

PLAYERS OF THE 1920'S AND 1930'S



B B WILSON

Came from Yorkshire to coach in North Taranaki in the late 1920's. Scored two centuries in the 1928 match against Wanganui - the only player to achieve this feat.



O M NASMITH

A graceful batsman, his only two centuries were both over 150. So impressed the 1927 Melbourne tourists, that they invited him to come across the Tasman.



C G CLARKE

Together with E Cole, his medium fast bowling won the Hawke Cup from Wanganui in 1926. In nine matches captured 47 wickets.



E COLE

Like C G Clarke, had played against Lord Hawke's XI in 1903 - in seven matches took 38 wickets at an average of 11.11. Enjoyed playing cricket so much would lease out his farm each summer.



S H BETTS

The outstanding all-rounder of the 1930's and 1940's. His family has played vital roles in Taranaki cricket over three generations.



E CHRISTENSEN

In fourteen matches, his left arm fast bowling gained 75 wickets. With V Parkinson nearly won the Hawke Cup defence against Manawatu in 1934.

The Transition Years 1935-1950

The years from 1935 to 1950 cover the period from the loss of the Hawke Cup to Manawatu, until the advent of Central Districts, as the fifth Plunket Shield team, comprising players from what had been the Wellington Country region. This was very much a time of transition, with the retirement of many of the players from the earlier successful Hawke Cup times and the emergence of players and administrators who were to remain involved in Taranaki cricket until the 1960's. Cutting across the period was the Second World War which, as in 1914-18, saw the demise of competitive club cricket.

In terms of team success there was little in these years and yet it was from this period that emerged Martin Donnelly, who is still regarded as one of New Zealand's outstanding batsmen. Donnelly had been selected for Taranaki whilst still a pupil at NPBHS and had played both in the successful Hawke Cup challenge against Nelson (at the age of 16) and in the nail-biting loss of the Cup to Manawatu. It was, however, his innings of 49 for Taranaki against the 1936 MCC tourists which was to place him clearly before the national selectors and lead to his selection in the 1937 tour to England. To ensure Donnelly's form and talent was continually given national prominence his cricket coach (and English master) at NPBHS, W.E.Alexander (who had himself played for Taranaki in the 1920's), saw to it that the Wellington newspapers were continually provided with details of Donnelly's exploits in Taranaki cricket (prior to the MCC game Donnelly had scored 169 for North Taranaki in the annual Graham cup fixture). On that tour of England, at the age of 19, Donnelly's left handed batting saw him score 1414 runs. Fittingly in his last match ever for Taranaki – against Auckland in 1940 – Donnelly scored 97, revealing the form and style that had won him the Redpath Cup for outstanding batting in that first class season (V.J.Scott, who was to be a fellow member of the 1949 New Zealand team, scored 106 for Auckland). On the 1949 tour of England, Martin Donnelly scored 2287 runs, including 206 in the Lords Test (becoming the first New Zealand player to score a test double century) and was a key member of that team which holds a legendary status in New Zealand cricket.

Until representative cricket ceased in 1941 matches were limited to one or two a season, with one being the now traditional Wanganui fixture. In 1935 Wanganui were dismissed for 22 (being the lowest ever opposition score) with E.Christensen capturing eleven wickets in the match. In 1937 Taranaki challenged Manawatu for the Hawke Cup, only to be defeated by 374 runs. T.Pritchard, who had played for Taranaki against MCC, was now playing for Manawatu and featured prominently against his old association (Pritchard had played primary school cricket with Donnelly in South Taranaki, was subsequently selected for New Zealand and played professionally for Warwickshire after the war. At his peak he was regarded as a very fine fast bowler). Taranaki were not well prepared for the challenge, driving down on the day of the match and lacked practice. The game was further marred, from Taranaki's view point, in that Manawatu refused to allow a Taranaki umpire who had travelled down with the team to stand as one of the umpires in the match. What could be fairer than each association appointing one umpire?

Taranaki's relations with Manawatu have always had an edge to them – Taranaki seeing Manawatu as overbearing and often dismissive of Taranaki players, whilst Manawatu believed that Taranaki pitches were sub-standard resulting in Taranaki bowlers gaining inflated figures (the

counter argument that Taranaki batsmen had more difficult conditions to bat under was however not acknowledged). When Central Districts came into being in 1950 (being the result of many years of lobbying by Manawatu under the leadership of A.M.Ongley) Taranaki opposed the creation, on the grounds that Central Districts would be dominated by Manawatu and on that basis Taranaki often gained fairer (and better) representation in the Wellington Country team, chosen by the Wellington selectors. As evidence of Manawatu bias the selection of only two players, Donnelly and Pritchard, in the 1938 Wellington Minor Association team (of which A.M.Ongley was selector) was proof, coupled with their under-utilisation in that team which included eight Manawatu players.

In 1939 Taranaki challenged Waikato for the Hawke Cup in a rain-affected match. That year saw the appearance of L.S.M.Miller, another talented and graceful left hand batsman from NPBHS, who in the 1950's was to win selection for Central Districts and New Zealand. Likewise in 1940, J.D.Ridland, again a powerful left hand batsman from NPBHS, made his Taranaki debut.

