

THE FIRST TARANAKI XI TO WIN THE HAWKE CUP - DECEMBER 1926



*Standing: S Lay, A Wilson, D Saxton (Secretary), C Bottrill, W Crombie
Seated: J Brown (Umpire), O Nasmith, G Clarke, C Kingstone (Captain), E Cole, H Grayson, T Bates (Manager)
In Front: J Cheevers, L Petty*

THE TARANAKI XI WHICH DEFEATED NELSON IN 1933 TO REGAIN THE HAWKE CUP



*Standing: L A Jennings (Umpire), N Giddy, S Betts, V Parkinson, W Groombridge, A Biggar, C Lash (captain), W Dormer, E L Mason (Manager)
Kneeling: E Christensen, M Donnelly, H Barker, W Barker*

The Dream Fulfilled 1925-35

On 27th August 1925 at Stratford a meeting was held between representatives of the North and South Taranaki Associations to consider an amalgamation of the two associations and thus revive the Taranaki Cricket Association. The constitutional proposals placed before that meeting were then favourably considered by the two associations and formally adopted at a subsequent meeting at Stratford on 17th September 1925.

The functions of Taranaki were to organise representative cricket and club finals but the management of club cricket was left firmly in the hands of the two founding bodies, now known as the North and South divisions. In the first year each division contributed 5.5.0 (five guineas) to the running costs of the association, any additional income to come from gate takings at representative matches.

The fourth match played by a reunified Taranaki resulted in the winning of the Hawke Cup from Wanganui and ushered in an era where Taranaki were to twice hold that trophy – the symbol of national minor association supremacy. In the overall context of Taranaki cricket that period must rank with the early 1970's, as the outstanding days of Taranaki cricket. Furthermore the late 1920's and 1930's were times of economic hardship throughout New Zealand and often the association relied upon the generosity of individual supporters to cover the net costs of matches.

In early December 1926, Taranaki challenged Wanganui at Cooks Gardens for the Hawke Cup. The initial 1925-26 season had given no indication of further glories – losing all three of the season's matches, twice to Wanganui. But the first challenge following reunification was to bring success. Batting first, in a start delayed by rain, Taranaki scored 188 with C.Kingstone, the Taranaki captain and wicket-keeper (and 1921 All Black fullback against the Springboks), top scoring with 64. Press reports describe his batting as "continually on the qui vive for runs, (keeping) the fieldsmen away and the crowd happy". Wanganui were then dismissed for 63 with G.Clarke, a powerful medium paced bowler, capturing 7 wickets for 16 runs. Taranaki were assisted on the second morning in that Dr Williams (a member of the Wanganui team) had been away attending a patient before the recommencement of play and such had been the rapidity of Wanganui's collapse on that morning, that when the doctor returned to the ground he was five minutes too late to bat! Taranaki's second innings totalled 178, with O.Nasmith scoring 56. Nasmith, who still played club cricket until the 1950's, was a graceful batsman who impressed many opponents, including the Melbourne visitors in 1927. Wanganui, needing to score 304 runs to retain the Cup, scored 271 in their second innings (at the time challenge matches were played through to an outright decision). E.Bernau, who was to tour England with the 1927 New Zealand team, scored 137 but gave six chances. Because of the smallness of Cooks Gardens, Kingstone decided that Taranaki would bowl only its faster bowler's in the second innings so G.Clarke bowled 47 overs and E.Cole 28. Both these players had played against Lord Hawke's team in 1902 so they both must have been in their forties at the time of the challenge. Clarke took another 6 wickets for 92 runs, thus capturing 13 wickets in the whole match whilst Cole's last eight overs only conceded 9 runs. One of the turning points in the second innings was when C.S.Dempster, one of Wanganui's better batsmen (and the future New Zealand representative), attempted to run three only to be defeated by a throw from S.Lay (who was later to become the New Zealand Empire Games javelin champion!)

The press report of the end of the match captured the tenseness of that last day. "When the final wicket fell, players and spectators alike experienced a feeling of mental and physical exhaustion, so acute was the reaction after hours of excitement and pent up feelings."

E.Cole was presented with a silver pencil for taking the most catches in the match, the presentation being made by the first Secretary-Treasurer of the association.

The journey home by cars from Wanganui was something akin to the Ranfurly Shield returning to Taranaki in 1963, with formal welcomes at Hawera and New Plymouth to the victorious team, the full journey taking five hours.

C.Kingstone, when accepting the cup, expressed hope for what the win would mean to Taranaki where cricket was more or less up against it.

