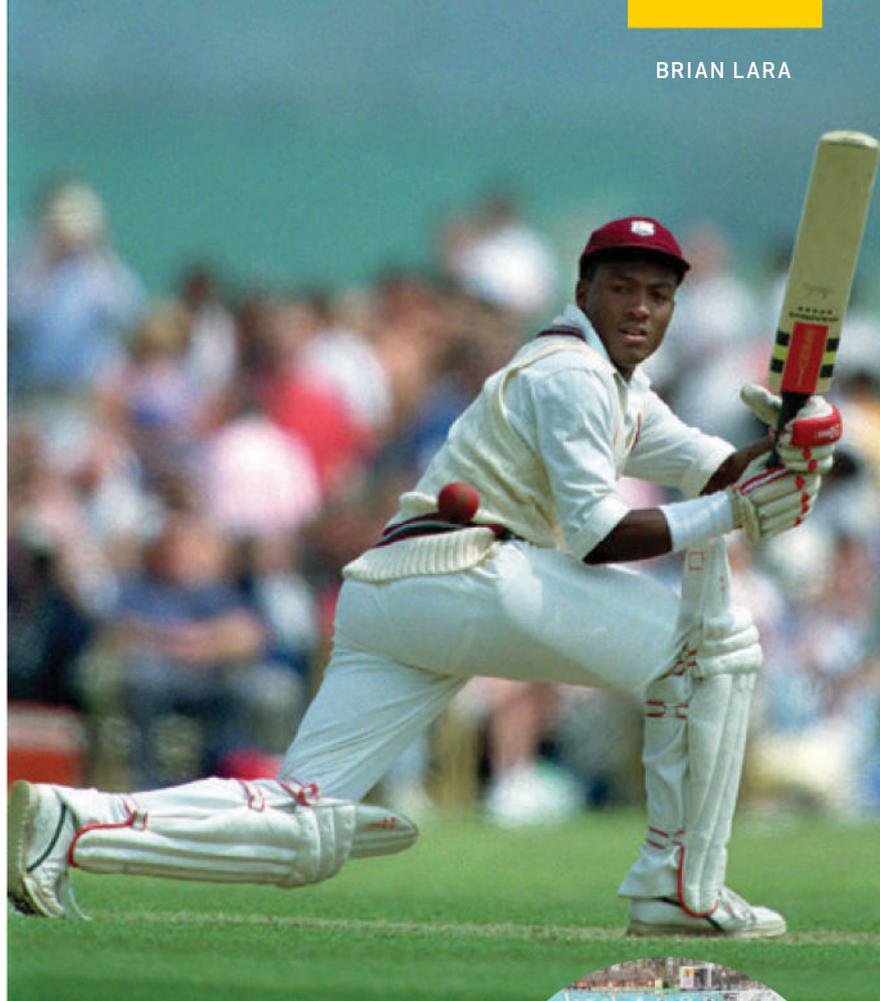
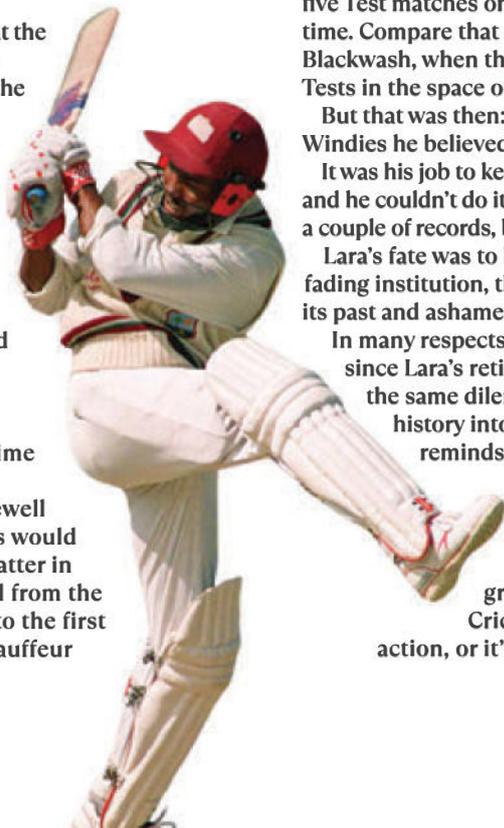
"There have been times over the years when I've wondered whether he is content," Adams writes in the foreword to Lara's new book, *LARA: The England Chronicles*. "Something I've wondered about a few of our great players in the past. I watch and listen to them and think, 'For all that you've achieved in the game, are you truly content?'" For a mortal like me, if I had achieved what Brian did, I wouldn't have a care in the world. I could be driving down the motorway butt naked and be like, 'So what, I've scored 30 Test hundreds!'. Yet when I look at Brian, I see someone who's still searching. Perhaps this is the price of genius."

In Lara's mind, he inhabits an unsettled place in the story of West Indies cricket. He sees himself as the last link in the "rusty chain" – tying together the decades that went before him to the fragmented, chaotically individualistic era that emerged in his stead.

"I came up through the great eras of the past," Lara writes. "In awe of these players, not being rich in money but rich in purpose, alive to the struggle, fired by the cause. And then there's this other era, the one we're in now, let's call it the age of the individual, where young talented kids – and good luck to them – can make a lot of money very quickly and pick and choose whoever they play for. In spirit, I belong to the former group, though I have a foot in the present."

Breaking through the gates at the endpoint of the Eighties, wide-eyed and full of it, Lara found the walls crumbling from within. His first England tour, 1991, would be Viv Richards' last. Those two all-timers would play just a single game together, an ODI at Lord's, across a summer which would also signal bathetic ends for Gordon Greenidge and Malcolm Marshall.

Against that backdrop, England took an actual Test match off them for the first time in 16 years and then had the cheek to gate-crash Viv's farewell match at The Oval. The series would end 2-2, and as the reserve batter in the squad, Lara watched it all from the sidelines; unable to break into the first team, his main job was to chauffeur



Richards around the country in the skipper's sponsored Vauxhall Calibra.

That series in '91 was the last great hinge point in this topsy-turvy rivalry. Since 1991, the West Indies have lost seven of the eight series played in England, winning just five Test matches on English soil in that time. Compare that to 1984, summer of the Blackwash, when they won the same number of Tests in the space of two months.

But that was then: the Windies of Lara's youth, the Windies he believed he was inheriting.

It was his job to keep the West Indies on top of the world and he couldn't do it. "We won a couple of things, I broke a couple of records, but I failed at my main purpose."

Lara's fate was to be the solitary, isolated genius in a fading institution, the focal point of a team haunted by its past and ashamed of its limitations.

In many respects, every version of the West Indies since Lara's retirement in 2007 has wrestled with the same dilemma of how to harness all that history into something good. Lara's book reminds us why it must always be so.

A man doesn't play cricket by himself, he writes. "Nor should he play it for himself. Cricket isn't golf or tennis. It's not about grand slams and individual titles. Cricket is an expression of collective action, or it's nothing at all." ▷



TOP: Lara served a lengthy apprenticeship before establishing himself in the Test team

ABOVE: Brian Charles Lara, pictured at The Oval, June 2024, with Jo Harman, Phil Walker and Yas Rana

LEFT: Lara in full cry, The Oval, 1995

LARA: THE ENGLAND CHRONICLES

The following is an extract from Lara's new book. The setting is Antigua, April 1994, and a young Test cricketer on the cusp of sporting history

EVERYWHERE IS UPROAR

I DON'T SWITCH OFF. That's not how this thing works. I never feel tired. I never will feel tired. Switch on and switch off? Between deliveries? *That's* tiring. *That's* not me.

Out there is my ring. You think I'm switching on or off when backed into a corner? I'm gonna dance and sway and throw another hit. It's a fight between them and me. Win it and the innings belongs to me.

I don't put myself under undue pressure. There's more than enough of that kicking around. Pressure is a thick winter coat I never take off. Wasting time on what this guy's gonna bowl, worrying about technique, those things don't factor.

It's never a strain. They talk about fatigue, exhaustion, the mind playing tricks. This means nothing to me. Batting and concentrating is second nature. I never get out because I'm tired.

The affair deepened after Sydney. Gave me a taste and now I'm obsessed. Infatuated. Big runs. Huge scores. Going bigger than anyone went before. It's all I can think about. I got close at Sydney. This time I'm thinking the longer I bat, the closer I get, the stronger I become. Think about it, who's going to be more exhausted? I'm the one plundering. I am the spectacle, and they are there to provide for that spectacle.

As a kid, when there was no one to play with, I'd use plant pots for fielders. I'd throw a ball against the wall in the back yard at home and use my wrists to hit the spaces between them. In my scorebook my batting order's always Greenidge-Haynes-Richards-Lara-Gomes-Lloyd and it's always a Test match against England. Playing against a golf ball, an orange, a tennis ball on the street, it's always about excitement. I'm learning the thrill of scoring runs, right out of the garage.

When it comes to the big stuff, and those pots become people, I have a mental picture of the field in my head. I know where every guy is. I can calculate when that ball is delivered, what I need to do with it. I don't need to be technically correct; I just need to find a gap.

I see countless beautiful batters hit a perfect cover drive straight at a fielder. Good for them. I'm never happy with that. The slight angle of the bat, the delay in the shot, sweeping it fine to make sure I get two, shifting the pieces around. It's a game of chess, and I want value for my moves.

They're tired. They don't want to do it. All the while I'm ready to go. Lunchtime on the second day, teatime on the second day, I'm ready to go.

Evening session, day two, the numbers start to fall. Sydney comes and goes. Next is Viv's 291. I don't need



ABOVE:
Lara kisses the Antigua turf after breaking Sir Garfield Sobers' record for the highest individual score in Test history

to be told. I felt shit at Sydney, getting so close. This one matters. This one taste sweet. To go past the Master Blaster. Now that's something.

Just before the close Angus Fraser beats my bat. I try to play a straight drive to one that leaves me. At least, he says, I can say I beat your bat after you had 300.

I go in 320 not out. Forty-six to get. There's no talk of a declaration. Curtly makes that clear. He's not bowling on *that*. Let the boy go for it, he says.

I can't be stuck in my room. I need to feel the scene outside. We're in a hotel in Five Islands, up where Richie Richardson's from. I go into town to lap up the atmosphere and think about what's to come. I burn some energy in the city, eat some food with friends and go back to the hotel. I don't break the curfew. Not this time.

Still no sleep. Everything's pumping, racing. My roommate Junior Murray has these videos. I watch one. Still wired. At 5am I call a friend and we go out to play nine holes. It doesn't matter where I hit the ball, I just need to do something different. I'm back in time for breakfast.

Down at the Rec it's teeming. People been getting busy overnight. Paraphernalia everywhere, T-shirts, caps, keyrings, all produced in anticipation of what's to come, what has to come. This be Antigua, the place shaking to Chickie's tunes, Gravy and Mayfield up on the rafters, the English sweating it out in the shade. You can feel the vibrations, this small ground smack in the heart of the city, and today the centre of the world.

I hear The Greatest is in town. That he's actually here.

This game, man. It's not just about playing and doing your best. It's entertainment. To entertain is the thing. It's always been with me. Make them dance. Make it a spectacle.

My mind is fresh. Adrenaline takes over. No sleep. If I sleep, I might miss something. I'm not wasted or tired. I have a quick knock up, then Clive Lloyd asks me, do I mind if the TV people hand me my bat on the way out. I'm cool with that, it's all part of the show, I say. By day three my shirt is pretty stained, but I pull it on anyway. I'm not superstitious. It just feels right. Bell rings. The crowd lose their minds. Gower and Botham wait on the outfield with their microphones. One of them hands me my bat. Showtime.

They bowl well. Fields set deep, not many boundaries. Tight bowling, questions asked. You can see they're into it. Everyone's connected. I play one loose shot, the ball lobs over the covers for two. Settle down. No rush. More singles.

I know he's in the building. I can feel it.

My confidence doesn't go backwards. That false shot locks me back in the right frame of mind. Man, you've had these guys in the sun for two days. They'll throw something at you now, but it'll get easier. They've had a night's sleep so wake up and pay attention. I'm into my groove and cruise to the landmarks. Gooch, Bradman, Hanif. They come up loud on the PA system, but I don't need to be told. Hutton next.

And then the one.

He's here, I know he is.

People always talked about my size. How small I was next to Desmond, Gordon, Richie, Viv. Boy got the power to be a world-class player? And he always say, 'This young man is going to be one of the best.'

I was puzzled, many times, by his sayings. The only one who truly believed in me. And now he's here. On 361 Caddick bowls a full one. I feel my body flow into the shot. And in that moment, we are inseparable. For a second, it feels enough just to be up there next to him.

I pass Shiv mid-pitch, he nods. Next over, he takes a single off Chris Lewis to get me back on strike.

Michael Atherton takes an age to set his field. Our eyes meet. He smiles. I smile back. We both know the game. It's a play by the English to have me wait. Fans are up on the fences waiting to invade. My mindset never changes. Ever. Attack first, and if the ball is good enough, go into a defensive shot.



Lewis runs in with an aggression I haven't seen before. Deep backward square leg is in the circle. The field suggests it'll be a good length ball on off stump, but I can see the bluff coming. It's there in his run-up. I know this guy will try to bowl the fastest short ball he ever bowled. I'm in position quickly. Waiting to slap it through midwicket.

Before the ball is through the infield, I see hordes of men eluding the police on to the field. I wheel away in the shot, almost swaying off my feet. There's Shiv, just a kid in his first series, the two of us tied in now forever. We share some words, whatever they are, a moment of stillness in the chaos.

The crowd and the police run for each other. Men lying on the turf, crying, shouting. Hundreds of them, all trying to get a touch. Everywhere is uproar. It's turned into a ceremony in the middle of a Test match. The England boys don't mind.

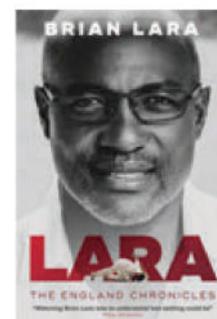
The crowd disperses a little, and now I see him striding out, leading a delegation onto the field. Sir Garfield. And for a few seconds it's just him and me. No one loves their record to be broken. I would learn that myself. But for Sobers, being here to pass the mantle? I can feel he wants it too. It's us two now, locked together.

At Sydney I'd thought a lot about my dad, felt his absence sharply. This night brings it all back again. Everyone's a part of it and happy and claiming to be there, but the one man who would have truly made the innings worth it, is not there to see it. Everything that happened came after he passed.

I understand a lot about expectation, and a little about adulation. Coaches, teachers, parents of other kids, I grow up with people looking at me. Some people fear it. They shrink in the face of it. I don't. From the very first time I saw Viv walk through customs at Heathrow into that mad mass of photographers, I've known that nothing will stop me getting to where I have to be.

And I have this idea, you see, that love, and beauty will always win out. But I'm naïve. So very, very naïve. 🐼

ABOVE:
Sobers and Lara
embrace after the
record is broken



LARA: The England Chronicles is out now, priced at £25 for a hardback copy and £6.99 for the eBook version. Go to www.thenightwatchman.net to order your copy.



BLACK WASH



Back to Blackwash

In conversation with Graeme Fowler, who opened up against the fearsome West Indian pace attack in all five Tests of the infamous 1984 tour, Daniel Norcross recalls a series which would go down in legend



DANIEL NORCROSS

Test Match Special commentator

● @norcrosscricket

I was inside the changing room behind two closed doors and I heard this terrible noise. I shouted to our physio Bernard Thomas: 'Bolt [Thomas' nickname], that's hospital.'

England were a mere seven overs into the first innings of the 1984 series against the West Indies. They had lost Graeme Fowler and Derek Randall for ducks and now Andy Lloyd, on debut at his home ground of Edgbaston, had just had his Test match career ended within 40 minutes by a short ball from Malcolm Marshall that clattered high onto his right cheekbone.