The last representative match played for four seasons was against Wanganui at Pukekura Park, being part of the National Centennial celebrations. Initially with the advent of the Second World War the Government wished for sport to continue as much as possible, this being in marked contrast to the First War when the playing of competitive sport ceased so as not to diminish the focus of the country on the war. The attack by Japan upon Pearl Harbour in December 1941 and the spread of the war into the South Pacific saw a similar decision made in 1942.

In Taranaki recruitment into the armed forces saw a drop of nineteen teams in 1941 and the temporary recess of the North Country division. Some friendly matches continued to be played but R.A.Grace, who was Taranaki President throughout the war years (and himself a farmer), commented in 1942 "that the prospects for cricket was not good... The Home Guard and farming might interfere to some extent and in all due deference to these if the occasion arose cricket must be prepared to give way".

With victory in the war being assured cricket resumed and in April 1944 Taranaki resumed its contests with Wanganui, narrowly winning a low scoring fixture. Requiring 25 runs to win outright, Taranaki edged home by two wickets, with H.B.Cave, the future Central Districts and New Zealand bowler, beginning his domination over Taranaki batsmen. In the Taranaki team was A.M.Matheson, who had toured England with the 1931 New Zealand team and who was to play for Wellington whilst in the province.

Representative cricket began in earnest in the 1945-46 season and until the end of this period the seasonal pattern was generally three matches. In 1946 J.D.Ridland saved Taranaki from outright defeat in a Hawke Cup elimination match against Wanganui, by scoring 165 in the second innings – this was to remain the highest total by a Taranaki player since 1925, until R.Brown scored 200 not out against Hutt Valley in 1989.

1947 saw Taranaki again challenge Manawatu for the Hawke Cup and again suffer a heavy defeat – by 264 runs. E.M.Meuli, who was to play for Taranaki until the 1960's, made his debut in the 1946-47 season. Meuli, another NPBHS product, was a stylish batsman who had been coached by W.M.Wallace whilst at training college in Auckland and was to gain future selection for Central Districts and New Zealand. He was to exert great influence in club cricket in Taranaki imposing upon

his club, New Plymouth Old Boys, in the 1950's, the disciplines of first class cricket which was to set standards in senior cricket (Ted Meuli's calling for runs was also the source of legends).

1948 was highlighted by the visit of the Fijian team and that match at Pukekura Park is still warmly spoken of by players and spectators alike for it was a game played in carefree spirit. M.Fenn captured eleven Taranaki wickets in the match.

A feature of these years was the large number of players selected for representative matches in a season – 19 for the 4 matches in 1948-49; 25 for 3 matches in 1949-50.

In February 1949 a reunion of retired Taranaki cricketers was held at the Criterion Hotel in New Plymouth – the toast list, alternatively called the event the Re-Union of “Has Beens” or probably the “Never Wasers” cricketers, with two reminiscent speeches – one by Harry Quickfall (the wrist bowler) and the second by Chris Bottrill (who bowled G.C.Macartnet). The guest list covered the previous fifty years of Taranaki cricket, including men who played against Lord Hawke's XI in 1902.

1950 saw the visit of an Australian Second XI, which proved too strong for most New Zealand teams being a balance of experienced and promising players. This was the case in the Taranaki game with J.Iverson, who was to bemuse the MCC the following season with his unorthodox spinners, proving almost unplayable.

At the administrative level, the financial constraints on the association continued until the end of the war. At the end of the 1937-38 season its net worth was 8/19/2 (which included the Graham Cup) and the Pukekura Park Board was owed 26/10/- in ground rentals. The MCC game in 1936 had been at a loss of 29/-/5, though no play had been possible on the middle day of the match out of respect for the late King George V. A cryptic note in the 1937 annual report mentions that a special bank account had been opened for the association (until then possibly the moneys had been held within the Northern Division funds as the TCA secretary was resident in New Plymouth). The 1939 annual report commented on the high rentals of cricket grounds in the north, feeling that these were excessive compared to other centres. Financial stringency continued to feature until 1947, the associations funds being only 4/6/5 in 1944 and 4/16/3 in 1945, and even these small balances owed much to the generosity of R.A.Grace, who had kept oversight of the associations affairs throughout these years. R.A.Grace was to remain a stalwart of cricket, both in Taranaki and Central Districts until the 1960's, generous of his time, talent and resources. In many ways he was the first of several long serving cricket administrators who also featured prominently in the overall life of Taranaki; E.P.Allen, E.O.Balson, R.Allen and B.Bellringer were to follow in his wake.

In 1947 R.A.Grace obtained a bat from the Australian cricketer W.A.Brown, a member of both the 1938 and 1948 Australian teams to England and the resultant raffle netted 86/5/6 which saw a total of 130/2/8 in the association's bank account. A considerable amount of these funds were to be used for coaching purposes – films and booklets being purchased for use within the province.

