

Club History

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Honours - Professionals - Roy Gilchrist - Frank Tyson - Basil D'Oliveira - Hedley Verity

The History Of Middleton Cricket Club

There is evidence that in 1857, "Middleton Albion" reported a match was played at Hollin Lane between Middleton and Chadwick's employees, Middleton scored 66 and the employees 27; this was followed by a sumptuous feast at the Old Boar's Head, Mr. Chadwick was a local silk manufacturer.

It should be remembered that Middleton was, in those days an agricultural district and every other man one met was a farmer, a farm labourer or a hand-loom weaver. What a lovely town or village it must have been. The contour of the land lent itself to natural beauty, with its woods and fields and its two rivers, brimful no doubt with trout and other fish. What a contrast to the current town, heavily populated and surrounded by light and heavy industry polluting the atmosphere.

There is no doubt that the current home of Middleton - Towncroft - was the last of several areas in the town where Middleton played the wonderful game. One certainly on record was opposite the Old Town Hall; owned by Mr. Schwabbes, whose factory chimney in Rhodes was a landmark that few could forget. The terms of the one year lease was five shillings; half of which had been paid prior to the start of the season. The first match was to be played against Rhodes, but was in jeopardy as having spent seven shillings and sixpence in Needhams Sports Shop on equipment the club found itself with only one shilling and nine pence. This dilemma was soon rectified with a collection on the Friday evening in the Old Boar's Head; the match went ahead with Rhodes scoring 51 to Middleton's 47.

Then followed a gap with no matches being reported in 1879, but on the 28th August, 1880 Middleton organised an Athletic festival on the Rhodes ground. From that date to 1888 there were still no matches reported. The late Frederick Entwistle, who became the Town Clerk, came to the rescue and called a meeting at the Town Hall, the result was the present club; matches were played at Towncroft in 1889 against Stand, Prestwich and Bury.

On 19th April, the pavilion was opened in the presence of a large crowd, which included the elite of the town including Samuel Barlow and all the principal men concerned with the government of the town. The ceremony was performed by Alderman John Willie Lees and a silver key is still held today at the headquarters of the brewery. The first professional to be engaged was Hone Foster from Kent in 1895, followed by Bill Brown of Staffordshire who remained with the club for ten years. It was during his appointment that Middleton won their first trophy; the league championship in 1898, the captain was John Henry Wood.

Alderman Wood was distinguished in the civic life of the town, holding the office of mayor from 1911-13 and from 1922-25; during his first years of office he was president and captain of the club at the same time. He lived opposite the ground on Towncroft Avenue and on 27th July 1922 he became the clubs greatest benefactor. In agreement with the Rector of the Parish Church, The Reverend Thomas Jones and in conjunction with the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for England, for a sum of £1,800 he purchased the glebe land for the club.

In 1924, John Henry Wood conveyed the land to the club trustees, of whom he was one, subject to the future covenants contained in the 1922 conveyance; a recital in this deed said that John Henry Wood was desirous of making provision for the permanent use of the land by Middleton Cricket Club so long as such club should continue in existence as a cricket club. There were however restrictions in the deeds, in respect of the Sabbath and the sale of alcohol.

Well those basically are the facts of how are forefathers gave us the opportunity to flourish, prosper and have the basics for developing and area in excess of 3 acres of land as an ongoing exercise, for the benefit of players and members. The next real challenge to the club outside the cricketing arena was in 1963 when the league decided to introduce Sunday fixtures. The club was literally stumped, under the covenants. The committee, certainly not unanimous on the sale of alcohol decided to seek "Queens Council's opinion". Mr. Joseph Turner, L.L.M. the Recorder of Liverpool was engaged. His findings were no way conclusive, but he recommended we approach the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.

The Rector of Middleton was Harry Moore. Trevor Roydes and Hubert Taylor, some of Middleton's greatest servants and characters were summoned to the Rectory. The first words the Rector said to Hubert were "I have not seen you in church

recently Hubert". To which he replied, "No I haven't seen you in the White Hart either". Despite this, it was not until 1965 that the committee saw fit to build a bar.