"They brought him back into the dressing room and he said he was fine," recalls Fowler. "He was talking. He was OK. Except he said he had this blind spot. And then my heart sank because I just knew what that meant. He had a detached retina, and you never get that back."

Lloyd missed the rest of that summer and though he returned to county cricket the following year, he would never add to the three ODI caps and solitary Test appearance he earned in that most challenging of seasons for English cricket.

The West Indies were indisputably the best team in the world. Very possibly the best of all time. They were four years into a 15-year unbeaten streak, but in 1984 they achieved what no side had done before, and only one other (South Africa in 1998/99) has managed since; win a clean sweep away from home in a five-match series.

By contrast, England were in the doldrums. The previous winter had seen the infamous 'Sex, drugs and rock-n-roll tour' of New Zealand, which ended in a first series victory for the Kiwis over the English. Equally awful was to come with a first series loss to Pakistan. Having lost to Australia, India and West Indies in the previous three winters, it meant they had contrived to lose to every Test-playing nation apart from Sri Lanka (against whom they had only played one match, back in 1982), within the previous three-and-a-half years.

Factor in that England were also missing a number of senior players including Graham Gooch, who had been

banned for three years after accepting a large payday to tour apartheid South Africa in 1981/82, and the auspices were far from good.

The West Indies, though, also had their rebels. Twice squads had toured South Africa in the previous two winters containing bowlers who would have walked into England's side. Colin Croft (who had featured in West Indies' previous two series wins against England), Sylvester Clarke (arguably the fastest bowler in the world), Franklyn Stephenson (the last man to achieve the 1,000 run/100 wicket double in an English county season) and Ezra Moseley (the only member of the 1982 rebel tour who would play for the West Indies again) were all unavailable. Yet still, in that opening Test at Edgbaston, England faced up to Malcolm Marshall, Joel Garner, Michael Holding and Eldine Baptiste.

Complementing this most fearsome array of quick bowlers were the very best batters in the world: Gordon Greenidge and Desmond Haynes at the top of the order, with Larry Gomes, Clive Lloyd and, the greatest of them all, Vivian Richards filling out the middle.

Exactly two weeks before Lloyd's fateful encounter with Marshall, it had been Richards who struck the first psychological blow of the summer. In the first of three ODIs he blasted a scarcely credible 189 not out to drag his side from 166-9 to 272-9.

"Viv was ridiculous," says Fowler. "I remember him hitting one ball towards me at mid-on and it just curved away from me, smashed into the advertising boards and rolled back to me. It was an unbelievable innings but I remember thinking at the time that this was something special; a privilege to be on the same field as him."

His rich vein of form continued into the first Test at Edgbaston as the West Indies replied to England's sub-par 191 with a mammoth 606, Richards making 117 and sharing a third-wicket partnership of 206 with Gomes, who made a patient 143.

"Gomes had a shovel at everything," Fowler recalls. "He was an ugly batter. He nicked and nudged and we



THE SERIES

1st Test, Edgbaston

England 191 (Botham 64; Garner 4-53) & 235 (Downton 56; Garner 5-55) v West Indies 606 (Gomes 143, Richards 117; Pringle 5-108)

West Indies won by an innings and 180 runs

2nd Test, Lord's

England 286 (Fowler 106; Marshall 6-85) & 300-9dec (Lamb 110; Small 3-40) v West Indies 245 (Richards 72; Botham 8-103) & 344-1 (Haynes 214*, Gomes 92*)

West Indies won by 9 wickets

3rd Test, Headingley

England 270 (Lamb 100; Holding 4-70) & 159 (Fowler 50; Marshall 7-53) v West Indies 302 (Gomes 104; Allott 6-61) & 131-2 (Greenidge 49)

West Indies won by 8 wickets

4th Test, Old Trafford

West Indies 500 (Greenidge 223, Dujon 101; Pocock 4-121) v England 280 (Lamb 100*; Garner 4-51) & 156 (Gower 57; Harper 6-57)

West Indies won by an innings and 64 runs

5th Test, The Oval

West Indies 190 (Lloyd 60*; Botham 5-72) & 346 (Haynes 125; Ellison 3-60) v England 162 (Fowler 31; Marshall 5-35) & 202 (Botham 54; Holding 5-43, Garner 4-51)

West Indies won by 172 runs

**West Indies won
the series 5-0**



PHOTO BY ADRIAN MURRELL

couldn't get him out. We just didn't concentrate on him because there was a big name at the other end. So what if he got a single here and there? But you look at the board, he's got to 40 and you think, where'd they come from?"

While the focus was on Richards, Greenidge, Lloyd and Haynes, Gomes would finish the series with 400 runs at an average of 80.

West Indies wrapped up the first Test early on the fourth day, winning by an innings and 180 runs. Joel Garner, who would finish the series as leading wicket-taker, picked up nine in the match and the series moved to Lord's.

A heavy defeat in the 1980s was invariably the catalyst for wholesale team changes and the selectors responded by dropping Randall and Nick Cook for Mike Gatting and Neil Foster, while Chris Broad came in to make his debut for the injured Lloyd.

"On the night before the game, we had cocktails with the selectors," remembers Fowler. "I was standing next to Chris Broad because we'd had a brief chat about opening the batting. Peter May, one of the selectors, walked over to him and said, 'Brian, congratulations'. And he said, 'No, it's Chris'. I'm thinking, the selectors don't even know what your name is. They never came to watch. I don't ever remember being at a game when one of them was there when I was playing for Lancashire."

In May's possible defence, Broad's initials are BC, but anyone who watched county cricket would have known he went by 'Chris'.

Despite the heavy loss at Edgbaston, the Lord's Test proved to be England's and Fowler's high watermark of the series. Broad and Fowler got England off to a good start on a rain-affected opening day, putting on 101 for the first wicket.

The next day Fowler brought up three figures. "I've had two truly great moments in Test cricket. That hundred, and the double against India in Madras. I can't choose between them. One was against spin but this was against the best pace attack in the world. I don't remember much about the moment except Ian Botham and Clive Lloyd, my county captain, shaking my hand. When I got back in the dressing room I was told I'd be on the Honours Board, but naïve as it sounds, I didn't know there even was one. You couldn't see it there then."

It had been a remarkable display of grit and courage, spread over 369 minutes and 259 balls of relentless fast bowling. "At one point Desmond Haynes, who was fielding at short-leg, said 'Stop screaming'. I asked him what he was talking about. Apparently, when I was in my stance and Joel Garner was running in, I was shouting, 'Come on, come on'. I was unaware I was doing it."

Despite Fowler's hundred, England's first innings fell away as Marshall grabbed six wickets, but the hosts responded in the field with Botham taking eight. A first-innings lead of 41 became a target of 344 for West Indies after Gower declared half an hour into the final day.

“I was walking off for the last time at The Oval and I remember feeling relieved. Not because the series had ended, but because the series had ended without me being injured. I just remember thinking, ‘I’m still here. I’m still all right’

Graeme Fowler

Here was England’s chance for a series-levelling victory, or at the very least a creditable draw. What followed was an innings of such brilliance and savagery that it remains imprinted on Fowler’s brain forevermore.

“Lamby [Allan Lamb] and I are in the covers. We start about 15 yards apart. Greenidge keeps finding the gap. We move closer and closer together and he keeps on getting it between us. Not until it was too late did we put a deep point out on the boundary. You just didn’t do that then. The pitch hadn’t changed. It was still a little awkward. He was just having one of those days.”

In tandem with Gomes, Greenidge put on 287 for the second wicket, finishing unbeaten on 214. West Indies reached their target in 66.2 overs with plenty of time to spare.

“That flattened us,” says Fowler, “because we were on top. When we got off and went in the dressing room, there was no sound.”

A similar story played out at Headingley nine days later. England made three changes, with Gattling jettisoned after just one game, and once again there was nothing in it after two innings. Lamb made a century, as he had done at Lord’s, but this time it was Marshall, bowling with a plaster cast on his left hand after breaking a thumb fielding, who took seven second-innings wickets (including, preposterously, Fowler caught and bowled) to blow England away after they’d reached a promising position. West Indies sauntered to their target of 128 – the first time since 1921 that England had lost the first three Tests of the summer. Worse was to come.

Old Trafford hosted the fourth Test and, of course, there were more changes for England. Bob Willis, injured at Leeds, had played his last Test for England, and Norman Cowans was recalled, as was 37-year-old Surrey spinner Pat Pocock.

“We had a team picture taken on the outfield,” says Fowler, “and I remember just sitting there and Beefy shouting at the photographer: ‘What are you going to say about this f*****g side in the future?’ He was dead right. I was near the middle on the front and I’m thinking, I’m on my way out.”

From 70-4, West Indies amassed 500 thanks to another double hundred from Greenidge and a ton from wicketkeeper Jeff Dujon. England’s reply began well but faded away as Paul Terry, in his second and final Test,

had his arm broken ducking a ball that didn’t get up.

Terry went back out to bat at No 11 to get Lamb over the line for his third hundred in consecutive matches, but did so with his arm in a sling under his sweater, batting in effect left-handed with only his right hand. “It was ridiculous,” says Fowler. “I remember someone saying to him, ‘You’ll be using your right hand as your top hand, so it will help you play straight.’”

After an innings defeat, the clean sweep was wrapped up at The Oval two weeks later in another match that saw the sides almost level after the first innings before West Indies ran away with it.

“I was walking off for the last time at The Oval,” recalls Fowler, “and I remember feeling relieved. Not because the series had ended, but because the series had ended without me being injured. Because you’d seen Andy Lloyd, you’d seen Paul Terry and you’d seen a million balls whizz past the face of people like Pat Pocock, and I just remember thinking, ‘I’m still here. I’m still all right.’”

Plenty of journalists at the time had harsh words for the West Indies fast bowlers, demanding law changes, some even hypothesising that they had naturally inherited physical characteristics that gave them an unfair advantage. That’s not how Fowler saw it.

“I played with Clive Lloyd for a long time. He correctly said that if his bowlers can get a ball to rise from there and it goes past the chin, that’s their ability. If an English bowler bowls it and it goes past the waist, that’s not his fault. I understood that and I agreed with him.

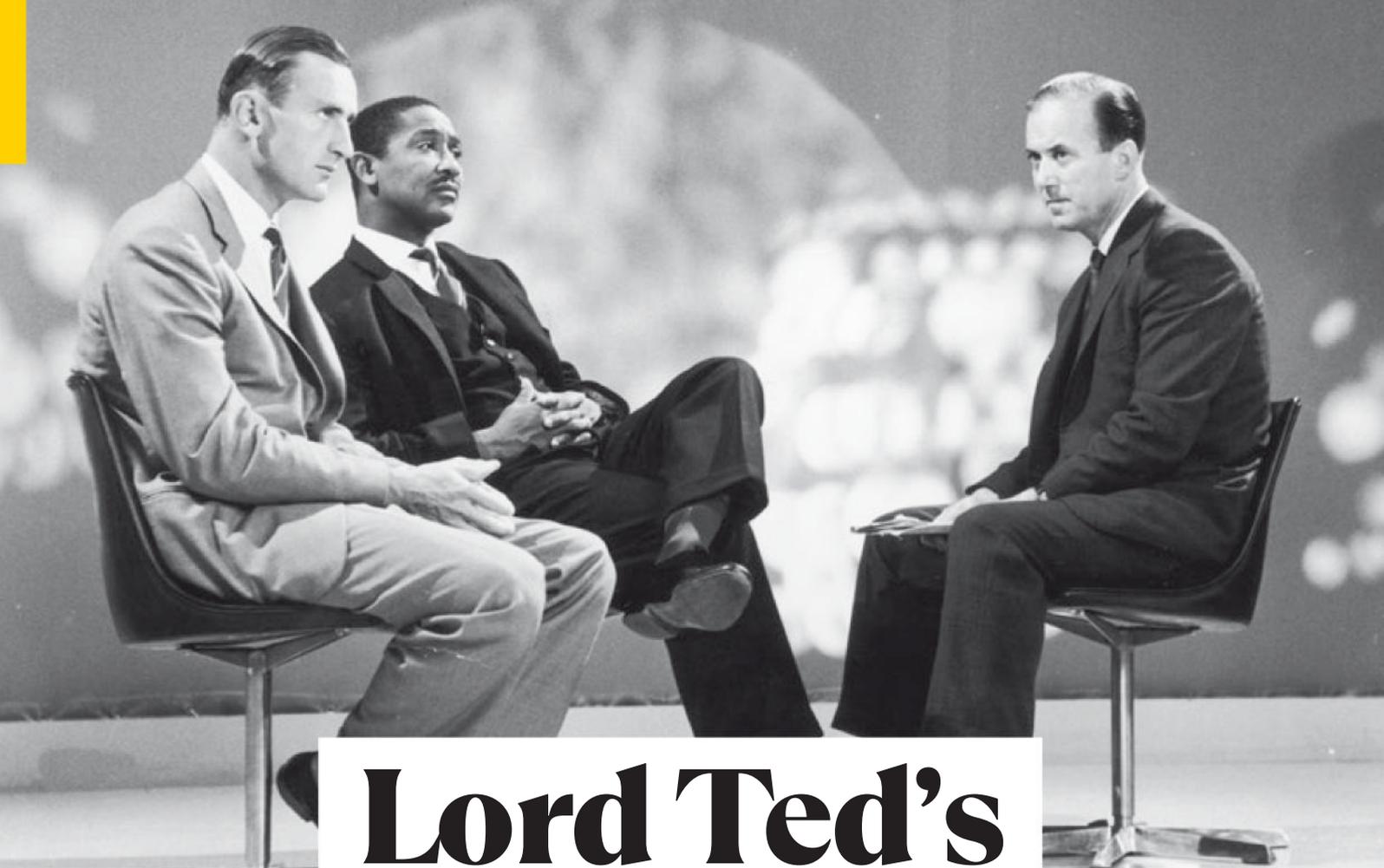
“Malcolm Marshall was 5ft 10in, Joel Garner was 6ft 9in, they could pitch the ball in the same place and Marshall would have me coming forward, Joel would have me going back. You just had to deal with it.”

In all, England used 21 players in the series, of which Fowler was one of only five (along with Botham, Gower, Lamb and Downton) to play every match. You’d think it would have been hard to take, but Fowler has a different perspective.

“I’ve always felt privileged to have played in that series because it’s not very often you play in a sport where you know you’re playing against the best in the world. And that in itself is an absolute honour.

“The West Indies were so obviously brilliant that I was never ashamed because there’s two ways of losing a cricket match: you’re either beaten or you lose. And you lose because you’ve underperformed. You get beaten because they’re better than you. We got beaten 5-0. We didn’t lose 5-0.”

LEFT: Graeme Fowler made 260 runs at 26 in the series, including a century in the second Test at Lord’s



Lord Ted's not-so-excellent political adventure

In the General Election of 1964, England captain Ted Dexter launched an audacious bid to stand for Parliament as a Conservative Party candidate. Oliver Price looks back on a campaign that lurched from one misstep to the next

On October 15, 1964, England's winter tour party left London City Airport on a flight to South Africa without Ted Dexter, who had captained the team to defeat in that summer's Ashes. Dexter had instead decided to stand for Parliament as a Conservative Party candidate, and it was polling day in the General Election. Rather than going to South Africa, he was in Cardiff, canvassing for a final few votes.

By the time of the 1964 General Election, the Conservatives had been in power for 13 years and their time in office had been marred by the Suez Crisis

and the Profumo Affair. The prime minister, Sir Alec Douglas-Home - a first-class cricketer himself during the interwar years - had been installed by his own MPs following Harold Macmillan's resignation and was regarded as out of touch with ordinary people. Campaigning on a slogan of 'Thirteen Wasted Years', the Labour Party were favourites to win the election having led in opinion polls for over three years.

