

## **Cricket Eccentrics**

### **Way-Out East**

At a time when there were fewer and fewer characters in the county game, Essex slow left-arm bowler Ray East was a worthy exception. He played for Essex from 1965 and 1984 and earned a justifiable reputation for being the finest clown on the county circuit.

Fielding out on the boundary, East engaged the crowd in constant banter. A favourite performance was to act like a stringless puppet which was out of control. He would then tell the spectators that they should be ready to stop the next ball because he was dizzy from being moved around so much by the captain. Always keen to improvise, he found the perfect opportunity one year at the Scarborough Festival where, in mid-afternoon, a mock gun-battle was being fought on a nearby lake. As East ran up to bowl, the sound of cannon fire reverberated across the ground, at which he collapsed in front of the umpire as if had been shot.

Going out to bat against Lancashire on a fiery pitch, East decided to have a quiet word with fast bowler Ken Shuttleworth on the way to the crease. He told Shuttleworth that if he pitched the next ball up and kept it straight, the bat would not prevent it hitting the stumps. Sensing an easy wicket, Shuttleworth duly bowled a half-volley on middle and leg. Possibly just to look convincing, East gave an almighty swing but instead of missing the ball, he sent it soaring over the ropes for six. To say the least, Shuttleworth was not amused and East knew he was in for a torrid time. So as the next ball came down, he threw away his bat, dived to the ground and lay flat on his stomach with his hands on his head. The anticipated bouncer flew harmlessly by.

East's antics soon spread to other members of the team and the Essex boys became known as a bunch who enjoyed a good laugh, on and off the field. There was the time when Keith Pont, weary through having to field at third man from both ends, grabbed a nearby bicycle at the end of the next over and pedalled around the boundary to his new position. And in a match with Cambridge University, paceman John Lever bowled the batsman a vicious half-volley with an orange which disintegrated when it hit the bat.