Middleton can be proud of some of their cricketing feats; both individual and bowling records were held until recently by Middleton players. On 26th April 1952 Middleton born Eric Price the club professional returned the remarkable bowling figures at Littleborough of 8.7 overs 5 maidens 4 runs for 10 wickets. This record has stood for almost 50 years and is likely to so for another 50. Until 2000 Middleton also held the batting record with an inning by South African Brad Osborne of 223. Previously beating the popular Trinidadian Kelvin Williams (another Middleton player). This record has now gone to former Oldham professional Brandon Nash.

How many clubs can lay claim to having had three players at their club, who later became County players and prosper even further and play for England. Middleton are proud to be in this position; Hedley Verity, Frank Tyson and Basil D'Oliveira. They, along with former West Indian Professional Roy Gilchrist can be found elsewhere in the club History section.

Since winning the League Championship in 2000 and Wood Cup in 2001 Middleton have been in transition, looking to build again for the future.

Since winning the League Championship in 2000, the club has been steadily rebuilding for the future, which epitomised the 2011 season, where the club won the Wood Cup, the Twenty20 Cup, the Second Division Trophy and the Oldham Brewery Trophy. In 2012 the club went even further by retaining the Wood and Twenty20 Cups and winning the Burton Cup. If they continue along this path, which Middleton's forefathers set, their future should look bright and successful.

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Club Honours

The Central Lancashire Cricket League

1898, 1899, 1920, 1938, 1958, 1959, 1970, 1973, 1988, 2000

The Wood Cup

1921, 1930, 1931, 1933, 1936, 1938, 1948, 1967, 1977, 2001, 2011, 2012

Twenty20 Cup

2011, 2012

The Second Division Championship

1908, 1909, 1921, 1926, 1929, 1933, 1935, 1950, 1952, 1955, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1962, 1977, 1984, 1987, 1990, 1994, 1995, 2001, 2008, 2011

The Second XI Championship (Second Tier)

2014

The Burton Cup

1973, 1977, 1980, 1982, 1986, 1987, 1991, 2012

The Aggregate Cup

1930, 1933, 1952, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1962, 1973, 1980, 1981, 1993, 1995, 2000, 2001, 2009

The Roydes Trophy

2001, 2005

The Clifford Pickup Trophy

1976 R Clarkson, 1977 P Rocca, 1999, 2000, 2001 & 2002 L Wolstenholme, 2011 D Highton

The Sir Frank Worrell Trophy

1971 & 1979 L Taylor, 1976 K McEntyre

The Spirit of the Game Trophy

2008 (1st XI), 2010 (2nd XI)

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Club Professionals

1895 H Foster

1940 - 1943 No Professionals

1981 - 1982 D Da Silva

1896 - 1902 W Brown

1944 - 1947 A Cassley

1983 - 1986 K Boden

1903 - 1910 T Cassley

1948 - 1949 S Hunt

1987 - 1989 K Williams

1911 T Howarth

1950 - 1956 E Price

1990 - 1991 B Osborne

1912 -1915 T Higson

1957 J Dale

1992 - 1993 P Sleep

1916 - 1918 No Professionals

1958 - 1959 R Gilchrist

1994 M Handman

1919 A Williams

1960 - 1963 B D'Oliveira

1995 - 1996 K Williams

1920 - 1927 L Cranfield

1964 G Houlton

1997 - 1998 J Batty

1928 - 1930 H Verity

1965 - 1967 J Mitchinson

1999 - 2003 G Peiris

1931 H Spencer

1968 - 1969 J Swinburne

2004 - 2005 S Fernando

1932 S Shepherd

1970 - 1975 J Burton

2006 - A Jacobs

1933 H Fisher

1976 G Jones

2007 - B Reddy

1934 -1935 S Preston

1977 J Jacklin

2008 - W Coetsee

1936 - 1937 G Hargreaves

1978 H Jamil & P Rocca

2009 - K Skewes

1938 - 1939 E Dennison

1979 - 1980 J Williams

2010 - No Professional

2011 - 2012 M.B.A. Smith

2013 - 2014 G Edmeades

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Roy Gilchrist

1934-2001

A Sign Of Things To Come

Ever wondered who began the long line of successful West Indian Speedsters? Ever wondered who it was who lit the trail for the likes of Holding, Garner, Croft, Marshall, Ambrose or Walsh?