The constituency of Cardiff South-East had been held by James Callaghan, the shadow chancellor, for Labour since its inception in 1950. In 1959, Callaghan had won by only 868 votes, and by the time of the 1964 General Election the seat was considered a key battleground.

“

Dexter bemused local steelworkers and dockers by telling them that they should send their sons to Eton. In one speech he even reportedly said that Labour-voting households would often have “grubby lace curtains and unwashed milk bottles on the doorstep”

Defeating Callaghan would have been a coup for the Conservatives and, in August 1963, they announced the 28-year-old Dexter as their candidate.

Dexter was not the first cricketer to stand for the Conservatives; his Sussex teammate, Robin Marlar, had been an unsuccessful candidate at both the 1959 General Election and the 1962 Leicester North-East by-election. There were significant differences between the two cricketers, however, as Marlar had a background in Conservative politics, having previously chaired a Young Conservatives group. Although nicknamed ‘Lord Ted’, Dexter had negligible political experience. At a press conference announcing his candidacy, the England captain admitted that he had never previously been a member of the Conservative Party but insisted he had always been a Conservative “by conviction”. Callaghan noted: “Mr Dexter is the second sportsman to arrive in Cardiff this week, and I think John Charles [the footballer who was joining Cardiff from Roma] is likely to provide the better investment to Cardiff.”

Dexter’s selection attracted headlines and questions. Some saw it as nothing more than a gimmick and had good reason to believe so. Dexter had not been seeking a political career and had instead been approached by the Cardiff Conservative Party to stand as a candidate. According to the historian John Ramsden, in the early 1960s the Conservatives had “an unusual desire to find showbusiness and sporting candidates to enable the Party to compete for attention in the new mood”. Another example was the actor and comedian, Jimmy Edwards, who was selected as their candidate for North Paddington. Writing in his memoirs many years later, Dexter admitted that in 1963 his political knowledge was limited. As he had been born in Milan, he “knew more about Italian politics than English... but the sum total of both would not have made up a five-minute speech to the local Young Conservatives”.

At the beginning of 1964, the date of the election was unclear, a situation far from ideal for the England selectors who were aiming to win back the Ashes while unsure about the availability of their captain because of his political commitments. In March, Dexter admitted

that if a summer election was called then he would likely miss at least one Test match. This led the *Daily Mirror* to argue that there was “no room for ‘part-timers’ if England want to win back the Ashes”.

The media speculated that Dexter’s possible absence would lead to his removal as captain but such discussions proved redundant as Douglas-Home decided against calling a summer election. After he was confirmed as captain for the Ashes in late May, the *Daily Express* featured a cartoon of a blazered Dexter at Lord’s with the caption: “Good luck Edward. Dashed inconsiderate of the PM to plump for an autumn election and lumber you with this lot.”

It may well have been better for Dexter had the election taken place that summer. Australia were not an outstanding team, but the England team was flawed, and the hosts lost the series 1-0 after defeat at Headingley in the third Test. According to Simon Wilde, the loss “permanently scarred” Dexter’s reputation. His tactics at Leeds were described in *The Guardian* as “disastrous” with their cricket correspondent, Denis Rowbotham, writing that, “Dexter is fitted by neither temperament nor cast of cricketing mind to lead England to victory or even improvement”. It was to be the last time he would captain his country. The selectors

LEFT: Ted Dexter appearing alongside Frank Worrell on BBC’s *Sportsvision* in 1963, the year before he stood for parliament

RIGHT: Dexter changing his son’s nappy



RIGHT: Pictured with Harold Macmillan at Chequers in September 1963, a month before the prime minister's resignation

BELOW: Alec Douglas-Home, pictured batting for the Lords and Commons at The Oval in 1951, lasted less than a year as prime minister

named Warwickshire's MJK Smith as skipper for the trip to South Africa despite Smith not being part of the side for the Ashes.

The Ashes defeat may well have counted against Dexter as the election approached. Once the series had finished, an article in *The People* stated: "Callaghan can reassure himself with one fact. Dexter failed to win the Ashes for England. If he had, any job in politics might have been within his reach. Even Sir Alec Douglas-Home's."

Campaigning began in earnest in September and Dexter admitted that, rather than being a vote-winner, his cricketing background may even have lost him support. Initial reports that his England teammate, Fred Trueman, would be coming to support him turned out to be untrue and voters were sceptical of Dexter's political capabilities. A report in *The Guardian* revealed the opinion of a local taxi driver: "Teddy Dexter's a nice enough chap. Only Jimmy Callaghan don't go and try and play for England, do he?" While an article in *The Times* shortly before polling day explained the major issue: "If Mr Dexter had been a local Cardiff bus-man he



would not have been chosen... He is intelligent, likeable and as a cricketer earns tremendous respect; but at his press conferences he is politically naïve."

This naivety meant that Dexter faced many difficulties on the campaign trail. He created unwanted headlines when, at one event, he advocated private schooling and said, "Let us have a very special treatment for our rich and powerful boys". He later bemused local steelworkers and dockers by telling them that they should send their sons to Eton. In one speech he even reportedly said that Labour-voting households would often have "grubby lace curtains and unwashed milk bottles on the doorstep".

Dexter did not seem to be personally disliked by voters who were interviewed by the press, but he simply did not convince his prospective constituents that they should vote for him. While he was heckled during some speeches - on one occasion someone even cut the cable to his microphone so he could not be heard - often, he was greeted with apathy and silence. His troubled campaign was perhaps summed up by the fact that he had to pay a fine for parking in the wrong place outside the Conservative offices in Cardiff.

On the Sunday before election day, a reporter from *The People* visited Cardiff and said that local Conservatives worried that they had "put the wrong man in to bat". Local party members noted that there was a "big difference between Ted Dexter, the flashing bat at Lord's, and Edward Ralph Dexter, the not-so-flashing politician making awkward conversation on the doorsteps of Tiger Bay... he lacks the common touch... he seems ill at ease talking to the tough little Welshmen he hopes will vote for him". The Conservative hopes of winning the marginal constituency seemed to be fading, the reporter suggested, writing that: "The Battle of Waterloo, they say, was won on the playing fields of Eton. The battle of



Cardiff South-East may well prove to have been lost on the cricket fields of Sussex.”

In the early hours of Friday October 16, with many results too close to call, it was still far from clear who would be governing the country. In Cardiff, things were more clear-cut. Dexter would not be taking up a seat in Parliament, with Callaghan increasing his majority from 868 to nearly 8,000.

Once the Cardiff South-East result was announced a little after 2am, the candidates went to a local television studio for an interview with the BBC's Robin Day. According to the historian Kenneth O. Morgan, who was present that night, Dexter “seemed shell-shocked when he entered the studio, almost in tears”, while Callaghan was genial and relaxed.

In the days and weeks that followed, the two men took very different paths. After the Labour Party won a narrow election victory, Callaghan became the occupant of 11 Downing Street, serving as chancellor in Harold Wilson's new government. Meanwhile, Dexter headed belatedly to South Africa and helped England to a series victory.

The 1964 General Election was the beginning and end of Ted Dexter's political career. He was not suited to the political environment – local Cardiff Conservatives thought he simply “did not care about politics” – and was facing a formidable opponent. Callaghan would eventually occupy Number 10, serving as Prime Minister between 1976 and 1979.

‘Lord Ted’ may not have reached the Houses of Parliament, but one of his cricketing contemporaries did – Colin Cowdrey later became Lord Cowdrey of Tonbridge. And Dexter was not the first England captain to become involved in politics – the captain of the 1924/25 Ashes tour, Arthur Gilligan, was a member of the British Fascists.

Dexter may not be the last England captain to run for Parliament. Just don't expect Ben Stokes to throw his hat in the ring any time soon. 🇬🇧

BELOW: On the campaign trail with his wife, Susan Longfield, in October 1964



The Corridors Of Power

Four cricketers who got drawn in to party politics with mixed results

Stanley Jackson

Given that Winston Churchill was Jackson's fag at Harrow, it's perhaps no great surprise that the ex-England captain and army veteran found his way to the House of Commons after a decorated playing career in which he averaged 49 from 20 Tests and skippered his country to victory in the 1905 Ashes. After marrying the daughter of the Tory MP for Howdenshire, he took the seat himself after winning the 1915 by-election, sitting as an MP for 11 years, briefly serving as financial secretary to the War Office and later being appointed Governor of Bengal.

Darren Gough

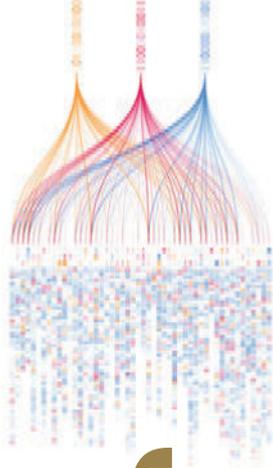
The former England fast bowler turned down a personal request from David Cameron to stand in the 2011 by-election in his hometown of Barnsley. Gough reportedly hung up when the PM phoned him, believing the call to be a prank, with a Tory MP having to convince him the offer was genuine. “The PM's a big fan,” said a No.10 source, but Goughie wasn't for turning, declining the position due to his sporting and media commitments. “Darren Gough is a supporter of the party and will be taking part in the campaign for Barnsley,” said a government spokesperson. “He will not be standing as an MP, however.”

CB Fry

Fry was “probably the most variously gifted Englishman of any age,” according to John Arlott, but the great polymath conceded: “I take a great interest in heaps of things that I know nothing about, politics being one.” Three times he tried and failed to convince the British electorate that he was deserving of a seat in the Commons. After claiming to have rejected an offer to become Albania's king in 1920, he stood as a Liberal candidate in Brighton in the 1922 General Election, winning almost a quarter of the vote, before narrowly losing to the Conservatives in Banbury in the 1923 General Election. Selected to stand in the Liberal-held constituency of Oxford in the 1924 by-election, he surrendered the seat to the Tories.

Monty Panesar

“Monty, of course, was a great left-arm spinner, and so we could do with him,” said George Galloway after announcing Panesar as the Workers Party of Britain candidate for Ealing Southall in April. Eight days later, Monty thought better of it, revealing he had quit to “find my political home, one that aligns with my personal and political values”. “It's not a career choice we would have advised,” said a spokesperson for the Professional Cricketers' Association.



Mining for Gold

In association with 

Nº 5 Unlikely nemeses

Next in our series exploring previously unseen data from the CricViz archive, Rob Smyth picks out a selection of players who had unexpectedly outstanding records against the world's best



ROB SMYTH

Author and freelance sportswriter

Andre Nel is the only man who's had Brian Lara twice on his honeymoon. We should probably explain that. Nel got married on the third evening of the fourth Test between South Africa and West Indies in 2004, and celebrated by dismissing Lara twice the following day. These weren't just the actions of a man who was high on love: Nel troubled Lara throughout his career.

He was equally successful against the other devastating left-hander of his era, Adam Gilchrist. "It's quite cool," says Nel of his record against them. "I wasn't a superstar - I was a decent, steady bowler [123 Test wickets at 32] so to get all these greats out gives me a nice satisfaction."

Eighteen months before Andrew Flintoff undermined Gilchrist from around the wicket, Nel did the same to Lara. It was his own initiative, a response to feeling unbalanced when he bowled over the wicket to left-handers: "Going round the wicket forced me to be more upright, which made me feel stronger and more powerful." That and a wrist which allowed him to shape the ball away made him a potent threat.

Only Glenn McGrath dismissed Lara more often in Tests than Nel, who did so eight times at a head-to-head average of 23. The South African had the full Lara experience, because Lara scored centuries, sometimes huge, in four of those eight innings. A couple of the dismissals came when he was, in Nel's words, "teeing off completely", but the majority were down to the bowler's



skill, competitive instinct and an intelligence that was frequently ignored because of his pantomime villainy.

In 2005, playing what turned out to be his last Test in Trinidad, Lara was four runs away from a first double-hundred on his home ground when Nel duped him with a gorgeous slower ball. It was so good that Nel didn't even realise what had happened: he threw his arms up in disappointment, then heard Mark Boucher shouting and noticed that the bail had been trimmed.

A year earlier, the day after his wedding - which he arranged when he wasn't on South Africa's radar - Nel dismissed Lara twice, the second time with a beautiful inducker. Lara, the man with every shot in the book, offered none and was plumb lbw. "He was always comfortable with me taking the ball away from him," recalls Nel. "But when I got my wrist in a good position, I could swing the ball back into him. Everything clicked that day. The nice thing is, my wife and all my friends were sitting in the stands. And I've still never been on a honeymoon."

Nel also got Lara out after switching the bails, a tactic used by Stuart Broad last summer. "I used to do that randomly," he says. "I meant nothing by it: it was just boredom and an attempt to change the luck. I still do it now sometimes when I play for Chelmsford!"

One of Nel's prouder bits of memorabilia, currently at his dad's in South Africa, is a framed shirt signed by Lara, given to him by his wife for his 30th birthday: "To Nelly: give me a break."



ABOVE: Andre Nel gives Lara a volley at Joburg in 2003

BELOW: Adam Gilchrist admitted that Nel got under his skin

LEFT: Nel dismisses Lara in a 2005 ODI in Trinidad

His success against Gilchrist came during back-to-back series in 2005/06, straight after the 2005 Ashes. Gilchrist was caught fiddling outside off stump at Melbourne during a pulsating four-wicket spell from Nel. Most of the other dismissals were when he was hooking or pulling. "That was one of the ploys we had against him, because he always hooked upwards - it was one of his release shots and we played on that. Sometimes a strength can be a weakness."

Nel loved the challenge of taking on the best, particularly in their own backyard. "The crowd absolutely hated me on that tour," he laughs. "Everywhere we went, they sang 'Nella is a wanker!'. It fired me up. They hated my guts and I loved it. I based my game on the way Australia played, hard but fair, so to do well over there meant a lot."

Bowlers who dismissed Brian Lara most in Tests

	Runs	Balls	Dismissals	Average	Rpo	Bpd
Glenn McGrath (Aus)	407	869	15	27.13	2.81	58
Andre Nel (SA)	185	340	8	23.12	3.26	43
Angus Fraser (Eng)	375	608	7	53.57	3.70	87
Shane Warne (Aus)	501	773	7	71.57	3.88	110
Darren Gough (Eng)	102	192	6	17.00	3.18	32
Allan Donald (SA)	202	251	6	33.66	4.82	42
Andrew Caddick (Eng)	268	430	6	44.66	3.73	72

Nel and Gilchrist weren't quite so friendly, and Nel was once in the doghouse after abusing him in a Test at Durban. "I called him an old-ball bully," laughs Nel, who received a strange kind of vindication when Gilchrist then larruped him for 22 in an over. Earlier in the same Test, after again falling cheaply to Nel, Gilchrist diarised something he never thought he'd think, never mind write: "I hate this game... I could easily walk away from it right now."

Nel had no idea how much time he had spent in Gilchrist's head. "I was so shocked to read that. I never thought my antics on the field got to anybody - they were always for my benefit. I knew if I was aggressive and had the right mental attitude I was 10 times better."



Bowlers who dismissed Adam Gilchrist most in Tests

	Runs	Balls	Dismissals	Average	Rpo	Bpd
Anil Kumble (Ind)	239	291	9	26.55	4.92	32
Harbhajan Singh (Ind)	164	205	7	23.42	4.80	29
Jacques Kallis (SA)	173	195	6	28.83	5.32	33
Andre Nel (SA)	86	105	5	17.20	4.91	21
Andrew Flintoff (Eng)	121	186	5	24.20	3.90	37
Daniel Vettori (NZ)	297	390	5	59.40	4.56	78

Nel is one of many good Test cricketers who had eye-catching success against all-time greats. Another was John Crawley, a man who found himself in the right place at the wrong time. His Test career almost coincided with an eight-year period, from 1993 to 2001, in which England didn't play a single Test in Asia. Crawley was a quietly outstanding player of slow bowling, who averaged 78 against spin compared to an overall Test average of 35. Growing up at Old Trafford, a wicket that bounced and turned, was a key factor in his development.

