

Cricket Eccentrics

Joker in the Pack

Few cricketers of modern times have carved their personality on the game to the extent of Nottinghamshire and England's Derek Randall. His constant fidgeting, boyish enthusiasm and infectious grin made him a favourite with spectators across the world. Going out to bat, whether facing a humble county bowler or a Test superstar, Randall would shuffle and twitch at the crease as if he were a bag of nerves. Before nearly every delivery, he would go through a series of mannerisms, including tweaking his cap and the top of his left pad. Every bowler must have fancied his chances of getting him out, but as the majority discovered, where Derek Randall was concerned appearances could be deceptive.

His finest hour was in the 1977 Centenary Test at Melbourne where he made a brilliant 174 (for which he was sent 174 pork chops by a Nottingham butcher). In the heat of the battle, Randall turned somersault to evade a wicked bouncer from Dennis Lillee and ended up on bended knee, doffing his cap at the bowler. Lillee was not amused, later describing Randall as a 'bloody pain in the arse'. Coming from Lillee that was probably a compliment.

With Randall, the only thing that was expected was the unexpected. As a youngster on his first MCC tour, he enlivened an official reception in India by suddenly turning a cartwheel. The faces of his hosts were a mixture of amusement and amazement. When handed caviar on the same tour, he remarked: 'The blackcurrant jam tastes of fish to me.'

During a match with Yorkshire, he was fielding in the deep when John Hampshire lofted a ball from Notts spinner Bob White towards him. Randall positioned himself beneath the ball, but at the very last minute he appeared to bow his head and allow it to fall behind him. The umpire duly signalled a six and White was on his way to remonstrate with the fielder when Randall mischievously produced the ball from behind his back. Apparently, he had thought it would be a bit of a wheeze to try and catch the ball with his hands behind his back. Luckily for him, it worked – but it did little for his team-mates' blood pressure'.