

Channel Islands – Over 50's Cricket

Preface

I have always been aware that the history and formation, and progress of the Channel Islands 50+ should be recorded. The late Ralph Anthony produced a very fine statistical cumulative record 1991-2016.

Phil Mellon is taking up the mantle and is preparing statistics to compliment this and keep relevant records current.

In the meantime I have compiled details which I hope will be enjoyed. I apologise if I have left anybody out who should have been included. I have not referred to so many individual performances and experiences other than in a section on my personal memories/highlights.

It goes without saying that many memories and friendships were formed as players entered the twilights of their cricketing careers and as many have put it the Channel Islands Over 50's provided 'the icing on the cake'.

Micky Fooks

The Formation of the CI 50+

The birth of the Over 50s competition began in the late 1980's when the National Cricket Association introduced a competition – at that time made up of three sections/groups. Les Lenham, the former Sussex player and coach, and a frequent visitor to Jersey, was appointed manager of the Southern Section which included the Channel Islands.

On one of his visits he suggested to his former cricketing colleague Geoff Wills, and also to coach and administrator, Albert Brown, that Jersey should participate. Geoff spoke to Guernsey's captain John Appleyard who had similar thoughts but neither island had sufficient players of the quality required for a strong enough team.

A proposal was put to the NCA that a joint team under the name of the Channel Islands be considered but this was initially refused because not such organisation formally existed at that time.

However, with the assistance of the NCA and the agreement of the English Counties then forming the western region – Somerset, Dorset and Devon - consent was given with Guernsey providing guest players; Roger Snelling of Somerset and Geoff Husband, Cornwall, gave prominent support.

In 1991 two home matches were played in Jersey and two on the mainland. The first game was at Hatherleigh, Devon, where the visitors were soundly beaten only amassing 65 runs.

The team was based at Launceston and supported by friends and partners, with generous sponsorship provided by Bristol and West Building Society. The following year saw the team based at the Lamb, at Hindon not far from Salisbury.

It was agreed that Derek Breed and John Appleyard would captain the team on alternate occasions.

To foster the visits by away teams the Jersey hosts made every effort to make the 'away fixture' attractive to the visiting teams.

The NCA soon became the England and Wales Cricket Board and the group was expanded to include Gloucestershire and Wiltshire

Channel Islands Cricket Board

The year 1996 saw the arrival in Jersey of Keith Dennis who was to have a big influence on Jersey, Channel Islands cricket, and the Over 50's. KD was a great friend of CI cricket through his association and captaincy of the MCC and toured both islands for many years. He was of course a former Middlesex player and stalwart. Many will recall 'link-ups' at Lords!

In the late 90's the CICB was formed under his presidency and there began the journey to the cricket enjoyed today through the islands individually joining the International Cricket Council.

In this context he worked closely with David Piesing who 'spearheaded' the moves involved with the ICC. The latter went on to become a member of the ICC's European board. DP went on to play his first match for the CI 50+ in 2013 and soon become a stalwart in the organisation and administration of the side.

When president of the CICB, KD was also instrumental in introducing a CI side joining the ECB's 38 County competition. He managed the side made up of top players from both islands which pre-empted the islands joining the ICC structure.

KD, along with his Vice-chairman, yours truly, set out to enhance the need for the administration and players from both Bailiwicks to work together.

The latter always recalls KD's first tour, when at one of the headquarters, the Lamb, at Hindon, Wiltshire, he was taken aback to see the Jersey and Guernsey players sitting down to dinner at separate tables.

He soon set about successfully rectifying this when he became captain and there is no question that this led to the success of the CI 50+ side which was reflected in results.

Reaching the Semi-Final and successful qualification in the following years.

The structure and qualification from the group stages for the ECB's 50+ competition has and continues to evolve and in 1999 the group of Counties was changed so that the CI side was now playing against seven other sides in the group made up of: Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Wiltshire, Dorset, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight (who were accepted that year) and the CI side.

The year 1999 saw the first success through the group stages and after a victory against Norfolk in which John Beasley and Peter Glennon mounted a famous last wicket stand, of which the latter remained nought not out, the CI side was to reach the semi-final. The venue, Swansea, on the ground made famous by Gary Sobers' six sixes in one over, were of course Wales.

The match ended in defeat by 82 runs.

The next successful advancement from the group stage took place in 2002 when the first opponents were Staffordshire – away at Wolverhampton.

The CI 50+ went on to win by 98 runs in a match reduced from the normal 45 overs per side format, after the flight from Jersey and Guernsey was delayed.

The price for advancement was the need to arrange a fixtures at short notice – in this case a fixture against Cheshire (away) in early August – the height of the tourist season.

All avenues were explored and eventually the solution was the charter of the Jersey-based de Havilland Heron to and from Liverpool. With just enough seats for the squad, scorer and umpire; the journey was a nostalgic experience none will forget.