He had notable success against Shane Warne and Muttiah Muralitharan. He played against Murali only once in Tests, at The Oval in 1998, when he biffed 74 runs off 100 balls and was dismissed once. It might have been very different. Most of those runs came in the first innings when Crawley smashed 156 not out to earn a place on the upcoming Ashes tour. But he could have been out first ball. "I'd never seen Murali before," he says. "This thing just fizzed up in the air - you could hear it spinning - then it dropped down and I patted it straight back to him. Caught and bowled, but he'd overstepped. Unbelievable."

Against Warne, Crawley's body of work is greater: three series, two in Australia, played on everything from a Brisbane belter to an Old Trafford bunsen. He scored 190 runs off Warne, 116 more than any other bowler. "The most enjoyable bits of Test cricket I played were against bowlers who tried to get you out almost every single ball, and that's the way that Shane Warne lived his life."

The challenge of facing Warne is so vivid that Crawley sometimes switches to the present tense. "You just have to get in. Once you're in, you need to be clear about the balls that you're going to hit. With Shane it was definitely the sweep, particularly when he went just outside the leg stump with the drift. Subsequently, when I played under him at Hampshire, he *hated* people who swept well. He would always say it's not really a proper shot, because the Aussies don't play it. The reason he didn't like it is that you're basically hitting a very decent ball for a boundary.

"If you did get a few sweeps away he might try and fire one in, and then you'd get quite a few easier shots off

the back foot through the off-side. Those were my two staple areas."

Another player who swept Warne to distraction was the 20-year-old Bangladesh opener Shahriar Nafees (career average 26.39), whose only Test century came against Australia at Fatullah in 2006. That included 67 runs off just 56 balls from Warne, the only time anybody scored at least 40 runs off him at more than a run a ball during a Test innings. "Such batting against Shane Warne," said Nafees, "is the memory I will cherish forever."

ABOVE: John Crawley sweeps on his way to 156* against Sri Lanka at The Oval in 1998



Highest combined average v Warne and Muralitharan

	Runs	Balls	Dismissals	Avg v Warne	Avg v Murali	Combined avge
Moin Khan (Pak)	297	461	3	110.00	93.50	99.00
John Crawley (Eng)	264	562	3	95.00	74.00	88.00
Brian Lara (WI)	873	1481	10	71.57	124.00*	87.30*
Andy Flower (Zim)	236	720	3	13 runs, not out	74.33	78.66
Alastair Cook (Eng)	223	602	3	71.00	76.00	74.33

Minimum 200 runs. Excludes Ricky Ponting, who averaged 118 v Murali in Tests but didn't face Warne. Some ball-by-ball data is missing for Lara v Murali; we estimate Lara's average against Murali as roughly 84, which makes his combined average around 77.

Between 1974 and 2009, only one spinner opened the bowling for England in the first innings of a Test match at home or abroad. He was the captain, too. But John Emburey wasn't indulging himself when he took the new ball instead of Phil DeFreitas at Old Trafford in 1988. Richie Richardson was opening for West Indies, and everyone in the world knew Emburey was his nemesis.

Emburey was seen by many as the world's best off-spinner in the mid-1980s, but the overall career average of the two players (Richardson 44, Emburey 38) does not suggest a head-to-head record of 68 runs at 9.71.

Six of the seven dismissals were in the Caribbean in 1985/86, when Richardson was arguably the world's best young batter. He barely scored a run off Emburey but still collected 387 in the series, including the only two centuries on either side in the first four Tests. Emburey had him in his pocket without realising.

“

Richardson did not face Emburey until his 143rd ball of the 1985/86 series, by which time even Allan Lamb had had a go. The last 50 deliveries bowled by Emburey to Richardson in the series yielded four wickets for four runs

Richie Richardson v England in 1985/86

	Runs	Balls	Dismissals	Average	Rpo	Bpd
John Emburey	48	178	6	8.00	1.61	30
The rest	339	492	1	339.00	4.14	492

Richie Richardson v England (whole career)

	Runs	Balls	Dismissals	Average	Rpo	Bpd
John Emburey	68	222	7	9.71	1.83	32
Other spinners	250	640	3	83.33	2.34	213
Seamers	1268	2412	30	42.26	3.15	80



“It was quite amazing,” said Emburey in his book *Spinning in a Fast World*, “that not until I had got him out four or five times did we suddenly realise that he had usually amassed a big score before I even came on to bowl.”

Richardson did not face Emburey until his 143rd ball of the series, by which time even Allan Lamb had had a go. The last 50 deliveries bowled by Emburey to Richardson in the series yielded four wickets for four runs.

The last of those dismissals was a mixed blessing: Viv Richards came in and launched a 56-ball century. Two letters can make quite a difference. Emburey didn't have quite as much joy against Richards in Test matches: 335 balls, 278 runs, no wickets.

ABOVE AND BELOW: John Emburey had Richie Richardson's number





The 1990s was a golden age of fast bowling and mystery spin. Sachin Tendulkar withstood all of them – and then fell in a heap against Hansie Cronje. The South African was the first man to dismiss Tendulkar five times in Tests, a feat he achieved just before the match-fixing scandal finished his career. “I was never comfortable facing Hansie Cronje, who got me out on a number of occasions with his medium pace,” said Tendulkar in his autobiography. “Even when I was in control against the likes of Allan Donald, Hansie would somehow get the better of me and I’d get out to him in the most unexpected ways.”

Cricket history is littered with occasional bowlers who for some reason troubled great batters. One of the few spinners who wasn’t munched by Viv Richards was Allan Border, while Garry Sobers had similar problems with Bob Simpson’s leg-spin. Martin Crowe accounted for half of Mike Gatting’s four Test wickets.

The smaller the sample size, the harder it is to know whether it’s meaningful. Woe betide anyone who suggests within earshot of Geoffrey Boycott that his struggles against India’s left-arm seamer Eknath Solkar (Test record: 18 wickets at 59) in 1974

(four cheap dismissals inside a month, though only one was in a Test) were anything other than a coincidence.

Steve Waugh landed a devastating and undeniable blow in the eternal style-substance war with his record against Carl Hooper. Waugh dismissed Hooper six times in Tests at an average of 19. When the roles were reversed, Waugh averaged 217 against Hooper’s off-spin.

It can work the other way, with lower-order players defying dominant bowlers. When Mitchell Johnson laid waste to England and South Africa in 2013/14, one of the few players able to handle him was Vernon Philander, who scored 35 runs off 72 balls without being dismissed. Only Hashim Amla and Ian Bell had a better record. And across his whole Test career, only Kane Williamson and Shivnarine Chanderpaul faced more balls without being dismissed by Johnson.

Derek Pringle didn’t score many runs off Curtly Ambrose in 1988 and 1991 – but he kept him out for all bar one of the 234 balls he faced. This was especially crucial at Headingley in 1991, when a rampant Ambrose was threatening to take all 10 in the second innings. Without Pringle’s dead bat, Graham Gooch could not have made his immense 154 not out.

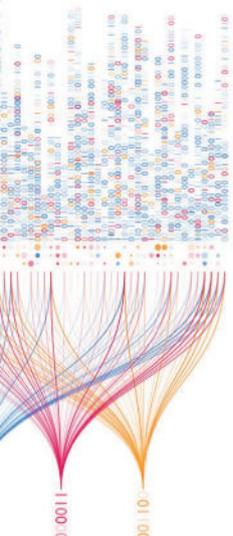
ABOVE: Hansie Cronje was Sachin’s bogeyman

Selected part-time bowlers (Tests only)

Batter	Bowler	Runs	Balls	Dismissals	Average	Rpo	Bpd
Garry Sobers (WI)	Bob Simpson (Aus)	55	135	4	13.75	2.44	75
Viv Richards (WI)	Allan Border (Aus)	18	72	3	6.00	1.50	24
Martin Crowe (NZ)	Mike Gatting (Eng)	0	5	2	0.00	0.00	3
Carl Hooper (WI)	Steve Waugh (Aus)	115	242	6	19.16	2.85	40
Sachin Tendulkar (Ind)	Hansie Cronje (SA)	56	198	5	11.20	1.98	40

Selected lower-order batters (Tests only)

Batter	Bowler	Runs	Balls	Dismissals	Average	Rpo	Bpd
Graham Dilley (Eng)	Dennis Lillee (Aus)	93	145	1	93.00	3.84	145
Derek Pringle (Eng)	Curtly Ambrose (WI)	44	234	1	44.00	1.12	234
Daniel Vettori (NZ)	Glenn McGrath (Aus)	89	162	1	89.00	3.62	162
Harbhajan Singh (Ind)	Daniel Vettori (NZ)	168	231	1	168.00	4.36	231
Vernon Philander (SA)	Mitchell Johnson (Aus)	59	119	0	N/A	2.97	N/A





ABOVE: Ken Rutherford and Allan Border prepare to toss up at Brisbane in 1993, a Test in which Rutherford made 36 and 86

RIGHT: Rutherford couldn't resist taking on the pull stroke against Glenn McGrath

Sometimes even the bogeyman has a bogeyman. Glenn McGrath, probably the greatest self-fulfilling nemesis in cricket history, had occasional struggles of his own – often against New Zealand. We've mentioned Ken Rutherford's nightmare debut series in a previous article in this series, so it's only fair to cover some happier times. In McGrath's debut series, in 1993/94, he was taken to the cleaners by Rutherford, who bashed 74 off 80 balls, including 12 boundaries, and was only dismissed once. Rutherford's scoring rate of 5.55 per over is the fastest of anybody who faced 50 balls from McGrath across a career or in a single series.

"He was this big, tall, angular farming kid," says Rutherford, "though you could see he had raw natural ability. He'd only played eight first-class games before his Test debut so I think the team as a whole thought we might get some stuff we could seize upon."

Rutherford does himself down. This wasn't a case of an inexperienced McGrath bowling poorly, because the rest of the New Zealand team scored at 2.17 per over against him. "Jesus, I didn't know that!" laughs Rutherford. "I should use that myself at some stage. Pump up my own tyres!"

Rutherford much preferred facing this version of McGrath than the nagging interrogator he became. "He was a bit of a firebrand in those days. He was sharp and he hit the splice." He also bowled plenty of short stuff,

particularly on his debut at the WACA. "The Aussies liked to bounce me as they knew I'd take it on. They were prepared to accept me hitting boundaries because they knew if they bounced me continually, there was a good chance I'd hit one straight up in the air, which I ended up doing."

That dismissal, the only time Rutherford fell to McGrath in a Test, is his most vivid memory. "They'd just taken the second new ball. Wanie had finished bowling a marathon spell at the other end, so instead of going to slip he wandered down to fine-leg to get a drink. McGrath bowled me the slowest bloody bouncer of all time. I needed to see a chiropractor because I spun myself into a top trying to hit it into the next state. Wanie was trying have a drink, put a sweater on and put his floppy hat on all at the same time, then suddenly the ball came straight down his throat."

Rutherford was in the best form of his career and determined to flaunt it. "Too many New Zealand teams go to Australia with a bit of a negative attitude, so I was pretty keen to have a crack. They admire you if you play attacking cricket. I live in Brisbane now and I met a guy in the pub a few weeks ago who said, 'You used to bloody give it back to us, didn't you mate?'"

"John Wright often said to me about facing the West Indies in the 1980s: 'I don't care about the runs so much, I just want to earn their respect.' The same was true with Australia in the 1990s." 🏏

Highest strike-rates v Glenn McGrath in a Test series

	Runs	Balls	Dismissals	Average	Rpo
Ken Rutherford (NZ, 1993/94)	74	80	1	74.00	5.55
Chris Cairns (NZ, 2001/02)	68	78	1	68.00	5.23
Graham Thorpe (Eng, 1994/95)	76	89	1	76.00	5.12
Inzamam-ul-Haq (Pak, 1998/99)	67	89	2	33.50	4.51
Hansie Cronje (SA, 1996/97)	64	86	1	64.00	4.46

Minimum 50 runs





PHOTO BY GRAHAM CHADWICK

A **CRICKET** LIFE

DOMINIC CORK

The former England seamer on his breakthrough at Derbyshire, his dream Test debut, and a historic hat-trick against West Indies

Interview James Wallace



1981 Ashes. That's when I saw an all-rounder called Ian Botham. From then on that's all I wanted to be. I loved him. I wanted to emulate Beefy. I saw how confident and competitive Botham was and my dad was the same. He told me not to make friends on the pitch. I'm sure I took it too far at times, I wouldn't even call it white-line fever because I was the same way off the pitch. It's funny, I work with people now who I played against and they say, "Oh, you're actually alright". As a player they absolutely hated me! I loved the battle, loved looking in the whites of people's eyes. It was natural for me. The huge appeals and the chirping, that wasn't for show, it's who I was. I've calmed down a little bit now, perhaps.

LEFT: Cork celebrates the wicket of Junior Murray at Old Trafford in 1995; he dismissed Carl Hooper with his next delivery to complete his hat-trick

“**Junior Murray and Carl Hooper were the next two and they were plumb lbw. I almost split my trousers appealing!**”

Writing to Warwickshire

As a teenager I wrote to Warwickshire to ask for a trial because my mate had done it and he got accepted. They asked to have a look at me and we drove over there one Tuesday afternoon. Out of the 50 young cricketers that were there, I was the only one to get picked. That led to me spending six months training with Warwickshire as a teenager, an amazing learning experience. I was there with the likes of Gladstone Small and Bob Willis and they took me under their wing.

Believe it or not, I was very nervous. It was a real step up. Mainly because of the pace of the bowlers and how hard the batters hit it. I'd gone from playing a bit of first-team cricket at Betley to mixing with these grizzled professionals. That's when I realised the standard I needed to get to and how much I had to improve in order to reach their level. It spurred me on. Warwickshire were really honest with me. They said, "Unfortunately we can't offer you anything, but we'll keep tabs on you". That summer, when I was 16, Derbyshire came in and offered me a two-year youth training scheme. I really have to thank John Morris' dad, Eddie, who has passed away now. Eddie watched a lot of North Staffs/South Cheshire League cricket and it was him who recommended me to Derbyshire.

Derby days

I loved it from the very beginning. I used to get the train over to Derby from Stoke every morning, carrying my kitbag and walking over Bass' Recreation Ground. It wasn't glamorous! I used to make a lot of tea, wash towels, clean up old cricket balls, it was a proper introduction into the world of professional cricket. All the lads there were very good to me and I started to get better and better. Alan Hill was the coach then and eventually Phil Russell signed me to play under Kim

Competitive spirit

I'm the youngest of three brothers so there was always competition in the backyard. That's how it all started. There's four years between me and my second brother and six between me and my older brother, so I was always playing against bigger and better opposition. The challenge was always there – can I play to their standards? That taught me early on about competitiveness and that I always need to try my absolute best. My dad actually played a bit of professional football for Port Vale but was always really into cricket. He went on to play at Betley Cricket Club, which was then in the North Staffordshire and South Cheshire League. Our weekends as a family revolved around the club.

Emulating Beefy

My brothers were more into football but for me it was always cricket. I remember really vividly watching the

Barnett's captaincy. Those men changed my life really. Derbyshire were a very unfashionable county – they still are – but we had a very good side. Kim was an excellent captain and we had some damn good international players. When I turned up Michael Holding and John Wright were there, then John Morris and Devon Malcolm, and a bit later on Phillip DeFreitas, Ian Bishop and Dean Jones. I made sure I wasn't anywhere near a bat when Mikey Holding was bowling! Devon was a nightmare to face in the indoor school too, but he was really brilliant with me and helped me out a lot when it came to settling in and learning my craft. Everyone at the club helped to shape me as a person and a bowler.