Roy Gilchrist was one of the fastest bowlers ever to have played not just in the Central Lancashire League - but Cricket as a whole.

Gilchrist only played 13 Tests for the West Indies during an era when the Caribbean Kings were already blessed with pace bowlers such as Wes Hall, Garfield Sobers and Charlie Griffith, but for many years he put the fear of God into CLL batsmen. An always controversial figure, he famously was sent home from the 1958-59 West Indian tour of the sub-continent for constantly bowling beamers.

Standing at only 5ft 9in, relatively diminutive for a fast bowler, Gilchrist nevertheless was able to generate formidable pace with his long, whippy right arm action.

He first signed professional for Middleton in 1958, inspiring them to successive league titles. In fact, his first match for Middleton on 25 April 1958, was described as the "most sensational league cricket debut ever". Gilchrist destroyed Crompton at Glebe Street, taking all 10 for 38 including a hat-trick.

Crompton were 63 without loss, chasing Middleton's 141 for nine, when Gilchrist who had none for 32 at that stage, switched ends to bowl with the sun and wind at his back and the advantage of a downhill slope. He shortened his run and was immediately successful, annihilating the Crompton innings in a 25 ball spell during which he took 10 wickets for the cost of only six runs. The last six wickets he took for just nine balls, including four in four.

The following year Gilchrist came close to beating Dhattu Phadkars all-time season bowling record, by taking 145 wickets.

He then moved into the Lancashire League, and played with Bacup for a year, before joining Great Chell in the Staffordshire League.

He returned to the CLL as professional for Crompton in 1965. Proof that he had lost none of his venom in the intervening years came when his new club shared the CLL title with Stockport that year.

After leaving Crompton, Gilchrist played in the Saddlewoth League, but he was then persuaded to make a comeback in the CLL with Castleton Moor and subsequently played for them as an amateur in the 1980's. He provided the after match entertainment playing to members with his Jamaican steel band.

Gilchrist returned home to Jamaica in the 1990's and it was there that he died in 2001 after a long fight against Alzheimer's Disease.

Former Moonraker all-rounder Paul Rocca who played with Gilchrist in the 1959 Middleton Championship-winning team said; "That year 99 of his victims were clean bowled. That says a lot about quality fast bowling. I was the only player to field in front of the wicket most games. Gilly always had four slips and two gulleys".

"I think most people who knew him, or played against him, will agree that he was arguably the fastest bowler ever to have played in the CLL".

"It's curious really, that the two fastest bowlers ever to have played Test cricket, Gilchrist and Frank Tyson, both had the shortest test careers and both played for Middleton."

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Frank Tyson

1930-

The Typhoon Of Middleton

There have been many memorable series throughout the Ashes long and glorious History. Botham's Ashes in 81's, Laker's in 56's and even the recent 'Series of the Century' in 2005. However, since the Second World War, England have only won the Ashes 4 times Down Under. Illingworth's Men famously did it in 1970/71, Brearley's in 78's/79's against a Packer savaged Australians and Gatting in 86's/87's when the Baggy Green were the worst side in the World.

Perhaps the greatest English Victory Down Under came with Len Hutton's 1954/55 MCC side, which at the time was paraded for having an 'Embarrassment of Riches' in its bowling department. If you look at the players left at home you can easily see why: Trueman, Laker, Lock & Tattersall all failed to board the ship for the de-facto tour for all Englishmen.

