

A Prince Amongst Players

In both Sussex and England, the Indian prince Kumar Shri Ranjitsinhji (1872-1933) was better known as Ranji.

Ranji's batting is said to have been almost magical, his talent first showing itself in his days as a Cambridge undergraduate when he managed the extraordinary feat of hitting three centuries in one day.... in three matches. He began by hitting 128 for the Cassandra team before lunch on the second morning of a two-day match. After lunch, he wandered over to a game on an adjoining pitch featuring the Basinelles Club. Finding them a man short, he immediately offered his services and struck a swift 132. He then returned to this original match but discovered that his side were still batting, steadily building on the score which he had provided. Spotting him at a loose end, the Long Vacation team seized the opportunity to stiffen their batting line-up for the game. Ranji duly obliged, hitting 150.

Sometimes batting came too easy to Ranji. Partnering Percy Fender for Sussex against Australia at Hove in 1912, Ranji suggested between overs that it might be 'interesting' to name in advance which strokes he intended to play. He told Fender: 'I'll send the first ball down to Kellaway's left hand at long leg and the third ball to his right – he's always slow to get back. We'll run two each time.' Sure enough two of Ranji's famous leg-glances ensured that the plan was accomplished, and each time as they crossed, Ranji reminded Fender to run two. In another over, late cuts to Bardsley at deep third man brought two runs to the fielder's left, then two more to his right. Throughout the innings, Ranji always fulfilled his predictions.

He was the most immaculately dressed of cricketers with his silk shirt neatly buttoned at the wrists. The only thing which ever ruffled his elegance was the British weather. The summer of 1912 was generally wet and cold and the Scarborough Festival of that year was definitely a place for only the hardy. The wind whipped off the North Sea with such force that each day, Ranji, recently returned from tropical India, went shopping to buy another layer of clothing. First it was another vest, then a woollen waistcoat and so on. Onlookers were convinced that he was putting on weight by the minute and *The Times* wrote: 'Had the cold lasted, he certainly would not have been able to pass out of the dressing-room door.'

In 1915, he lost his right eye in a shooting accident in Yorkshire, and injury sustained while he was home from the war on sick leave. After that, he wore a glass eye but still managed a career total of 24,567 runs at an average of 45, including seventy-two centuries.

A Saw Point

When the volatile Majid Jahangir of Glamorgan and Pakistan was bowled for 28 by Derbyshire's Ian Buxton in August 1968, he stormed to the pavilion and immediately sawed his bat in half. When asked to explain his actions, he answered: 'I was getting a bit fed up with it. I haven't made many runs with it lately.'

Handy Hanif

Pakistan Test player Hanif Mohammad bowled four right-handed deliveries and two with his left hand in the last over before lunch against Somerset at Taunton in July 1954. He chose to repeat this bizarre feat after tea.

Disputed Decision

During a cricket match in Karachi, the hot-headed Prince Aslam was given out lbw. He did not agree with the decision but was forced to return to the pavilion. Obviously the injustice continued to gnaw away at him, because a few minutes later he returned to the field with a loaded revolver which he fired above the head of the offending umpire. As umpires and players alike fled for their lives, it was wisely decided to abandon the game.