Crossing paths with Botham

In 1992 I made the squad for a Texaco Trophy series against Pakistan and ended up making my debut at Old Trafford. I only got picked because Chris Lewis came down with toothache on the morning of the game. It was amazing really, as I made my England debut in the same game that my childhood hero, Ian Botham, played his last match for England. I'd never been so nervous in my life – walking into that changing room that had my idols in it. Botham put his big hands on my shoulders and said, "You're going to be fine". He then made this speech which was basically, "You get the runs, I'll get them out, let's go!". That sort of self-belief definitely rubs off on you.

On the radar

England were playing West Indies in the summer of 1995 and they'd already lost the first Test at Headingley. I knew I was on the radar of the selectors and needed to put in some good performances to give myself a chance. I bowled an eye-catching spell against Northants the week before the second Test at Lord's, taking 9-43. It should've been all 10! Colin Wells dropped a catch that would have been the 10th wicket, he shelled David Ripley at slip – an absolute sitter! At that time there was a sponsor called Whittingdale which gave £7500 for the best bowling



figures that year. A week or so later someone took nine wickets for less and they took the money. Colin wrote me out a blank cheque afterwards but he never signed it...

No pain, no gain

I'd done enough to get noticed by the selectors. I got the call-up to play at Lord's, which was amazing but I was really struggling with my back. I was taken to see a specialist who gave me a huge injection and told me that I was absolutely not to bowl for 24 hours. I didn't really want to tell people so I rocked up at Lord's a few days before the game and ended up saying I was a bit fatigued from my exploits the week before. Imagine having to do that before your Test debut – they must've thought I was a real prima donna!

The dream debut

Ian Bishop was my first Test wicket, a little inside edge onto the stumps – thanks Bish! We'd played together at Derbyshire and knew each other well. He's a great man, we now work together a lot doing commentary. I bowled OK in the first innings but things changed in the second when Michael Atherton put me on to bowl from the Nursery End, much to the dismay of Angus Fraser.

It was just one of those amazing days you sometimes get as a bowler. When rhythm comes, you have to capitalise on it. The ball feels beautiful in your hand and

ABOVE: Leaving the field at Lord's in 1995 after a stunning Test debut which included second-innings figures of 7-43

LEFT: Castling his former Derbyshire teammate Ian Bishop to pick up his first Test scalp



Factfile

BORN: August 7, 1971, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire

MAJOR TEAMS: England, Derbyshire, Hampshire, Lancashire

CAREER:

37 Tests, 864 runs at 18.00, 3 fifties, HS 59; 131 wickets at 29.81, 5 five-wicket hauls, BBI 7-43

32 ODIs, 180 runs at 10.00, HS 31*; 41 wickets at 33.36, BB 3-27
321 first-class matches, 10,114 runs at 25.03, 8 hundreds, 54 fifties, HS 200*; 989 wickets at 26.73, 36 five-wicket hauls, 5 ten-wicket matches, BBI 9-43

314 List-A matches, 4,184 runs at 20.92, 19 fifties, HS 93; 382 wickets at 27.75, BB 6-21

82 T20s matches, 445 runs at 12.71, HS 28; 73 wickets at 23.73, BB 4-16

HIGHLIGHTS

- ✓ Took 7-43 on Test debut against West Indies at Lord's in 1995, still the best innings figures for an England debutant
- ✓ Took a hat-trick at Old Trafford in 1995, the first by an English player in Test cricket since Peter Loader in 1957
- ✓ England's leading wicket-taker on the '95 tour of South Africa with 19 Test wickets at an average of 25.52
- ✓ Named a *Wisden* Cricketer of the Year in 1996
- ✓ Player of the Match in the 1993 Benson & Hedges Cup final against Lancashire, scoring an unbeaten 92 for Derbyshire
- ✓ Player of the Match for Hampshire in the 2009 Friends Provident Trophy final, taking 4-41 as Hampshire defeated Sussex
- ✓ Captained Hampshire to victory in the 2010 Twenty20 Cup final, taking 2-21 against Somerset

comes out perfectly. There was some swing and I had a little bit of luck too. There's a couple of fluky dismissals in those seven wickets! What I really remember was the crowd. People just seemed to be piling in as it went on. It was quite a sedate crowd the other days but I remember the supporters getting right behind me. I was so delighted to get that final wicket and finish the game off. Test cricket was better than I could have even dreamt.

Mayhem in Manchester

It's nearly 30 years ago now but I still sometimes get quite visceral flashbacks of the hat-trick at Old Trafford in the fourth Test of that summer. It was scorching hot in Manchester and the game was quite nip and tuck. That morning Athers had said that we need to win the first hour and I remember saying, "Give me the ball!". That was the way I was. Some people thought it was cockiness or arrogance but I just really wanted to be involved, I wanted to win games for England, or whoever I was playing for. I backed myself, but I had to.

The ball was reverse swinging because of the dry conditions, and I was bowling at Richie Richardson, the great man in his red floppy hat. I bowled one that hit the top of his pad and then flicked his gloves and went down onto the stumps. In the book it just says 'Richardson bowled Cork' but it was a bit of luck to get me going. I knew I had to bowl full to give myself the best chance. Junior Murray and

Carl Hooper were the next two and they were plumb lbw. I almost split my trousers appealing! I remember Robin Smith grabbing hold of me and shouting a flurry of expletives in my ear, and then I was mobbed by everyone else. It was magnificent and something I'm very proud of.

No regrets

I wouldn't swap any of it. I loved playing in my era, but I'd love to have another go! At Test cricket or in the IPL. I think my personality would be well-suited. I know I could have done a lot better for England. I genuinely believe that I should have played more, but that's not anybody's fault apart from my own. I probably at times should have been more selfish. I know that sounds a bit iffy, people might say, "How can Dominic Cork say he should've been a bit more selfish?!" Because people generally think I'm selfish anyway. But I wasn't. I would give anything to whatever team I was playing for. I'd bowl all day if I could. I think that was to the detriment of me as an individual. I bowled myself into the ground at times.

I also tried to bowl too quick, which was harmful to my natural swing. Often that is what people wanted you to do and it was hard to say no. But I have a lot to be proud of, and thankful for. If you'd have told me as a teenager that I'd play professional cricket until I was 40 and then have a life in the game coaching and commentating, I would have snatched your hand off. ■

ABOVE: Cork captained Hampshire to victory in the 2010 T20 Cup

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YOUR GAME

At the heart of club cricket



PHOTO BY YAWAR NAZIR

£1k bats and the cost of living crisis

Scott Oliver investigates why the cost of cricket bats is soaring and considers what can be done to remedy the issue

Consumer price perception is a funny thing, no doubt with some riveting papers written about it in those *super-expensive* online journals (although that could just be my perception; they might actually be cheap at \$100 a pop).

Readers of a certain age may recall Trevor Francis becoming the first million-pound footballer in 1979, which adjusted for inflation is today around £4.8 million. Nowadays, there are £70 million footballers described as an “absolute snip”. Something of a shift in price perception.

All of which came to mind recently while browsing the web for cricket bats and seeing the dread text: ‘RRP £1,000’. *Excuse me?* Twenty years ago, I bought a brand-new bat from a prestige traditional brand for £150 (about £265, adjusted for inflation). It is six years since I last played, but at what point did high-end bats start costing four-figure sums? Is that how things are going to be now?

I dropped in at the websites of two Indian batmaking behemoths – Sareen Sports (SS) and Sanspareil Greenlands (SG) – and discovered that their top-of-the-range models cost £1,758 for an ‘SS Ton’ or £1,705 to procure an ‘SG 70 Sunny Years’. How’s the price perception there? Are we cool

with this? And how did we get here so quickly?

Fundamentally, this is a simple case of supply and demand. Premium cricket bats are made exclusively from English willow, the cost of which has risen by 25 per cent in each of the last three years. Mature trees take between 15 and 20 years to grow and only so much can be harvested each year. JS Wright from Chelmsford produce about three quarters of the English willow clefts subsequently turned into bats by the global market, each one graded from 20 up to 1 on the basis of grain quality (number, uniformity, lack of blemishes). Demand for this premium willow – cheaper bats, aimed at the lower end of the market, are available in the faster-growing Kashmir willow – far outstrips supply. Perhaps especially in India, with its IPL-mania and emergent middle-class.

Industry insiders also cite the rising costs of skilled labour, energy and shipping as further factors behind the price spike. Meanwhile, the T20 boom has not only opened up new markets, increasing demand, but has also attracted the major sports brands such as Adidas, Nike, Puma and New Balance, who may not be in the game to sell bats so much as ‘sneakers and apparel’ – having a high-profile name bat

ABOVE: Demand for premium willow is far outstripping supply, leading bat prices to rise



My major concern is for the youngster who's starting out in hardball cricket. The burden on parents buying all the statutory equipment is getting towards £200 or £250 for the most basic of kits, which will scare some off

Gary Stanyer of Spyder Bats

RIGHT: Willow cleats used to make cricket bats are piled high at a factory in Halmullah, Kashmir

BELOW: "A Grade 2 bat can perform just as well as a pro's bat if pressed properly," says Sam Brandon of Buffalo Cricket

all day in a Test match is cheaper brand exposure than paying for TV ad slots – but they are inflating sponsorship fees.

"These major brands have overpaid in personal endorsements to players," asserts Gary Stanyer of Staffordshire's Spyder Bats, "which then drives up the fees paid by the traditional cricket brands. This ultimately gets reflected in the product price, and the end user suffers."

If these might be considered optional costs, then willow is not, and one effect of the supply-side scarcity is an increase in counterfeits. A recent *Business Insider* investigation highlighted a number of Indian factories 'upgrading' their bats and even trying to pass off Kashmir willow as English. Meanwhile, the increasing reluctance for Asian batmakers to sell on to third-party 'sticker operations' is also affecting things closer to home, argues Michael Blatherwick of B3, which manufactures bats on-site in Nottinghamshire. "Some of these non-manufacturing brands declare that they don't make their

own bats, but many don't and give the appearance that they have their own factories. Potentially these brands are double-duping the customer: pretending to be something they're not and selling inferior willow as top-grade English willow."

If it is a minefield, it is an expensive minefield, one compounded by the likelihood that ever more stringent health-and-safety regulations and Trading Standards compliance around the manufacture of protective equipment – helmets and gloves especially – will further drive up costs, which then trickle down to consumers. And all this comes in the midst of an acute cost of living crisis, where in some households it is a struggle to stay warm and well fed, let alone be too choosy about cricket bats. Unaffordability means inaccessibility, a game that becomes ever more shrunken and/or stratified.

"My major concern is for the youngster who's starting out in hardball cricket," says Stanyer. "The burden on parents buying all the statutory equipment is getting towards £200 or £250 for the most basic of kits, which will scare some off. I openly encourage clubs I deal with to purchase a team bag with a few pads, gloves and helmets. This way kids can get a taster before buying all the items required. The whole equipment chain has to remember that if we don't sell the junior kit, they won't then become the seniors who need a bat."

No one has done more than Chance to Shine to ensure that cricket's doors are kept open – especially for those without existing ties to the game through clubs – as it has disappeared from the state education sector and nestled on the manicured lawns of fee-paying schools.

"We target the areas of greatest economic deprivation and these were

all issues before the cost of living crisis," says the charity's Ross Jeavons, "but they have definitely grown. One of our coaches in Port Talbot told us that parents were actively discouraging their children from being involved in cricket because of their perceptions around the cost of the game, the expense of kit. Also, the cost of living crisis has affected how we operate, paying for coaches and venue hire to offer cricket that's free at the point of use. Our money doesn't stretch as far as it once did."

What can the game's custodians – from administrators to manufacturers – do to ease these barriers to entry, to help turn the gateway drug into a lifelong habit? Aside from communal kitbags and various kit-recycling initiatives, is there a remedy to the spiralling cost of equipment, bats especially?

Not everyone requires a top-grade bat, of course. "At B3, we have recognised the potential barriers caused by the hike in the price of top bats," says Blatherwick. "With that in mind, we launched a Kashmir willow range, which gives a great mid-range bat for less than £100 for a junior and £200 for an adult. We won't put B3 stickers on the adult, because the B3 brand is synonymous with the best English willow bats. However, for young players who want our stickers, then why not. Anything to get kids hooked on the game!"

For Sam Brandon, who launched Buffalo Cricket as an "affordable boutique brand" during the pandemic, education around bat grading and performance – "pick-up and ping" – is the key. "It's the grading structure," he says. "There's no international standard, no regulation. I've seen bats with five grains classed as Grade 1 – it just isn't. But if you buy finished bats from the subcontinent, you have to go off their grading because they go off the grading of what they've been sent by the willow





The Captain's Log

DAMAGE CONTROL

merchants, and have paid accordingly, which means you pay accordingly. You're not going to downgrade a bat, even if you think it should be, because you will most likely lose money."

Brandon admits that Buffalo are able to price their premium bats at under £500 in part because they are "first and foremost a sport social media agency" with cricket equipment one offshoot, a "passion project". Nevertheless, he is adamant that "no one needs to spend £900 on a bat. No one needs a pro's bat, with nine, 10, 11 straight grains. A Grade 2 can perform just as well as a pro's bat if pressed properly. I've compared our most expensive bat to some other top-end bats and there's absolutely no difference in performance. It's all about the education."

However, some in the industry believe more radical thinking than a tweak in consumer price perception is now required to resolve the apparent intractability of willow's supply-side issues – quality bats may become rarer still as temperatures rise and trees grow faster – and ensure cricket remains as affordable as possible.

"The game is in for a difficult few years," predicts Stanyer. "It would be interesting to see what plans the governing bodies have in place. ICC and MCC can look at willow alternatives – hybrid bats and the like – particularly for club cricket. This can break the monopoly [of the willow growers] and make the game more accessible to all."

Research has already been carried out into the viability of bamboo bats – a cheap and plentiful crop, but a grass – although this would require the MCC to change Law 5.3.2, which states that the blade of the bat must consist solely of wood. Still, a crisis calls for pragmatism and nimble thought, believes Ali Jafri of London's AJ Sports.

"Like hockey, cricket bats should also be allowed to be made from carbon fibre instead of wood," he says, "and this change should be implemented immediately, starting with junior cricket. Additionally, the strict regulations regarding the safety of equipment need to be relaxed. If these measures aren't taken, the day is not far off when the game of cricket will once again become just a pastime for Lord's." ■

Yas Rana, metronomic seamer and host of the *Wisden Cricket Weekly Podcast*, plays for Old Pauline CC's second XI in Division Five of the Surrey Championship. Vice-captain last summer, he's earned himself a promotion. This month, he's in existential crisis

I'm not sure whether I've enjoyed this season yet. Our overall availability has been spectacularly poor. My pre-season grand plans about fostering a new, energising team spirit have gone out of the window, largely because from week to week we rarely have XIs that come close to resembling each other.

Two weeks ago, I was the only player who turned out for the second XI on consecutive Saturdays. One week away from the halfway point in the season, and we are yet to start a match without a round of introductions. We have used 45 players in the twos across the first eight games of the season. It's been impossible to build any sort of momentum.

For the sake of my own sanity, I've given up caring too much about our league position and, most weeks, whether we even win. Some Saturdays are essentially about disaster prevention, making sure that the damage isn't too scarring and hoping new recruits or returning players won't be put off.

I find I'm looking for games within the game to keep myself and the team entertained. My mate's younger brother, who loves watching cricket but hasn't played much before, was roped in for a game at the last minute. On the train down he asked how

our bowling stocks were looking. "Funny you should ask," I replied. "How do you feel about sending down 10 overs of darty off-spin? I reckon you're coordinated enough to pull it off."

To his credit, after a quick pre-game tutorial followed by studious observation of how our veteran spinner went about his business, he managed to deliver 10 overs of serviceable, non-turning offies.