The match was played across the Mersey at Neston. Rain threatened to make the trip a wash-out but sportingly the home side recognised the efforts made to travel and allowed play to go ahead on a questionable pitch and shortened game.

Chasing, the CI lost wickets at regular intervals, but another outstanding knock from John Beasley just failed to get us over the line, and he was last out, caught on the boundary, with some 15 still required.

At about this time the side were on a roll and went three complete seasons of not losing an away match – we certainly enjoyed touring in more ways than one.

Advancing from the group stages in stage in 2003 – we were drawn at home (Grainville) to Warwickshire whose side included Mustaq Mohammed – and we lost by 78 runs.

Reaching the knock-out stage in 2004 Grainville was the venue – but the opponents Surrey came away winners by seven wickets.

The knock-out stage was again reached in 2007 – with the opponents Kent – away at Tonbridge Wells.

An overnight trip via Gatwick saw another rain affected wicket and we went on to lose by 78 runs. I recall that the two Kent openers had both clocked up 100 centuries each.

The year 2008 again saw us advance from the group stage. A trip to Northamptonshire resulted in an interesting first experience for many.

Flying on the red eyes to Southampton – Mike Kinder with his experience with younger tourists took the wheel of our mini-bus for the round trip as the weather looked more and more gloomy.

Rain affected the start and the game was shortened, but again the rains kept coming and as per the knock-out rules a bowl-out was staged.

The Channel Islands came through 4-3 and advanced to the next round – a home tie (Grainville) against Lancashire. This ended in a 93 run defeat for the home side.

At various stages of our history financial sponsorship has been greatly appreciated – namely from Bristol and West, Castle - Trust and Credit Suisse.

In the main this helped with travel expenses for ‘home’ games for players who needed to travel to the venue between the islands.

Travelling costs for tours were something else and of course advancing from the group stages, as described above, does not come cheap.

Players dug deep and played hard while loving the experiences of playing on some picturesque and grounds of different character.

Andy Gibbs set about organising the 100 Club with a regular draw and this was a further valuable source of funding.

Golfing Trips

At an early stage Derek Breed set up a French golf tour – pre-season in an effort to build team spirit. He generously provided flights to nearby France, on occasions dropping in to set down Guernsey participants.

Dinan was the popular base – playing at courses such as Le Tronchet, Les Ormes and Val Andre. At one stage a trophy was offered and the participants enjoyed the formats arranged by the late Mike Weaver and in later years Chris Searson.

Handicaps were suitably adjusted and good food and wine was the order of the day as the tours extended to be based at such Southern Brittany towns and cities – viz Carnac, Vannes, Auray and Rennes.

Staged as a pre-season opener – golf was extended to days-off on tour and occasionally on match days when there were sufficient players/supporters.

On tour, players were under instruction not to get injured, as happened on one occasion at least, much to the disdain of the captain.

An annual AGM social gathering was held each year in alternate islands – in the autumn - until inter-island travel costs put a halt to this.

Memories – MAF

There are so many but here are just a few highlights:

As mentioned the experience of playing on some very picturesque grounds, some with great history and character – too many to mention.

One memory stands out for me – taking the field beneath Glastonbury Tor where I was born – on the magnificent playing facilities belonging to Millfield School in Somerset.

My first match was at Luccombe, Cornwall where we had to hike over styles on a venue on three levels. If you were fielding at long-on you could not see below the waist of the batsman!

Cornwall, Gunnislake, I achieved a milestone in my career whereby I managed to be on the field for every stage of the game, when chasing a mediocre score, having kept wicket, I opened the batting with the skipper's orders to stay there.

In another game in Torquay, I recall joining the same skipper, our inimitable leader, Keith Dennis, as he passed one hundred chasing a Devon total of around 250. I went to the wicket for the last ball (non-striker), with two needed for victory. KD struck the ball to mid-on and I managed to make it for two and a truly memorable victory over one of the sides with which we had great rivalry.

As recorded previously, experiencing that great victory when everyone thought the quarter-final against Norfolk was lost, as Peter Glennon joined John Beasley – still in search of what was to us all – too many.

We should have known better, as Sussex man JB set about 'farming' the strike and striking the ball to all parts to see us through. I recall catching the red-eye flight from Jersey to the UK the following morning and witnessed the Norfolk players' demeanour.

Taking the field at Grainville with a team made-up of eight Guernsey players and three from Jersey. Captain Paul Robson, in place of his team talk, remarked that this was the proudest moment of his cricketing career 'captaining Guernsey'!

The banter was something else - carrots left in Guernsey players' bags – and during another golf trip, this time to Deauville, Normandy, Robbo and Greg Sykes summoned Steve Birkett and myself over to capture the sight of 'our cousins' – the donkeys on the beach. Driving through Cornwall with 'Sykesy' one occasionally passed a '..... sanctuary' which was always pointed out!