Despite the hype, England were mauled against Australia in the first Test at Brisbane against a Australian side that included, Morris, Lindwall, Miller, Benaud, Harvey & Davidson. It didn't help when Hutton famously asked the Dominion to bat - and scoring a massive 601 to win by an innings and 54 runs. The English were humiliated; laughed at as being full of talk with no fight or venom. The spearhead of the attack, Frank 'Typhoon' Tyson, was greeted with the headline 'Typhoon Blows Cold' upon the arrival for the 2nd Test in Sydney. Spurred on by this, he famously cut his run and destroyed the Australians in the subsequent Tests, taking 4 for 45, 6 for 85 and 7 for 27 helping England to a 3-1 Series win, a first in Australia since the Bodyline series in 1932/33.

Ritchie Benaud later said 'We just didn't see it. He was, is and always will be the fastest ever bowler. It was the only time I ever felt scared playing the game - I just couldn't pick it up'. Even Sir Donald Bradman, now writing for the Times of London, agreed saying Tyson was the fastest speedster ever to have played, even surpassing the great Ted MacDonald of Lancashire.

So there it was, arguably England's greatest overseas adventure was primarily instigated by a lad who learnt his trade at Middleton, a lad who was rejected by Lancashire for being 'unable to withstand a full season' of Cricket at the highest level. So he left, and was picked up by Northamptonshire for whom he applied his skills before prematurely calling an end to his career at the age of just 30. Ironically he emigrated to Australia, where he became a very successful coach of Victoria, Commentator and eventually head of the Australian Cricket Board. However, Frank Holmes Tyson shall always be remembered for that glorious winter of 1954/55 when he wrote himself forever into Ashes and English Cricketing folklore.

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Basil D'Oliveira
1931-2011

The Cricketer Who Changed The World

It is very rare that a Sportsman, let alone a Cricketer could say he has changed the world. But Basil D'Oliveira, Middleton Professional between 1960 and 1963 can comfortably say that he has. A Cape Coloured All Rounder, he was brought to England in 1960 with the support of John Arlott, as he was banned from playing first Class Cricket in his native South Africa, for purely being the wrong colour of skin. It was Middleton he first came to and then onto Worcestershire before being selected for England in 1966 against Garfield Sobers' West Indians. He made the transition to Test Player smoothly and was selected as one of Wisden's five Cricketers of the year in 1967.

D'Oliveira's moment of destiny came in the 1968 Ashes when he famously scored a beautiful 158 at the Oval against the Australians - seemingly cementing his place in the side for the forthcoming tour to his native South Africa. However, as is the case, Politics and Sport don't mix and the South African Government issued a statement saying if D'Oliveira was selected the tour would be abandoned, losing thousands of pounds for the MCC, England's tour operators. Because of this, he was shockingly left out of the touring party under the pretext that his bowling would not be effective in his native country. The press retaliated, arguing the MCC were only interested in money rather than moral judgement. However, when Warwickshire's Tom Cartwright was ruled out because of injury, the MCC backed down and D'Oliveira was called up into the squad. South African president BJ Vorster had already made it clear that D'Oliveira's inclusion was not acceptable and despite many negotiations the tour was cancelled. This, coupled with the 1970 Commonwealth summit, led to the ban of South Africa from playing International Sport. It was only in 1992 that South Africa were once again allowed to play International Cricket, due to the collapse of the Apartheid regime.

Because of this, D'Oliveira's Cricketing skill is often overlooked. A brilliant all rounder, he scored 5 Test Centuries at a healthy Average of 40.05 and took 47 wickets with his Medium Pacers. For Middleton, they say he used to frequently hit the ball into the houses at the Towncroft Avenue End and place the ball neatly and majestically as well as anyone who has played the game.

After retirement he became Coach of his adopted county Worcestershire, overseeing some of the most glorious years in the Counties History during the late 1980's and early 1990's. As a way of thanks, one of the stands at New Road was renamed the 'Basil D'Oliveira Stand' in recognition of his outstanding achievements for the County.