We've had several guys come in who haven't played in years. They've looked like they've enjoyed themselves, but it's such a big leap to go from playing the occasional game when they fancy a day out to becoming a regular whose default Saturday is spent on the cricket field.

I wondered in last month's column if in a world where Last Man Stands (LMS) scratches the itch of so many young cricketers, whether recreational 50-over cricket on Saturday afternoons can survive in the long-term. If people squeeze in one or two LMS games after work mid-week, dedicating your Saturday to more cricket isn't quite as appealing.

Nothing that I've seen in the last month has changed my mind on that. I can't help but conclude that for young men in urban areas where LMS goes from strength to strength, Saturday cricket is becoming an increasingly fringe pastime. ■



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Issy Wong met primary school children in Birmingham to launch Here Come the Bright Sparks

Children got the opportunity to play on the famous Lord's outfield

Street Cricket gives young people the chance to play cricket without the need for expensive equipment

England captain Heather Knight at the open day at Lord's

Fun for all: A lot of children first play cricket thanks to Chance to Shine

Street Cricket champions Easton Street took on a team of cricket Youtubers and influencers in Bristol

National Cricket Week proves a big hit

Adam Hopkins reports on Chance to Shine's flagship annual event, with hundreds of young people across the UK getting involved in a festival of cricket

Last month saw the return of Chance to Shine's National Cricket Week, a nationwide festival celebrating the sport, raising awareness of the charity's work, and showing children that cricket is a game for all.

Since 2005, Chance to Shine, an independent charity, has brought cricket to more than six million children in schools and communities across England, Wales and Scotland. They have helped children to learn the game and find a sense of belonging through the sport, while also developing life skills and benefitting their general wellbeing.

"The thing that really struck me about Chance to Shine is that it's a charity promoting cricket, but for everybody," said England fast bowler Issy Wong during a visit to Heathfield Primary School in Birmingham to launch Chance to Shine's new early

years resource package, Here Come the Bright Sparks, as part of National Cricket Week.

"That 'for everybody' part is really important because it shouldn't matter what background you're from, what age you are, if you're male or female – cricket should be something that everybody can get involved in."

Here Come the Bright Sparks supports the physical development of children during their Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The resources include an animation, Meet Charlie, the Confident Cricketer, alongside four physical development lessons with a storytelling theme.

"I wanted to play cricket but never really knew how to play," said Heathfield student Ariyaan. "Now I know how to play."

On the opportunity to meet Wong at her school, Zaaqa added: "It's been amazing because you can see a real cricketer."

One of the week's marquee events was Chance to Shine's annual Schools' Open Day. More than 400 children from state schools across the country attended an event at Lord's where they had the opportunity to play cricket and take part in a host of activities on the outfield and in the indoor school, with England captain Heather Knight and England fast bowler Richard Gleeson getting involved.

The pupils at Lord's were from schools among the 4,000 state primary schools that have received a 'half-term of cricket' from Chance to Shine coaches in the last year.

"We've just been doing some really fun activities," said Fletcher, one of the children in attendance. "We've been having mini games, we've had a tour. It's just been really fun."

At the Seat Unique Stadium in Bristol, two sides made up of cricketers from Chance to Shine Street champions



Easton Street took on a team of cricket YouTubers and content creators in a game of street cricket in Gloucestershire's indoor school. Easton won the Young Adults category of Chance to Shine's Street competition finals in Nottingham last year.

Dan Jazdevics from ourCricket said: "My first impressions of street cricket have been absolutely wild. I've played a little bit of indoor cricket and it's kind of similar, but it's a little bit safer with a softer ball. The energy is so high, the enthusiasm is massive."

Gareth Grant from Can You Cricket added: "It's very different to your usual cricket. It's a gateway for a lot of people to get into cricket. And, also, cricket is about enjoying yourself, having fun, and I can tell you we had a lot of fun tonight."

Chance to Shine's Street Clubs programme gives young people aged 8-24 in underserved areas the chance to develop their cricket and life skills while also taking part in informal matches. There are currently 293 Street Cricket Clubs across England, Wales and Scotland, with 82 per cent of participants coming from ethnically diverse backgrounds and 65 per cent from some of England's most deprived areas.

"It eliminates the need for that

expensive kit," said Chance to Shine trustee Bilal Raja. "You can show up with a tennis ball, a bit of electrical tape and you don't even need a stump. Just use a good old-fashioned bag. And it's great because it brings people from varying backgrounds to the safe place that is a cricket hall."

It wasn't just street cricketers in Bristol getting involved in National Cricket Week, as young people from the 17 Street Clubs across Surrey were lucky enough to form a guard of honour at The Oval as the players took the field for Surrey's T20 clash with Glamorgan.

Other events that took place during the week included 3,000 children from across Sussex attending a match at Hove, girls from Buckinghamshire taking part in a Street Cricket session in Bletchley, 60 children participating in a mixed Dynamos final at Upton CC in Cheshire, 16 teams battling it out at Taunton at the Chance to Compete County Finals, 120 girls from across North Powys descending on Newtown CC, and much, much more.

If you want to find out more about Chance to Shine, visit chancetoshine.org. For free cricketing resources, visit teachers.chancetoshine.org. ■

“

The thing that really struck me about Chance to Shine is that it's a charity promoting cricket, but for everybody. It shouldn't matter what background you're from, what age you are, if you're male or female – cricket should be something that everybody can get involved in

Issy Wong, England fast bowler





PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ECB

TOP LEFT: Chris Edwards has been representing his country since 2009 and was named England Learning Disability captain aged 22

TOP RIGHT: England Learning Disability triumphed over Australia and South Africa in a tri-series last November

BELOW RIGHT: "Putting on the England shirt is not an easy thing to achieve, you have to earn the right"

Leading from the front

England Learning Disability captain Chris Edwards is growing the disability game in Cheshire and beyond. He speaks to Adam Hopkins about his journey in cricket and how perceptions have shifted across his career

Learn to succeed – there are times when things don't work out how you want them to, but by learning from success and failure, it can make you and your team stronger." This is the coaching philosophy of Chris Edwards, England Learning Disability captain and the Cheshire Cricket Board's disability lead coach.

"It started in school," Edwards tells WCM of his introduction to cricket. He was diagnosed with autism as a three-year-old, and attended a school which was more suited to his needs than an average primary school.

"I was five or six years old at the time and we were playing football, but it got too hot. The school caretaker and head of lunchtime activities, Keith Beggs, got a cricket set out and we played a bit of cricket. He identified I had a natural talent and it all took off from there."

Seeing the innate ability Edwards had for cricket inspired Beggs to take his coaching qualifications,

allowing Edwards and his classmates to play cricket more regularly. Beggs taught him how to bat and bowl and subsequently became a close friend of Edwards and his family, even travelling on England tours with him to Australia in 2009 and South Africa in 2011.

Twenty-six years on from that hot day in the school playground, Edwards has enjoyed quite the career. He debuted for England in 2009, aged just 16, became captain of the national side at 22, and was awarded a British Empire Medal in the Queen's birthday honours in 2021 for his services to learning disability cricket. He's been in the England set-up for over 15 years and is still going strong.

Edwards' international career highlights include successes against Australia, featuring three Ashes wins Down Under and a tri-series victory over the Aussies and South Africa last November. England defeated Australia in the final at the Wanderers, a game that he describes as "probably the best day of my England career to date".

While autism is something that impacts his life on a daily basis, he says, for the most part, it doesn't impede him too much on the cricket field.

"My main disability is social and communication difficulties, particularly when going into new or unknown environments. From an impact point of view, it can be [affected] if my routine is out of sync. So, say, wet weather or something happens in the game that hasn't gone to plan. It can affect people differently. But in terms of actually playing cricket, nothing much is different."

As well as captaining England, Edwards represents the Cheshire disability side, and was part of the team that won four successive championships between 2007 and 2010. He also opens the batting for Neston in the Cheshire County League, an ECB Premier League, and so far this season has a top score of 61 not out against Toft.

Edwards is a recognisable figure in Cheshire cricket circles, particularly



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ECB



My main disability is social and communication difficulties, particularly when going into new or unknown environments. From an impact point of view, it can be affected if my routine is out of sync. But in terms of actually playing cricket, nothing much is different

due to the work he does as a coach for the Cheshire Cricket Board, including at the county's six Super 1s hubs – an initiative set up by the Lord's Taverners that gives young people with a disability aged between 12 and 25 the chance to play regular, competitive cricket.

"I'm the disability lead coach," he says. "I also look after the disability county squads. So we have a D40 hardball squad and a hardball development squad. And then we have two Super 9s sides who use an incrediball.

"It's quite a wide range of disabilities. In the Super 1s you've got all four impaired groups [physical, behavioural, developmental, and sensory] involved with the squad. It's pan-disability."

As well as overseeing the disability squads, Edwards' role with Cheshire Cricket Board involves lots of

community work, including coaching in schools and outreach activities. He also organises friendlies for the disability squads to take on local cricket clubs as a way of "challenging our players to aspire to be stronger and better and improve their cricket".

Edwards is incredibly proud of what he's achieved in the game, both as a coach and England cricketer. Ahead of England's tri-series in South Africa last November he told the BBC: "It's given me an identity. When I started, it was a massive taboo if someone had a learning disability – people weren't educated about it. Now there's an openness, with more people coming forward, more youngsters wanting to play our game.

"This is who I am. Putting on this shirt is not an easy thing to achieve.

You have to earn the right to wear it, and when you do, you have to understand what it means, and what the ethos of this squad means. For me, it's massive." ■



DISABILITY CRICKET IN NUMBERS

70%

Increase in participation at grassroots level in England and Wales since the pandemic began in 2020, with 60,000 people with disabilities or additional needs engaged in recreational programmes.

642

Special educational needs and disability (SEND) schools and units that were provided regular cricket provision in the 2022/23 academic year, engaging over 19,000 participants

33,000

Pupils with additional needs or disabilities who engaged in the Chance to Shine programme last year.

1,000

Disability cricketers playing at elite level

3

Elite-level disability competitions: the D40, Super 9s, and the Disability Premier League – the latter being broadcast live on Sky Sports.

4

England men's disability teams, covering blind, deaf, intellectual impairment and physical disability



The Wisden Club Cricket Hall of Fame



Do you know someone deserving of a place in the Wisden Club Cricket Hall of Fame? Email editorial@wisden.com



Number 84 Steve Johnson

Scott Oliver profiles an orthodox and courageous opening batter who carved out a monumental career in the club and county cricket of his adopted Shropshire

What's your first-class batting average? Probably not as high as Steve Johnson's, which is 170. The Big Fish. The one time the Shropshire opener dipped his toe in those waters, for the Minor Counties XI against the Indians on home turf at Wellington, he followed a first dig 146* against Kapil Dev, Srinivas Venkataraghavan et al with a steady 24, the statistical if not emotional high point of an illustrious career. "That was a great thrill," he says, "but I have to say it was a batting paradise."

Born in Doncaster to a father who was a "devout Yorkshire supporter" and a mother who "taught me how to catch walking around Doncaster racecourse", Johnson's first club was Harrogate, after the family moved further north. He settled in Shropshire after graduating from agricultural college, working as

a veterinary nutritionist and joining Bridgnorth CC, making his Minor Counties bow at 22, before heading to the Birmingham League in 1969 for more competitive Saturday cricket.

After a year at Old Hill, he spent six at Kidderminster, winning a share of the title in 1973, the year Shropshire landed their sole MCCA Championship pennant 16 years after belatedly joining the competition. No one made more fifties than Johnson in the competition that year, "a fabulous season with a great team, which we celebrated with jugs of gin and tonic".

Tall and lean, strong on drive and hook, Johnson helped underdogs Kidderminster win the title outright in 1975, by which time he had young children with his wife, a Welsh golf international, so headed back to Ludlow CC in Shropshire, which had welcomed league cricket in '73. In 1997, aged 53, he led them to a maiden championship in his final campaign – no mean feat when two clubs, Wroxeter and Shrewsbury, had hitherto shared 18 of 24 titles. A golden moment. By then, quite apart from his 90 appearances for the county's hockey team, 'Johnners' had become one of the dominant figures in Shropshire cricket history.

Debuting in 1967 and retiring in 1991, Johnson amassed a county record 10,115 Championship runs at a healthy 34.17 in 179 appearances, one of only nine batters to break the five-figure mark in Minor Counties history. Having averaged 65 in 1980, he was the competition's leading run-scorer in 1981 with 917. There were 195 catches, too, mainly at first slip. All of which saw him picked for the Minor

Counties XI in the B&H Cup, where in 1979 he stroked 42 at Lord's against Wayne Daniel's Middlesex and 51 at Trent Bridge against Rice and Hadlee before being run out. "That was quite a challenge," he deadpans.

In 1980, Johnson chipped in with 22 at Chippenham as Minor Counties downed Gloucestershire by three runs for an historic maiden win in the competition, although the *Telegraph* reporter on the day gave his trio of catches to namesake Peter. Later that summer he made 30 against the West Indians with Holding and Marshall sharing the new ball. This was a golden era in the Minor Counties game, with Johnson listing the great bowlers he faced: "Tom Cartwright, Derek Shackleton, Johnny Wardle, Sonny Ramadhin, Franklyn Stephenson, Lance Cairns, Mushtaq Mohammad, Nasim-ul-Ghani... I look back on these experiences with great pleasure. We played at the best time for Minor Counties cricket."

He took on the Shropshire captaincy in 1982 and two years later the county shocked the mighty Yorkshire in the NatWest Trophy at Telford. "My father didn't know who to support that day. He was in hospital, very close to death, and I had to rush straight off after the match to see him. I had mixed feelings about the result. It was a very poignant moment."

After calling time on his Shropshire career, Johnson spent seven years on the Minor Counties' umpiring circuit. "I wanted to put something back into the game," he reflects. "I would have liked to carry on but everything comes to an end. Overall, I had a wonderful cricketing life." ■



My father didn't know who to support that day. He was in hospital, very close to death, and I had to rush straight off after the match to see him. It was a very poignant moment



LEFT: Steve Johnson on the block

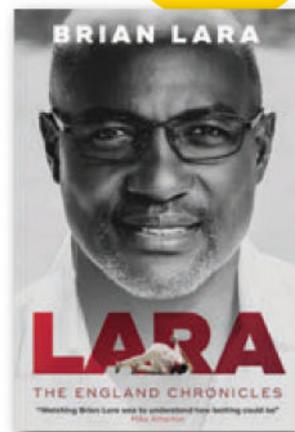
The Quiz

WIN!

Time Warp

The winner of this month's quiz will receive a copy of Brian Lara's new autobiography, *Lara: The England Chronicles*, published by Fairfield and available to buy at thenightwatchman.net.

Send in your answers via email (editorial@wisden.com) or via post (Time Warp, Wisden Cricket Monthly, Fourth Floor, Bedser Stand, Kia Oval, Kennington, London, SE11 5SS). Entries must be received by August 5, 2024.



1. 5 years ago...

On July 26, 2019, England beat Ireland by 143 runs in the one-off Test at Lord's. Who did Jack Leach cover for as opener in England's second innings, scoring 92 as a nightwatchman?

2. 10 years ago...

On July 13, 2014, who did Alastair Cook dismiss at Trent Bridge to pick up his first and only Test wicket?

3. 15 years ago...

On July 13, 2009, Bangladesh defeated West Indies by 95 runs



in the first Test in Kingstown, St Vincent. Which 36-year-old captained a Windies side featuring seven Test debutants?

4. 20 years ago...

On July 26, 2004, England beat West Indies by 210 runs in the first Test at Lord's. Who was named Player of the Match for the first and only time in their 54-Test career after taking nine wickets?

5. 25 years ago...

On July 1, 1999, which 20-year-old wicketkeeper debuted for England in the first Test against New Zealand at Edgbaston?

6. 30 years ago...

On July 21, 1994, South Africa played their first Test match in England since 1965. Who captained the tourists to a 356-run victory at Lord's, scoring a first-innings hundred?