In my first year, fighting our way to a tie against Wiltshire, after the game was postponed from the previous day, it was and moved to Victoria College. A notable result at that time.

Taking the field against Somerset the memorable and fitting tribute paid by Roger Snelling - the following year after Keith Dennis' passing.

So many great memories.

The stalwarts

I have made reference to a number of players and individuals – but in this section I would like to just mention others and some again.

Geoff Wills, John Appleyard and Albert Brown – whose vision led to the last 30 years of the CI 50+.

Derek Breed – early captain, all rounder of many talents, and golf enthusiast/organiser

Keith Dennis – who has done so much for Channel Islands cricket and the 50+. His talents both on and off the field and the way he enthused others was second to none.

David Piesing – I have linked him at this stage because, along with KD, he has had a huge influence in getting Channel Islands cricket to the position it is in today. In latter years he has been one, if not the main driving force looking to the future of CI 50+.

All the captains (listed) and Vice captains who have worked so hard to select, where necessary, but more importantly to foster players, and those ‘coming of age’ and achieve sufficient numbers for touring.

Pauline Kelly – How many games has she scored for the 50+? Rarely if ever missing one from 1996 until the arrival/interruption of Covid. Having scored in Jersey cricket for many years, on her retirement from teaching Pauline became a mainstay. Players should never under-estimate the value of a scorer and umpires.

When asked by KD – Pauline stepped up to help manage the side, arranging a number of tours/accommodation etc and as stated, was an ‘ever present’.

Captains are an important role:

Derek Breed

KD

Paul Robson – a character and leader of the fines committee (Sykes and Birkett)

Dave Gorman – who can forget his century at Warminster, kept his sweater on in 90+ degrees. Also achieved a hole-in one at Le Tronchet

Ralph Anthony – late to the party but when he started – how he enjoyed it instilling his will to win. After retiring he began recording these excellent statistics and records

Chris Searson – also for his golfing organisational skills, Guernsey players will never forget his nine wicket haul in an inter-insular.

Ward Jenner - Captained both Jersey and Guernsey and his experience, enthusiasm and commitment have guided the 50+ team through ‘difficult times’.

Umpires

So many have contributed but mentions should be made of

Jane and Mike Carpenter – stalwarts and brilliant tourists – Mike also stepped in when our touring numbers dwindled.

Ray Wilson – How he took to the 50+ culture, who can forget his first tour and his later production of a memorable video on the 50+ side. His late bath at Hindon on his first tour will be recalled by many!

In this category I must mention Phil Mellon – a great tourist of dry wit – who never minds whether he plays, umpires or scores. He is now helping plan accommodation and is linking the statistical work carried out by the late Ralph Anthony – up to the current season.

Finally mention should be made of those with 50+ caps – an achievement/commitment in itself:

Steve Birkett – well over 100 caps. Low handicap golfer, vice-captain, centurion and all rounder. Many tourists will recall his rivalry with another centurion and keen golfer and all round sportsman, John Taylor.

MAF – not quite made the 100 mark!

Barry Middleton – How the opposition feared him when he first ‘qualified’ – took up golf after having some tasters on his early tours

Paul Robson

KD

Mike Kinder – “Mr Consistency” – could always be relied on to bowl nine tight overs which set the foundation.

Andy Gibbs – Another centurion, organiser of the 100 Draw

Greg Sykes – Kept Robbo in check and a keen (another lefty) golfer and organiser on tours.

With the statistics being updated others include:

Trevor Gallienne – World Champion at Bar Billiards, and ‘ally’ of Robbo both on and off the race course and like so many – great company

‘Bukko’ – Dave Buxton, the consummate all-rounder, consistent bat in any position, wicket-keeper, fielder and even occasional bowler. His knowledge of ornithology was extensive and he passed this on to many interested tourists.

Covid 19

The arrival of Covid 19 affected everybody, including the ECB 50+ competition. The 2020 season never happened, and because of restrictions on travel to and from both islands an early decision was taken for the CI team not to partake in 2021.

David Piesing and skipper Ward Jenner worked hard to ensure participation in 2022 and this went ahead with both away and home fixtures, with the exception of one or two counties.

In addition the former has sought links which may be attractive on a wider scene.

There is little doubt that the cost of travel, post Covid, together with the ever increasing cost-of-living is causing all Counties to review the competition.

A working group has been set up by the ECB and already a series of e-mails point to ideas and potential changes within the group/structure etc.

In this context the CI 50+ representation channelled through DP is in good hands and in conclusion I would like to thank all those players (87 in all between 1991 and 2016), so now we must well have surpassed 100, along with supporters, administrators, umpires and scorers who have helped 'ice the cake' –Onwards and upwards.

MAF