With deep sadness, 'Dolly' passed away on the 19th November 2011 after a long battle with Parkinson's Disease. He will truly be remembered as 'a cricketer with character'. He was a legend in his own lifetime. However, his name will always be linked to a dark era of our History and proof that eventually some good will always come out of ignorance and injustice.

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Hedley Verity

1905-1943

The Man With No Breaking Point

Most probably the greatest player to represent Middleton, the story of Hedley Verity is one of highs and lows - culminating a great sadness. Following in the footsteps of the great left arm Yorkshire tradition of Peel and Rhodes, Verity was one of the most skilful bowlers in the games history. Indeed, Sir Donald Bradman regarded him as England's best ever spinner adding 'His physique, run up were co-ordinated in a perfect delivery position with a superb command of length and direction'. Indeed, it was Verity who dismissed the Don more than any other bowler in Test Match Cricket. Similar superlatives were accorded on Verity by Hutton, Hammond and Compton - all the dominant batsmen of the era.

Verity struggled as a young man to break into a strong Yorkshire side, mainly because the great Wilfred Rhodes was the prime spinner and was keeping Verity out. So, in order to gain experience he was signed as Middleton Professional in 1928. After 3 successful seasons at Towncroft, which included the Wood Cup, Verity finally got his chance with Yorkshire. It was worth the wait as he took wickets-a-plenty, quickly erasing the glorious memory of the retired Rhodes. From 1935 to 1937 he exceeded 200 wickets in a season, bowling Yorkshire to Championship Victory. He twice took all 10 wickets in an innings, including a world record 10 for 10 against Nottinghamshire at Headingley. Even in his last match, he took 7 for 9 against Sussex at Hove in 1939.

Verity got his chance, after years of practice and graft, of playing for England in the 1931 Test at the Oval. In 1934, he bowled England to their only victory against Australia at Lords in the 20th Century taking a remarkable 15 for 105 (14 in one day) including the wicket of Bradman twice. It was reported that Verity loved bowling on a batsman's pitch, as he saw it more as a challenge than a spinner's paradise. Verity continued to play for England up until the last Test before the Second World War. His Test figures stand at a remarkable 144 wickets at an average of just 24 - unbelievable for a slow-left arm spinner. In all First class Cricket he took 1956 wickets at an amazing average of 14.90.

Verity was also a useful lower order batsman, averaging nearly 21 in Test Cricket, scoring 3 fifties. At Adelaide during the 1936/37 Ashes series he was promoted to opening the batting when no openers were available. He repaid the faith given to him by holding on, enabling England to get off to a good start in the Test. Verity was also an outstanding backwards point fielder, and apparently caught anything off his own bowling.

When the Wehrmacht marched into Poland in September 1939, all Professional Cricket was halted, so Verity joined the Green Howards hoping to do his bit for King and Country. He rose to the rank of Captain and was involved in Montgomery's Eight Army attack on Sicily in 1943. One of his companies' objectives was a ridge with strong points and pillboxes. Behind a creeping barrage Verity led his company forward 700 yards. When the barrage ceased, they went on another 300 yards and neared the ridge, in darkness. As the men advanced, through corn two feet high, tracer-bullets swept into them. Then they wriggled through the corn, Verity encouraging them with "Keep going, keep going." The moon was at their back, and the enemy used mortar-fire, Very lights and fire-bombs, setting the corn alight. The strongest point appeared to be a farm-house, to the left of the ridge; so Verity sent one platoon round to take the farm-house, while the other gave covering fire. The enemy fire increased, and, as they crept forward, Verity was hit in the chest. "Keep going," he said, "and get them out of that farm-house." When it was decided to withdraw, they last saw

Verity lying on the ground, in front of the burning corn, his head supported by his batman. It was later reported he was captured by the Italians and died on 31st July 1943 in a POW camp in Italy itself.

It was statement to the man himself that he told his men to keep going, and proof that this man had 'no breaking point' - he was neither beaten nor afraid and persisted to the end. The story of Hedley Verity is one that proves Cricket is only a game and occasionally, there are more important things to comprehend.