7. 35 years ago...

On July 28, 1989, which overseas

player made their eighth century of the County Championship season for Somerset?

8. 40 years ago...

On July 21, 1984, Lancashire defeated Warwickshire by six wickets in the Benson & Hedges Cup final at Lord's. Who captained Lancs to victory and was named Player of the Match despite making a duck and not bowling a ball?

9. 45 years ago...

On July 21, 1979, which county won the Benson & Hedges Cup final at Lord's, defeating Surrey by 35 runs, and went on to win their first County Championship later that summer?

10. 50 years ago...

On July 14, 1975, England were thrashed by an innings and 85 runs in the first Test of the Ashes at Edgbaston. Who captained the hosts to defeat and never played another Test match?

* Only available to UK residents. An alternative prize will be provided if the winner is aged under 18, or if requested

Last month's answers:

1. Eoin Morgan 2. James Anderson 3. Chris Gayle 4. Nick Knight 5. Saqlain Mushtaq 6. Dion Nash 7. Steve Waugh 8. Andy Lloyd 9. Mike Hendrick 10. Gary Gilmour. **Winner: Collette Roberts**



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Books of the Month



IT'S NOT BANTER, IT'S RACISM

BY AZEEM RAFIQ
Trapeze, £22

It began during lockdown with an interview with *Wisden.com* about how his food supply business was helping local families and ended with Azeem Rafiq and his own family living in Dubai, their lives, and the lives of scores of others – not least the 16 members of staff sacked, many unfairly, by Yorkshire CCC in the wake of the racism scandal – irrevocably changed by what has happened. Except, and this is a point made forcefully by Rafiq's measured book, that is of course not where it ends, because it hasn't ended, and that interview with Taha Hashim is far from where it began. This is a reckoning as well as a morality tale.

Rafiq was not the only former cricketer to speak out about racism during Covid. Michael Holding made an off-the-cuff speech live on television during a Test match in Southampton that also led to a book, his award-winning *Why We Kneel, How We Rise*. And yet Holding has not, to anyone's knowledge, been forced to emigrate, or had human excrement left on his lawn, or awoken to find chain-wielding men surrounding his house in the middle of the night (or at least not recently – none of the above is meant



ECHOING GREENS

BY BRENDAN COOPER
Constable, £25

to even minutely traduce Holding's lived experience or the others he has described). But why is that?

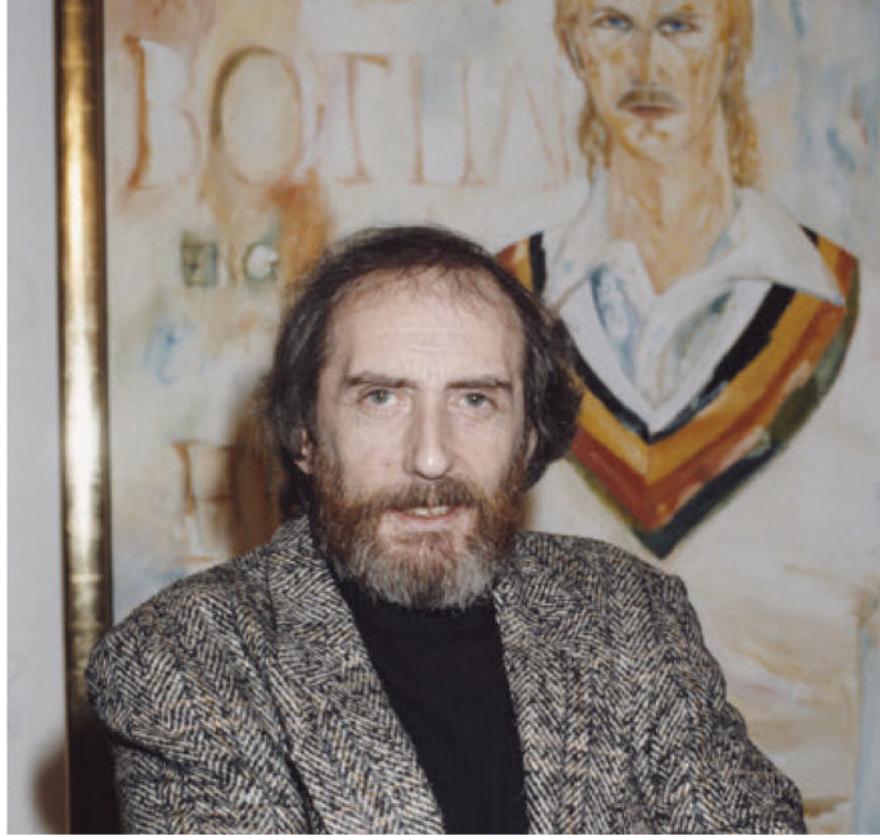
Is it because Holding is Jamaican and Rafiq born in Pakistan? Or because Holding is older and respected throughout the world and Rafiq unknown outside of cricketing circles? Or is it a different, newer, more virulent form of racism, fuelled online, that causes people that we all walk past on the street to think and behave in that way given half a chance?

There is a toxicity to Rafiq's experience that is bound up in an attitude that he should somehow be grateful for the opportunity he got having moved to Barnsley from Karachi, and to not worry about being held down and having alcohol poured down his throat as a 15-year-old, or hearing the P-word used as banter around dressing rooms, or any of the other more intangible moments that you – or me, as a white middle-aged man utterly divorced from the experience – may read about in his book and think, 'Well does that really seem so bad?' (the answer to which is no, until you understand that it is not just an isolated offhand comment or sideways look, but part of the fabric of the life that you have lived every day.)

ABOVE: Azeem Rafiq in action for Yorkshire in 2017

A moral satirist like Tom Wolfe would have understood the novelistic sweep of Rafiq's story, especially the nuances, because Rafiq is a flawed hero (a human being in other words). The day after his testimony to the DCMS Committee hearings, antisemitic comments he had made emerged online. Rafiq apologised, tried to educate himself and build links, the exact response that he was asking for in relation to his own experiences. His former teammate Gary Ballance was one who did apologise. Rafiq accepted wholeheartedly and now sees both he and Ballance, who has retired from the game in part for the sake of his mental health, as "damaged by the silence" around what happened.

Rafiq has been careful here not to make his case about individuals – perhaps because he understands his own flaws – but instead about the wider and evolving manifestations of racism. It is a book about institutions and ingrained cultures that butt up against one another to the detriment of all. It is not a book that is looking for a



“Rafiq has been careful here not to make his case about individuals – perhaps because he understands his own flaws – but instead about the wider and evolving manifestations of racism”

social media fight, a cheap headline. As he writes at the end of *It's Not Banter...* “Yes, it's uncomfortable to speak about it and put yourself in the firing line, and I've been advised that my decision to speak out will affect the rest of my life, but it is vital we don't give up now.”

It may seem odd to review Rafiq's book alongside Brendan Cooper's *Echoing Greens: How Cricket Shaped the English Imagination*, but as Cooper writes in his introduction: “This is a book about cricket and the art it has inspired; but it is also a book about England – about the disorderly workings of the English imagination, its visions and ideals as well as its vexed relationship with the blunt reality of life.”

There is a deep romanticism to much of cricket's art that has built the perception of what England is, and that is part of what the experiences described by Rafiq and Holding rub up against.

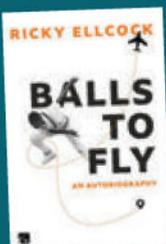
Cooper explores the history of the game through its art. He's brilliant on the representations of two giant figures, WG Grace and Ian Terence Botham, Grace forever trapped in the collective imagination as the towering, greedy Victorian with the giant beard, a voracious

brand before anyone knew what a brand was, and then Botham, the muscular, no-bullshit folk hero of comic book dimensions. The passages about his encounter with the painter John Bellamy, a tortured, depressive, alcoholic figure who in 1985 produces a controversial vision of Beefy for the National Portrait Gallery, are magnificent and enlightening as the unlikely pair find common ground: “Botham said the way I painted reminded him of bowling,” Bellamy recalled. “He would study the batsman with the same intensity, looking for their strengths and weaknesses.”

Bellamy was described as a painter who “dwelled on dark and mysterious forces”, much like Francis Bacon, who I confess I had no idea had “an under-acknowledged preoccupation” with cricket, painting a series of distorted body parts quite clearly wearing a pair of batting pads.

Representation and misrepresentation unite these two books, and reading them makes it clear that only close examination can lead to revelation. Anyone with an opinion, especially on Rafiq's, should gaze first upon themselves. **Jon Hotten**

ABOVE:
John Bellamy photographed with his portrait of Ian Botham at the National Portrait Gallery in London in 1986



MARKET IN THE DIARY!

Calling all cricket collectors – Saturday August 24 will see the Worcester Cricket Memorabilia Market take place at New Road from 10am to 5pm. An ideal opportunity to buy or sell cricket memorabilia, there will also be an appearance from **former Worcestershire and Middlesex cricketer Ricky Ellcock**, who will be signing copies of his book *Balls to Fly*.

There will be a variety of items to suit all budgets including cricket books on sale for £1, a selection of autographed items, ceramics and postcards. Admission to the market is free for day three ticket-holders for the Worcestershire v Kent Championship match, and for those wishing to exhibit, tables are available for £30. Contact rbrown@theurswickschool.co.uk for more information or to reserve a table.

THE STORY OF CRICKET IN 50 BOOKS

Next in our journey, David Woodhouse examines the first properly illustrated coaching manual, which promoted cricket as a game worthy of serious scientific study



5. FELIX ON THE BAT

BY NICHOLAS WANOSTROCHT (1845)

The *Young Cricketer's Tutor*, which headlined the book version of John Nyren's memoirs (as covered in these pages last month) was not cricket's first technical manual. It drew on published works by Thomas Boxall (1801) and William Lambert (1816), as well as notes by the Hambledon batter James Aylward (whose record score of 167 stood until 1820). But the success of Nyren's volume promoted interest in technique. Over time, coaching manuals have come to represent the third largest genre of cricket writing (after biography and tour books).

Nyren placed great store by what was already called "fair play", a concept that would develop into the even more nebulous "spirit of cricket". However, as well as high rhetoric on the character-forming qualities of the sport, his manual endorses a low trick or two:

If you bring forward a fast bowler as a change, contrive, if fortune so favour you, that he shall bowl his first ball when a cloud is passing over; because, as this trifling circumstance frequently affects the sight of the striker, you may thereby stand a good chance of getting him out.

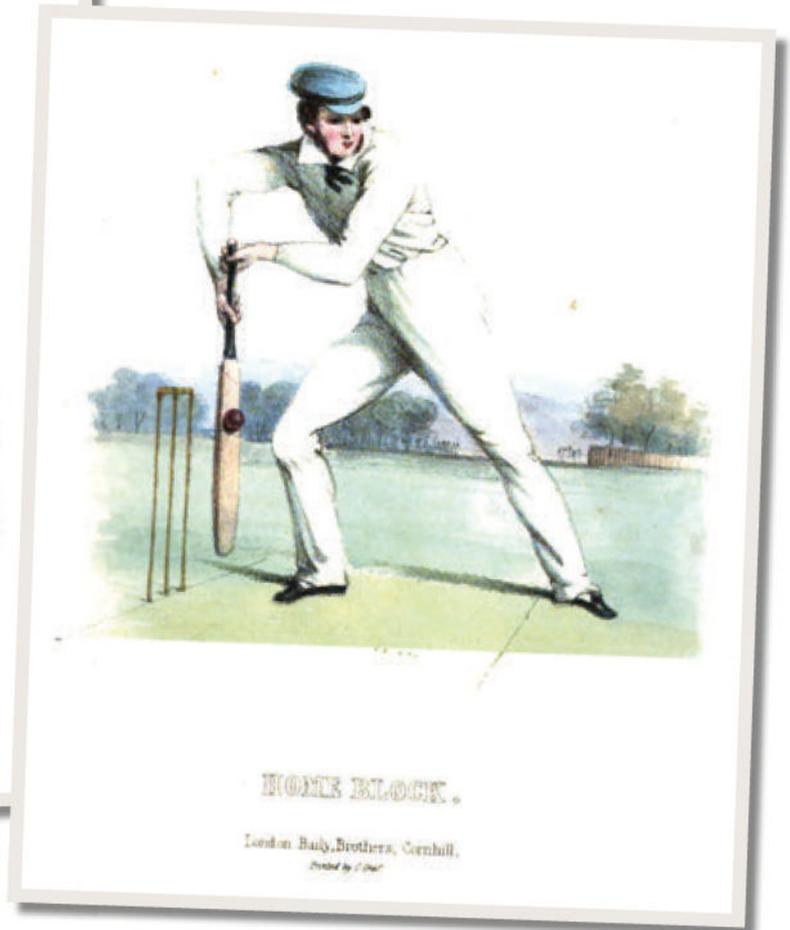
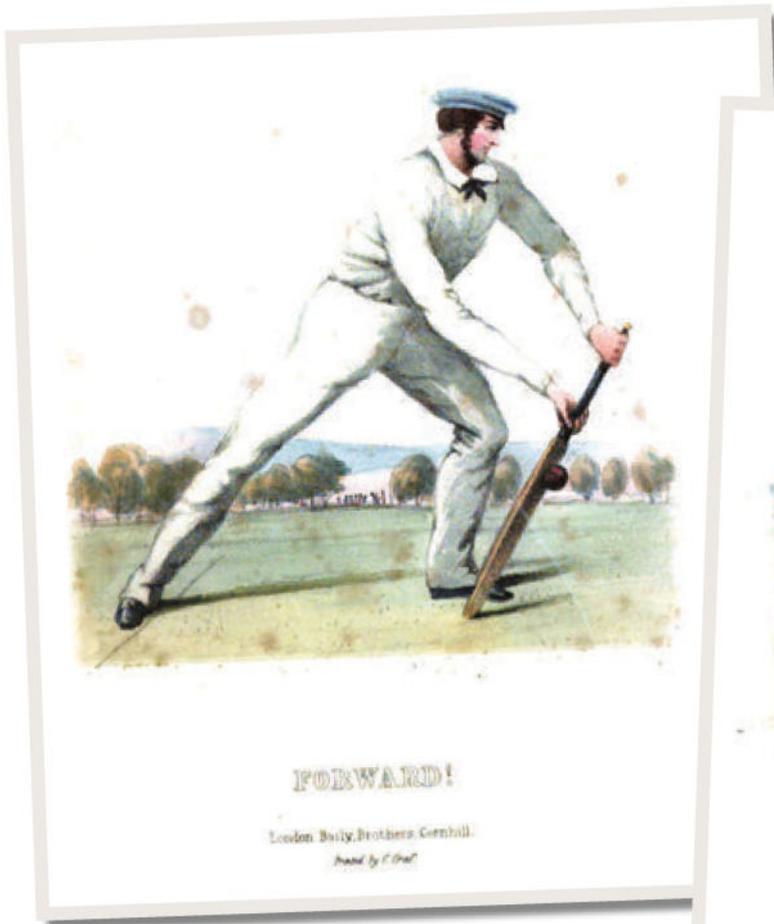
Nyren also advised young players that "in a desperate state of the game every manoeuvre must be tried" – such as blatant time-wasting and what we now call sledging. Early instructional books held a tension between playing

fair and playing to win. As styles of batting and bowling developed, so did another tension between the aesthetic and the pragmatic.

The first classic, if idiosyncratic, coaching manual was produced 12 years after Nyren by "Felix". Felix was the pen-name of Nicholas Wanostrocht (pronounced One-Horse-Trot). He had initially adopted a pseudonym not because his Flemish surname was a tongue-twister – a drinking song of 1831 described it as "jaw-breaking" – but because he was headmaster of a private school. He did not want the parents to think they were paying their fees to subsidise his bunking off to play cricket.

