

## Short History of Tasmanian Cricket

Although little evidence has survived of Tasmania's early days, cricket was probably played on the island soon after its European settlement in 1803. Certainly by 1814, when the colony's chaplain Robert Knopwood noted in his diary the popularity of the game during the holiday period around Christmas, the game was well established as a pastime, although the extent of its organisation remains a doubtful quantity.

Tasmania's first organised match appears to have been in Hobart Town in 1825, between a Military Eleven and a team of civilians. The colony's first cricket club, Hobart Town, was organised in 1832. During the next decade the Launceston Cricket Club was formed, reflecting a parallel development of the game in Northern Tasmania which was to be a unique feature of Tasmanian cricket for most of its long history.

The first inter-colonial cricket match in Australia was played at Launceston in February 1851 between Tasmania and Victoria; Tasmania winning by three wickets. A year earlier, in April, the first of a series of intra-state matches between the South and North was played at Oatlands; after 175 matches over 127 years the state administrators terminated the exchange – replaced by Tasmania's admission to the national Sheffield Shield competition.

It was not until January 1862 when a commercially-sponsored English touring team to Australia led by HH Stephenson that Tasmania hosted an international team but in 1884 Tasmania became the first Australian colony to make an international tour – organised by newspaper proprietor John George Davies to New Zealand's South Island. It would be another 100 years before a Tasmanian team toured beyond Australia's shores.

In 1866 the Southern Tasmanian Cricket Association (later to become the Tasmanian Cricket Association) was formed and in 1886 the Northern Tasmanian Cricket Association assumed control of the game from the powerful Launceston CC in the north of the state.

With the New Zealand tour under its belt Tasmanian cricket had reason to be optimistic about its future. By 1900 Tasmanian representative teams had played 14 matches against England, three matches against Australian XIs and 27 against other colonies – 24 of them against Victoria.

Two of its sons – Charles Eady and Ken Burns had been selected in Australian Test teams while others, namely Claude Rock, George Bailey, George Gatehouse, Harold Hale, Ted Windsor, Jack Savigny, Norman Dodds and Reg Hawson gained distinction in English and Australian cricket circles in the period leading to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

But as the Australian colonies moved towards Federalism Tasmania was becoming isolated from the Australian cricket mainstream. The Tasmanian cricket administrator J.G. Davies had been a strong advocate of an Australasian Cricket Council, but when the council was formed in 1892 Tasmania, perhaps nervous about cost and competitiveness, decided not to join. As a result of this, the island colony was excluded from the inaugural Sheffield Shield competition. This made it increasingly difficult to attract representative state teams to the island. By 1947, when Western Australia joined the Shield competition, Tasmania was the only state left out.

For most of the 20th century, Tasmanians were denied the opportunity to see cricket at the highest levels. The final humiliation came in 1963, when an encounter between a Tasmanian team and the visiting English tourists was cut to two days and given second-class status. Faced with a permanent slide into cricketing oblivion, Tasmania's cricket administrators determined that something had to be done.

Tasmania produced some good players in the inter-War era, banking on a progressive policy of youth that allowed teenagers such as Jack Badcock, Ron Thomas and Ron Morrisby to play first-class cricket. Badcock, like Ted McDonald and Laurie Nash before him, moved interstate to achieve recognition and played several Test matches. McDonald and Jack Gregory formed one of Australia's most potent pace-attacks terrorising England and South

Africa in the early 1920's. McDonald settled in England and played out his career with Lancashire. Nash became more famous as an Australian footballer with South Melbourne (VFL).

Others stayed at home; players such as Owen Burrows, Doug Green, Sid Putman, Gerald James and GA Combes usually gave a good account of themselves. State team selection was hampered somewhat by the need to give the north and the south equal representation in the side, which was not therefore always the best that might have been selected.

Post WW2 Emerson Rodwell, Max Thomas, Terry Cowley, Bill Hird and Brian Patterson stood out but the lack of opportunity and reluctance to move interstate to enhance their prospects of advancement at the first class level ensured their names would have no significance in the history pages of Australian cricket.

The decision by the Australian Cricket Board to grant limited participation in the Sheffield Shield competition in 1977 was a hallmark. It wasn't easy for the Cinderella state to progress – there was a threat of expulsion unless Tasmania's cricket administrators improved the standard of playing facilities and took steps to centralise control of state cricket. Enter the mercurial DW Rogers, an enlightened administrator.

Administration was streamlined in 1991 when the TCA, expanded to include representatives from the north and the north-west was empowered to run Tasmanian cricket, in keeping with its title. Sheffield Shield matches were centralised at the new headquarters of cricket at Bellerive Oval, and for the first time, there appeared to be public unity between the three regions. The time lag in Tasmania's development as a cricketing power, relative to the mainland states, had been all but expunged.

In the 25-years since the establishment of Bellerive Oval as Tasmanian cricket's home, the Tasmanian Tigers have enjoyed success. Following its first taste of national honours – the one-day Gillette Cup title – in 1979, the state has won the limited overs competition twice (ING Cup in 2005 and the Ford Ranger Cup in 2010). Then after three unsuccessful Sheffield Shield final appearances the Tigers, at home, defeated the NSW Blues in 2007 to win the Pura Cup/Shield and repeated that success with another victory over NSW in 2011 also at Bellerive Oval.

Complimenting the Tigers success has been Tasmania's contribution to the national team.

After Roger Woolley's brief selection in the Australian Test team, David Boon was the first Tasmanian cricketer to achieve icon status scoring 7422 runs at 43.65 during his 107 Test match career. Boon's first class career spanned 222 years during which time he scored in excess of 23000 runs for country, state and English county Durham.

Arguably the most outstanding batsman since DG Bradman, Ricky Ponting was appointed as the 42nd Australian captain in 2002 and became Australia's most successful Test captain before retiring from the role in 2011. In all he has played 165 Tests scoring 13346 runs at 52.75 – second only to India's Tendulkar.

Others to wear the *Baggy Green* include Greg Campbell, Shaun Young, Colin Miller, Jason Krejza, Ben Hilfenhaus, Xavier Doherty and Tim Paine. Michael Di Venuto, Brett Geeves, and Travis Birt have represented Australia in the short forms of the game. Current Tasmanian Tiger captain George Bailey was appointed Australia's T20 captain in 2012 and will undoubtedly earn Test selection in the short term.

Compiled by Ric Finlay and Michael Gandy

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