Taranaki had then to face three challenges for the Cup in January – February 1927. Though Taranaki was victorious in all three, they were all low scoring games. Poverty Bay lead on the first innings of their challenge only to succumb to Cole's bowling in their second innings, the veteran taking 7 for 20. G.Clarke and E.Cole were again the bowling stalwarts, taking 13 and 23 wickets apiece in the three defences.

Following the three defences, Taranaki played the visiting Melbourne Cricket Club, which contained several Australian cricketers, and lead them on the first innings by nine runs.

Thus in two seasons Taranaki had become a force in minor association cricket and its players were gaining recognition outside the province. Yet success on the playing field did not bring financial credit for at the end of the 1926-27 season the association was in overdraft to the amount of 8/15/11. In contrast to the events at the beginning of the century the Northern Division offered to remedy this situation, on the basis that the majority of the Taranaki games had been in the North (the second defence against Wairarapa had been at Hawera).

The 1927-28 season saw the loss of the Hawke Cup, to Wanganui, just before Christmas. Wanganui took their revenge for the previous years defeat, heavily outscoring Taranaki to win by an innings and 67 runs. The only two other matches were similarly outright defeats – to E.C.Beale's (Auckland) XI and Australia. The guile of C.Grimmett was too much for the Taranaki batsmen.

Yet four Taranaki players, W.Beck, C.Lash, S.Lay, and O.Nasmith, were selected for the Wellington Country team – against Wellington Town, whilst C.Kingstone, having captained the Rest of New Zealand against the 1927 England tourists, was twice unable to accept an invitation to play for New Zealand.

Financially the same position as the previous season continued – 17/9 was the net match income for the three matches.

The 1928-29 season was marked by the scoring of the first century for the revived association. This honour fell to B.B.Wilson, a Yorkshire professional who coached in North Taranaki for two seasons. Wilson scored 107 in Taranaki's first innings of a Hawke Cup elimination match against Wanganui and then, for good measure, scored 110 in the second innings. In the second innings he shared in a 214 run partnership for the third wicket with S.A.Lay, of Hawera Old Boys,

who also scored a century with 108. This partnership still stands as a Taranaki record for the third wicket and has only once been bettered for any wicket – G.J.Roberts and R.L.West scoring 215 for the fifth wicket (also against Wanganui) in 1974.

Unfortunately these batting feats did not win the elimination match and illustrative of the difficulties facing players in the 1920's and 30's was the fact that, because of the precarious financial state of Taranaki cricket, the players had to pay for all their travel and accommodation. This severely affected the selection of the team, which was compounded in that as the Hawke Cup rules required the match to be played to a finish, the game was played from Friday to Tuesday, with rain causing several stoppages of play.

The 1929-30 season saw Taranaki challenge Manawatu for the Hawke Cup at New Year. Once again player availability affected the final team selection yet Taranaki were to take a first innings lead of 64 runs, only to collapse dismally on a drying wicket in the second innings, to be dismissed for 48 and lose the match by six wickets. The Manawatu spinners, McVicar and Gallichan, were the destroyers, McVicar capturing ten wickets in the match.

Then, at the end of February, Taranaki played the visiting MCC team at Pukekura Park. The match attracted the largest crowd to watch cricket in the province and though Taranaki batted creditably the English players were too experienced. O.Nasmith and H.Brown (the 1924-25 All Black) both scored half centuries, which were the first fifties scored against the tourists in two day matches and this was the last match of the tour.

The visitors described the pitch at Pukekura Park as being quite a good one, though the out field was rather rough. But like many other overseas teams they were enraptured by the setting of the ground describing it so, "If they had a cricket field in Eden, which presumably they did have, it must have been just such a one as New Plymouth is blessed with".

A glimpse into the finances of the time reveal that the gate charges were 2/- for men for one day or 3/- for the two days with ladies 1/- and 1/6 and children 6d. The match had gate takings of 338/12/9 which, after expenses of 273/18/4, earned Taranaki a net income of 64/14/5 and so for the first time Taranaki had funds at the end of a season.

In 1930-31 Taranaki played only two matches – a Hawke Cup elimination match against Wanganui, which was won outright by one wicket, and a Hawke Cup challenge match against Waikato which was lost by 28 runs.

The Wanganui match was notable by the outstanding allround performance by O.Nasmith, who top scored in both of Taranaki's innings and then captured 4 for 13 in Wanganui's second innings of 79. This match was also the debut for Stan Betts who was to be a major force both in batting and bowling in Taranaki cricket for twenty years.