He proved less bashful once he had become one of the leading amateurs of the age. He presided over the design of an early bowling machine called the Catapulta, reportedly put together by his maths teacher and a local blacksmith, which allowed his boys to groove their techniques. In the 1830s he joined a Kent side distinguished by the batsmanship of the amateur Alfred Mynn and the professional Fuller Pilch. Felix helped establish "Canterbury Week", a precursor of more organised county cricket. But he was also prominent in two unregulated activities, demonstrating that MCC, even though it controlled the Laws, did not yet have full control of the game.

Felix proved a major draw during the craze for high-stakes single-wicket matches. Cricket lovers, especially if they loved betting, sometimes seemed less interested in counties playing for pride than star-individuals prize-fighting for the championship of each other. More importantly still, in the 1840s Felix and Mynn joined the All-England touring team managed and captained by William Clarke, the ex-bricklayer who ran the Trent Bridge Inn, enclosed the Trent Bridge ground (so he could charge admission) and took his XIs around all parts of Britain to play local XVllls and XXlls.



“

A skilled linguist, artist and musician, Felix was also credited with innovations such as the first tubular batting gloves, a lightweight cap to replace the top hat, and even the phrase “a pair of spectacles”. He was justified in supposing himself “qualified by experience” to write a book of technical “hints”

Clarke was an insatiable round-arm bowler, always on the look-out for what he called the “loose screws” of opposing batters: “Ain’t you from Harrow? Then we shan’t want a man down there.” He was also a resourceful entrepreneur who minded the loose change: amateurs like Felix were “known to receive pecuniary subsidy” but Clarke kept most of the profit for himself. Although he played cricket out of self-interest, he probably did more to spread its gospel than anyone before WG Grace. As Grace himself remembered: “A good many of us can date our first experience of first-class play from witnessing the famous All-England Eleven.”

Felix was not as canny as Clarke. He was a different embodiment of the multifarious energy of the early Victorian period, for which the adjective “Dickensian”

still seems as good as any. Felix himself attracted many others: active, facetious, gibing, jostling, merry, notch-getting. His pen-name means both happy and lucky in Latin – like many left-handers of later vintage, he was considered a flasher outside off-stump. He was often described as “the father of the cut” and was also an exponent of the draw, the on-side shot played behind or between the legs, which gradually fell into disuse once over-arm bowling was legalised in 1864.

A skilled linguist, artist and musician, Felix was also credited with innovations such as the first tubular batting gloves, a lightweight cap to replace the top hat, and even the phrase “a pair of spectacles”. He was justified in supposing himself “qualified by experience” to write a book of technical “hints”.

ABOVE:
Instructional drawings supposedly based on sketches by GF Watts: the forward defensive is immediately recognisable; the backward defensive less so



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Books

Although it has a long title – *Felix on the Bat: Being a Scientific Enquiry into the Use of the Cricket Bat together with the History and Use of the Catapulta; also, The Laws of Cricket as Revised by the Marylebone Club* – it is a short book. The first edition, even when padded out with the Laws, runs to only 41 quarto pages. That first edition refers to an explosion of “pamphleteering, magazing, book-making” which had three main drivers: advances in print technology, advances in media distribution (through the penny-post and then the railway) and advancing rates of literacy.

These developments presented publishers with commercial opportunities – a version of *Felix on the Bat* was issued in New York within two years. But writers were faced with accompanying anxieties about the originality and relevance of their work. In the expanded second edition of 1850, Felix makes one of the earliest complaints about the “circumambient atmosphere” of cricket publishing, where “the difficulty seems, how to dress up the old creature in new costume”. His attempts to overcome this difficulty have resonated circumambiently throughout the game’s instructional literature.

First, Felix insists cricket is a serious pursuit worthy of a scientific treatise. Aiming to be the Isaac Newton of the game, he writes a complicated section on “rotatory motion”

illustrated by billiards, a premonition of the experiments BJT Bosanquet would make with billiard balls to invent the googly. But Felix also concedes that the niceties of whether to play forward or back, whether to block or hit out, are as much matters of art as science. Hence the titles of the manuals-cum-memoirs we’ll be examining later in the series, Bradman’s *The Art of Cricket* (1958) and Brearley’s *The Art of Captaincy* (1985).

Second, Felix keeps one headmasterly eye on the welfare of his younger readers, and the other on cross-selling to this captive audience. The opening chapter is full of good advice about the maintenance of cricket kit: “A grand secret of comfort is to have spikes put into shoes which you have worn for some time.” It also takes the liberty of providing the addresses of two Marylebone retailers where “all these matters of equipment are to be obtained in the best possible style”, along with the Catapulta itself, “price £11 11s. complete with the latest improvements”. Many coaching books have either been trying to sell something, or were thought guaranteed to sell because of the pulling power of the celebrity author.

Third, *Felix on the Bat* is the first manual to make innovative use of images. By happy chance, the prize-winning artist GF Watts had briefly been one of Felix’s pupils. Although the coloured plates in the book are now thought to be “after” Watts not by him, they perfectly illustrate the instructive power of pictures, which would be fully developed in the photographic age. Another of our 50 Books will be *Great Batsmen – Their Methods at a Glance* (1905), a monumental collaboration between one of the game’s great theorists, CB Fry, and its first great photographer, GW Beldam.

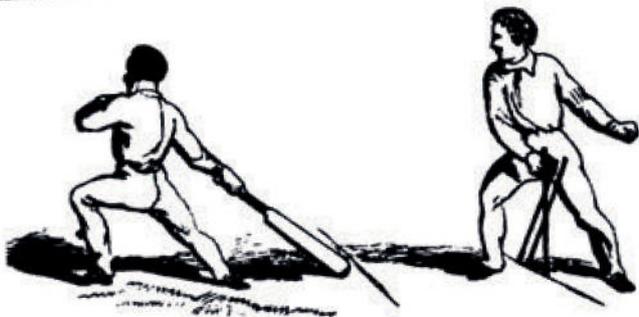
Fourth, Felix tries to spice up the dryness of the technical material with an elevated manner and a broad humour. Most chapters start with a quotation from Shakespeare and end with a cartoon of “Another of Those Things Which You Ought Not to Do”. Felix’s writing is full of Victorian circumlocution: the bat becomes a “mighty sceptre of delight”, slow spinners “insinuator”, a duck “the odious heart-breaking cypher”. He cannot be credited with a limpid prose style. Equally, he cannot be accused of losing the reader’s interest.

Fifth, like Nyren, Felix maintains decorum but gives a hint of darker arts. There is often a sense of the done thing: “It is anti-cricket-like to rush in to the slow-paced ball.” But Felix also gives direction, without any sense of discomfort, on the manoeuvre we now call a Mankad – he had reportedly performed such a run out himself in 1839. As time went on, manuals tended to self-censor, preferring to concentrate on the high elbows and high standards eventually enshrined in the *MCC Cricket Coaching Book* (written in 1952 by a committee of worthies including HS Altham and GOB Allen). The tricks of the trade were often confined to circles of pros whose craft was transmitted orally from generation to generation. The whole point of this freemasonry was to keep secrets from outsiders, although *Close on Cricket* (1966) and Ray Illingworth in *Captaincy* (1980) lift the veil a little.

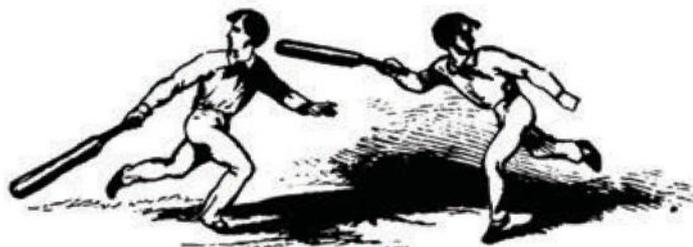
RIGHT: This is an orthodox “draw”, but the shot was sometimes played between the legs or under a lifted leg

BELOW: Two cartoons from *Felix on the Bat*: in the first, it is the batter not the bowler who is being chastised

ANOTHER OF THOSE THINGS WHICH YOU OUGHT NOT TO DO.



ANOTHER OF THOSE THINGS WHICH YOU OUGHT NOT TO DO.



Collector's Corner

Each issue we focus on one item from the collection of Christopher Saunders, who has been buying and selling cricket books and memorabilia for over 40 years and has the largest collection of cricket fiction out there

No. 4: Andrew Hamilton and WG Grace

Andrew Hamilton was an important figure in the sporting life of Edinburgh. He was a champion bowler, becoming secretary of the Scottish Bowls Association, then the first president of the International Bowling Board. He was also secretary of the Caledonian Curling Club, president of the Carlton Cricket Club, secretary of the Insurance and Banking Golf Club at Duddington, and on the board of the Edinburgh Ice Rink.

I bought a small archive on him last year, and included were 13 letters from WG Grace. When WG moved to London from Gloucestershire he started his own cricket club, London County, but also took up bowls, and laid out his own bowling green. His correspondence with Hamilton starts in 1901 and the letters continue until 1906. He goes into great detail about some of his bowls matches:

"The tournament is over, we had grand weather until yesterday when it was as bad as it could be. We had some great games, Hunter was in great form, Stonehewer and self had a very exciting match. When he was 20 and laying 2 to my 18 I ran the jack with my last bowl and lay 3 or game, he then bowled his last bowl and would have been in the ditch, but the grass at the side held his bowl up and it stopped half over, so I just missed being in the last form."

You rarely find a cricket letter from WG of such length. He and Hamilton arranged the first international bowls match in 1903 – England v Scotland, with Hamilton captaining Scotland and Grace captaining England. They roped in Wales and Northern Ireland and held international tournaments in each country. At the 1905 tournament in Wales they started the International Bowls Federation, with Hamilton as the first president.

What interested me was the way Grace enthusiastically threw himself into a new sport. He never did anything half-heartedly, and if he was involved he liked to run things!

I was able to persuade the National Library of Scotland to buy the archive, so it will be kept together and be available to researchers.



Finally, Felix has the humility to conclude that no manual can be definitive. This is partly because elements of cricket remain a “mystery”, even to those who play it “five months of the year”. It is also because the game is forever evolving. Felix was preoccupied by the gradual shift from round-arm to over-arm bowling which made life harder for the batters. Today, bigger bats, shorter boundaries and television’s appetite for sixes is making life harder for the bowlers. Nathan Leamon and Tim Wigmore are among those to have written well about the data-driven attempts to turn T20 strategy into a science. But for specific playing techniques – scoops and slower balls, ramps and relay catches – the short and now dominant form of the game awaits a coaching manual as artful and lively as *Felix on the Bat*.

SUGGESTED FURTHER STORYLINES:

Squad members: William Clarke, ‘Practical Hints’, in *Cricket Notes* by William Bolland (1851); ‘Felix’ (Nicholas Wanostrocht), *The Doings of the Eleven* (1851-52) [illustrated scrapbook diary held in the MCC Archive], *How to Play Clarke* (1852); Frederick Gale, *Practical Hints on Cricket* (1843); Frederick Lillywhite (ed.), *The Young Cricketer’s Guide* (1849)

Umpires and scorers: Patricia Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture 1790-1860* (1991); Gerald Brodribb, *Felix on the Bat: A Memoir* (1962), *Felix and the Eleven of England* (2002); Lee Erickson, *The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialization of Publishing 1800-1850* (1996); Ric Sissons, *The Players: A Social History of the Professional Cricketer* (1988)



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JOHN MORRIS

The *Flight* That Changed My Life

The former Derbyshire strokemaker and sometime England Test player on flying a little too close to the sun

INTERVIEW PHIL WALKER |

“
They were talking about sending us home at one point. We then got fined £1,000. I felt I'd been ostracised from the group

I was 18 in 1982 when I made my Derbyshire debut. We played 28 first-class games per season and I loved it. It was hectic, and we didn't play to make money, but you just got on with it. County cricket was a champagne lifestyle on a beer income.

It was a golden era for overseas players. Clive Rice and Richard Hadlee at Notts were fierce bowlers. Malcolm Marshall for Hampshire. At Derbyshire we had Devon Malcolm and Michael Holding sharing a new ball together! I was learning the game from the greats.

In 1990 I got a big hundred at Portsmouth against Hampshire, and that's when I got the nod. I debuted at Lord's, in Graham Gooch's amazing 333 game. Batting at six, it was a case of follow that!

Next Test, Old Trafford, Anil Kumble got me with a quicker ball

I thought I could cut. In the second innings it was really dark, Goochy wanted to declare after some quick runs. Robin Smith smashed one back into my inside right elbow and the next day I couldn't hold my bat. Final Test at The Oval, I nicked off, then strangled one down the leg-side in the second innings.

For the Ashes that winter, I thought I was in with a good chance. I missed out on selection for the first Test, then was told I'd be playing the second, only for David Gower to pass a late fitness test. After that we go up to Queensland. It was red hot. Goochy asked me to bat at N°3. The attack were all Test players, and I'm 100 not out overnight. I'm eventually out to Trevor Hohns for 132. I got changed, went upstairs, and heard David talking to Allan Lamb about going up in one of these Tiger Moth planes. My ears pricked up because Goochy's already said we'll bat on till tea. I said to David, "If there's two planes, I'll come up with you".

I never thought anything of it. I was just having a bit of fun. That night I'm hauled up to face the management. I got in the lift afterwards and Goochy said "You've stuffed up a bit here", and that's when the reality settled in. It took them a week to decide what to do.

They were talking about sending us home at one point. We then got fined £1,000. I felt that I'd been ostracised from the group.

In 1993, I played really well. Keith Fletcher had taken over as England coach and saw me score a double hundred against Courtney Walsh. He said to me, "West Indies this winter, up for it?" When the teams got announced I didn't even get a mention. I knew then that was it.

After a lifetime at Derby I needed a change and Durham offered me it. We soon came up against Brian Lara. Phil Bainbridge our captain said he just needed someone to bowl some overs, and if he gets the record, he gets the record. I was no bowler, I took eight first-class wickets in 22 years! Lara, on 497, didn't know it was the last over of the match. I bounced him and hit him on the head! Next ball he backed away and carved me through the off-side. I'm the only man to hit someone on the head on 497.

Some say I didn't fulfil my potential. Yet I'm one of only three England-born players to average over 40 for Derbyshire. We played on quick, bouncy pitches, as we had all the seamers. My record was very similar to those who played a handful of Test matches. 🏏





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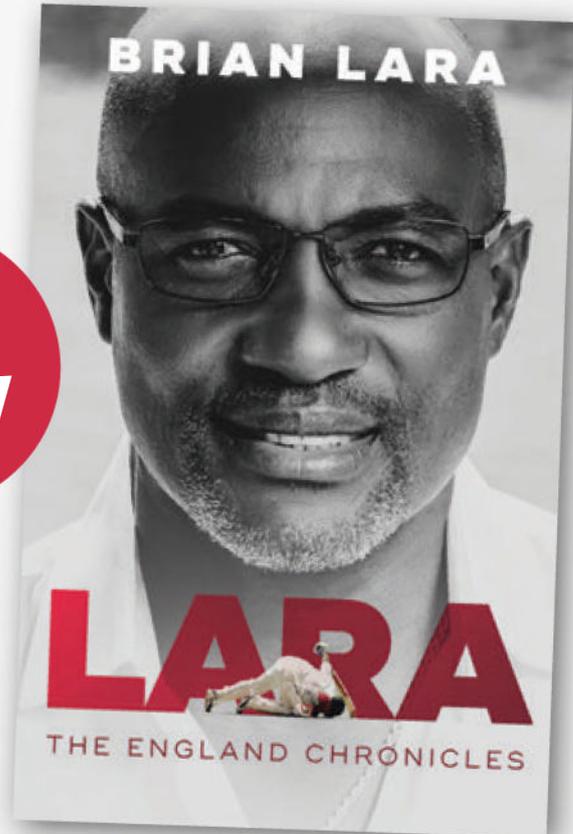
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