The mid 1940's also saw the emergence of Dr E.P.Allen and R.T.Harris as key administrators at the Taranaki level. Dr Allen, a radiologist of national standing, was to serve alternatively as President and Secretary of the association (in 1947-48 as both at the same time) and his astute mind applied itself to the challenges of the time R.T.Harris, who represented the province as a slow

bowler, was to earn a reputation in the 1950's and 1960's as a meticulous match manager of first class games at Pukekura Park.

The 1948 Fijian match returned a profit of 198/0/2, even after the Park Board received their 15% of the gate, whilst the Australian game netted 172/-/-. Thus at the end of the period the association had 221/7/3 in its bank account – a vast improvement on the penury in which the period began.

Some of the issues facing the TCA executive in this period remained issues for many more years – others reflected the times in which they arose.

The Graham Cup rules continued to exercise debate for originally it had been held that to win it the victory had to be outright, as that was the definition of winning in the Rules of the game. The match was an important domestic match in that, apart from club finals, it was the one game in which the respective strengths of the North and South Taranaki cricket could be gauged. It did also serve as a representative trial and warm up for representative matches. In 1940 V.Parkinson, a doughty Yorkshire born cricketer at both club and representative level, was questioned as to why he had batted in the Graham Cup match in fawn trousers – his response was not recorded.

In 1948 the Betts family presented the C.E.Betts Trophy for the winner of the provincial senior club final. The Betts family had, and continue to, figure prominently in Taranaki cricket. It was fitting that Kaponga, captained by S.H.Betts, was to win the trophy in the 1949-50 season.

The venue for executive meetings had always been a vexed issue, alternating between Hawera and New Plymouth. In 1948 it was decided to hold all meetings in Stratford (where the inaugural 1925 meeting had been held) though, reflecting the petrol rationings of the times, delegates on occasions travelled to the meeting by train.

The ongoing constitutional issue as to the relationship between TCA and its founding divisions continued to arouse debate. Should TCA or the divisions run representative and finals matches – was TCA to be purely a policy making body or should it also encompass those matches thus leaving the divisions to concentrate primarily on their affairs – club cricket and coaching. That there were tensions in these relationships was evidenced by the question – what was the position when TCA decisions were set aside by the divisions – who was paramount? To add to this matter the Northern Division umpires in 1948 argued that 'as of right' their body should make the umpiring appointments for all representative matches played at New Plymouth. This viewpoint was strongly resisted by TCA. Travelling expenses for representative matches was another continuing issue, with the current state of the associations finance being the determining factor.

Another issue as relevant and as vexed in 1935 as it was to be in 1995 – should a representative selector be an active player? Again this was often determined by the availability of men to act as selectors. Throughout this period there were always two representative selectors; one from the North and the other from the South, though it was unclear if they were nominated by their respective divisions, as had been the initial arrangement, or were chosen by the TCA executive which recognised this arrangement.

In November 1936 a resolution was passed by the executive that the representative players should vote for their team captain and to enable this to happen prior to the Wanganui match (the

sole game for that season) voting papers were to be sent out forthwith. The resolution remained in force until January 1946 when the executive decided that such a resolution was *ultra vires*, in that Rule Thirteen of the Constitution placed the authority to appoint the representative captain solely within the ambit of the executive.

In 1949 there was an approach made from cricketers in the Tainui area to affiliate with the TCA but there were some doubts raised, for if players lived north of Mokau (and thus outside the Taranaki province) could they be affiliated to TCA when boundaries were defined as the 'provincial district of Taranaki'?

In 1948 the Smith Shield was presented for competition between Rangitikei, Taranaki and Wanganui. This shield was played for until the 1960's.

Thus as the second half of the twentieth century began the opportunity for Taranaki cricketers to play first class cricket was greatly enhanced and the charm of Pukekura Park as a major cricketing venue was to become fully appreciated; but it was to be another twenty years before Taranaki cricket was to enjoy the glory days once again.

THE TARANAKI XI WHICH PLAYED MCC IN JANUARY 1936



Standing: W J Hall, H J Larkin, T Larkin, M Donnelly, N Giddy, E Christensen, T Pritchard, W Barker, H Barker, E R Gilmour (Mayor of New Plymouth), J H Abraham (Secretary)
Seated: W Groombridge, W Dormer, O Nasmith, E R T Holmes (MCC Captain), W Priest (Captain), T H Bates (President), V Parkinson, S Betts

M Donnelly and T Pritchard were later to be selected for New Zealand, and T Larkin was to become New Zealand's first Ambassador to Japan.

THE TARANAKI XI WHICH PLAYED FIJI IN 1948



Standing: W Barker, N Autridge, L Miller, S Pauling, N Leighton, M Gray

Kneeling: E Meuli, J Scott, S Betts (Captain), J Broughton, R Harris

S Betts and W Barker had played against the MCC in 1936; L Miller and E Meuli were to be both selected for New Zealand in 1953.

PUKEKURA PARK 1948



FIJI BATTING AGAINST TARANAKI

The Fillis Street wall is still there in 2000. The scoreboard, on the same site, is now somewhat more detailed, and the lights for nighttime athletics and cycling are no longer there.

PUKEKURAPARK



R T Harris Collection

PUKEKURA PARK IN 1948

Taranaki batting against Fiji. The pitch ran SE - NW, from the Dell corner to the Main Gates.