The 1931-32 season was limited to one match – the traditional fixture against Wanganui, in which S.Betts scored the first of his three centuries for Taranaki.

The 1932-33 season consisted of two matches in December – an unsuccessful Hawke Cup challenge against South Auckland (aka Waikato), and an outright victory against Wanganui in which O.Nasmith scored the first of his two centuries in excess of 150.

In the last days of 1933 Taranaki travelled to Nelson to challenge again for the Hawke Cup. A tiring journey by mail train and boat was the precursor to the match which began on the afternoon of Christmas day. Taranaki batted first and scored 384 after being 3 for 22. S.Betts and N.Giddy scored centuries with Giddy, who played for the Country team of Tarururangi, having his first innings ever on a grass pitch in this game. Nelson began as shakily as Taranaki, being 5 for 75, but a fighting innings by Morgan for 148, being the last batsman out, saw the defenders come within twelve runs of Taranaki's total. As the Hawke Cup could now be won on the first innings, with play being limited to three days, Taranaki returned home in triumph. It was averred that the tension, as Nelson batted towards Taranaki's total, was so intense that T.H.Bates, the Taranaki manager, chewed his was through a dozen cigars!

Taranaki then faced three challenges from Poverty Bay, Rangitikei and South Hawkes Bay in 1933. In contrast to 1927, the 1933 defences were notable for high totals by Taranaki – 496 against Poverty Bay with O.Nasmith scoring 157; 311 against Rangitikei; and 224 against South Hawkes Bay with H.Barker scoring 114 not out. Taranaki gained first innings leads in the first two of the defences and with an outright win in the last game held the Cup until the next season. In Poverty Bay's second innings the visitors scored 422 for 9, with the future double All Black W.Carson scoring 119. The feast of runs was in marked contrast to the bowlers dominance in 1927.

Making his debut for Taranaki in this season was a Yorkshireman, V.Parkinson, who was a talented all-rounder, bowling aggressive medium pace and batting resolutely. Two NPBHS pupils played in the Cup challenge and defences – M.P.Donnelly, who was to represent New Zealand as an outstanding left hand batsman, and E.Christensen, whose left arm fast bowling saw him capture sixteen wickets in the season, only three less than Parkinson.

Taranaki was to play only one match in the 1934-35 season – its fourth Cup defence, against Manawatu beginning on Christmas day. The match was to reach an amazing climax on its final day, which would place it as one of the most tense Hawke Cup matches of all time. Scoring 190 in its first innings Taranaki found the left arm spin of N.Gallichan, who was to represent New Zealand in 1937, difficult to manage with only Nasmith, Eden and Parkinson offering significant resistance. Manawatu replied with 302 with A.Cutler scoring 129. The Taranaki fielding was substandard, there being a large number of dropped catches. In their second innings Taranaki reached 191, with Parkinson top scoring with 44 and Callichan again being Manawatu's best bowler. The Daily News ran the headline "Cup Imperilled", for Manawatu faced the third and last day needing only to score 80 in its second innings to take the cup. And take the Cup it did, but only after the tensest of struggles. Let the Daily News tell the story; "Perhaps once in a lifetime it is given to lovers of cricket to witness the achievement of such heights of performance that makes the game an art rather than a pastime. To such heights unexpectedly reached [the Hawke Cup defence against Manawatu]. The climax of the game is destined to go down in the annals of minor association cricket in New Zealand as one of the most exciting ever witnessed. For two days the match dragged through in disappointment. [Then] Manawatu found a confident march to simple victory changed into a desperate battle".

[When Manawatu lost its ninth wicket, to a run out by H.Barker, they still needed two runs to win the match. Parkinson and Christensen had bowled unchanged all day – Parkinson 19 overs to gain 3 for 36 and Christensen 5 for 46 from 20 overs. Barlow (Stratford), who had won his selection in the Taranaki team because of a fine batting performance in the Graham cup match, which had

acted as a final trial, “had electrified the breathless watchers with three magnificent slip catches”]. “Berquist (Manawatu’s last batsman), the bowling hero of the previous day, walked as calmly as possible to the wicket. Christensen swinging down a flashing ball. Berquist’s bat curved in the sun and the ball rose stickily in a stupid lob to Barlow (previously described as the essence of fielding grace). A sigh arose, then turned to a gasp. Barlow, blinded by the sun, spun on his heel, grasped at the descending ball, as he dimly saw it, and sprawled on the ground. The ball trickled away uncaught. The batsmen ran and the scores were even. The position was unique as the forceful Hatch held his bat poised. Again the fast ball pitched on the off and Hatch drove it with all his might. No one saw it till it rolled weakly down the eastern bank”.

And so the Hawke Cup left the province for thirty six years. Thus ended an era which arguably produced many outstanding cricketers, whose playing careers reached back to 1902 and forward to the 1950’s. G.Clark and E.Cole both played against Lord Hawke’s team in 1902 and yet, in 1926-27 were still Taranaki’s main bowlers, capturing sixty wickets between them. O.Nasmith, S.Lay, S.Betts, B.B.Wilson, N.Giddy, H.Barker and C.Kingstone were the outstanding batsmen, with Nasmith and Betts being particularly graceful. Betts, Lay and Nasmith fulfilled dual roles also as bowlers whilst Kingstone, with his wicket-keeping and captaining, had gained national recognition. Parkinson and Christensen were as outstanding in the 1930’s as Clark and Cole were in 1925, and the youthful genius of Donnelly was emerging.

The successes on the playing field unfortunately were not matched by anything approaching financial security off it. Nearly every annual report mentions the struggle to gain sufficient revenue to sustain representative cricket. For this was also the years of the “Great Depression” and that cricket was kept alive in Taranaki was in itself an achievement. The 1926-27 season ended in a deficit of 8/15/11 and the debt of 41/-/- owing to the Pukekura Park Committee for ground charges still remained unpaid a season later. The MCC match in 1930 required a guarantee of 125/-/-, which was covered by local supporters. And at the end of the era the cash funds of the association were only 7/10/3.

But what had been achieved was the bringing together of North and South Taranaki so as to field a representative team which held its own at the minor association level. That was no mean task. There were still those who remembered the schism of 1903 and the futile wasted years until 1925. It was appropriate that B.B.McCarthy, who so dominated Taranaki cricket in the initial period, was the first President of the revived association. C.G.Bottrill, a master at NPBHS (and cricket coach) had done much of the spadework to recreate the association and was a member of the winning Hawke Cup team in 1926.

The annual report repeatedly mentioned the pleasing unity and cooperation between North and South Taranaki and conscious efforts were made to ensure parity. The Presidency changed annually between North and South, as initially did the position of Secretary, whilst meetings similarly alternated. There were two selectors appointed annually, one each nominated from the two founding divisions. Recognising that, because of the quality of Pukekura Park, most representative games would be played there it was decided, in the 1930-31 season, that the travelling expenses of South players coming to New Plymouth should be reimbursed 50% (if the matches returned a profit).

One of the key administrators was D.F.C.Saxton of The Daily News and the good coverage cricket was given in the newspapers reflected his enthusiasm for the game. For much of this period

the only record of the annual reports is the press report pasted into the minute book (one of the problems to be faced was that the meetings of the association were deemed not to be public meetings so, in a way, the press report provided that necessary public coverage).

Yet reading the minute book and newspaper reports of the era, there is the feeling that the challenges were being faced, and overcome, and that cricket in the province was far stronger in 1935 than it had been in 1925. There were now three divisions – Country coming into being in 1922; the Graham cup was presented for competition between North and South in 1927-28; a Thursday club competition had begun; T.H.Bates was President of NZCC in 1931-32.

The 1932-33 annual report sums up the dilemma that was to face Taranaki cricket until the 1980's but also looked confidently toward the future; "The Taranaki Association had practically no finance and is to a large extent merely an executive committee of the north, south and country divisions for the purpose of arranging and controlling representative fixtures... [but] in cricket administration, as in everything else, to mark time is fatal and the suggestion is made that the controlling committee of each division give serious consideration to the drawing up of a definite scheme of development in their respective districts, extending say over several years. Finance is of course one of the first essentials. Possibly such schemes could best be evolved allowing the following broad lines: (1) finance; (2) extension of the game, particularly by gaining assistance and encouragement to schools and young players leaving school; (3) improvement of grounds and cricket; (4) brightening and popularising the game for both players and onlookers; and (5) systemic coaching were such is possible".

THE TARANAKI XI WHICH DEFENDED THE HAWKE CUP AGAINST POVERTY BAY, 1934



*Standing: P Abraham (Scorer), S Betts, J Birch, W Groombridge, P Ewart, N Giddy, V Parkinson, E L Mason (Manager)
Seated: J M Thompson (Umpire), O M Naismith, C Lash (Capt), W Dormer, C Berg (Umpire)
Seated: E Christensen, W Barker*