

“Any school that defeats College at rugby or DHS at cricket can congratulate itself on having a first-rate team or a very favourable turn of fortune’s wheel”

Overview of Cricket at DHS from 1888 to 1966

The ancient game of cricket has long been a favourite with Natal. The game began, we are told, as a form of diversion for shepherds in south-eastern England. They used to use a shepherd’s crook as a bat and defend the wicket gate of a sheep pen. The Anglo-Saxon word for a crook is Cricc from which we get the word cricket. The crease was a cut made in the turf, probably by the same instrument. Some devotees of the game claim to have discovered references to it as early as the 13th and 14th centuries, but the first mention of it by name was when a witness in a lawsuit gave evidence of cricket being played at the grammar school in Guildford in 1550. In 1706 William Godwin wrote a poem in Latin which describes a game whose conditions differ very little from those settled by the committee that first laid down a universal code of laws in 1744. The first ‘county’ match was played between London and Kent in 1719. The game was then still played with a bent stick and remained so until about 1770, and about the same time a third stump was added to the two which formerly made the wicket. In the middle of the 18th century Hambledon in Hampshire was the ruling club and remained so until the formation of the Marylebone Cricket Club in 1787 and its purchase of a ground from Thomas Lord led to its becoming the final authority in the cricket world — a position M.C.C. still retains.

The Earliest Mention of Cricket

The earliest mention of cricket in connection with the School is an entry in the Council of Education Minutes of June 23, 1888, which states that Mr. Nicholas had asked for the grant of £9 for the purpose of laying out a cricket field. The request was refused. An entry later in the year (October 25, 1888) states, however, that Mr. Nicholas was to be refunded £4 which he had paid out of his own pocket for the same purpose. George Churton Collins, who was at the School from 1886 to 1894 gives a different origin for the pitch.

‘The ingenious manner in which the School obtained its first cricket pitch is well worth recording. The powers that be ordered the School to send in a sample of handwriting of every pupil therein. No particular subject was given as a basis to work on ; . . and the D.H.S. contingent one and all selected as their theme the inadequate and disgraceful condition of the cricket ground. This wholesale denunciation, dressed in all its schoolboys’ vivid colours, was not without effect. Within a month we rejoiced in a real gravel pitch; though it was dreary saving and scraping before we eventually became the possessors of a three-foot matting!’

The two incidents are probably related. The boys’ complaint either moved Mr. Nicholas or the Council of Education to action.

This was at the old Hospital School. When one considers that two schools, the

Model School and the Durban High School, were housed on one erf, 103 feet wide and 160 feet long, one wonders how any space could have been left for playing. Nevertheless the boys did have their football and cricket ground.

This is how Churton Collins describes it:

‘At one corner of the football field stood the school kitchen in glorious and aggressive isolation. One stops to wonder, nowadays, how the Head could have tolerated the inconvenience that must have been caused — especially in wet weather — by this alienation of the locus vivendi. At another corner ye tricky, dribbling outside-right must negotiate a small plantation of mulberry trees, and should he emerge there from with the rolling sphere yet at his feet, there still remains a guava and two orange trees twixt him and the coveted goal. When the ‘field’ became a cricket ground, ‘the busy positions of point and mid-on were unflinchingly occupied by the aforementioned solid brick kitchen. There was no Sports Committee in those days and if a new ball was required there was a general call

for coppers and ticeys until sufficient had been raised to buy a composition ball. 'We rarely had enough to invest in the luxury of a match ball, Churton Collins adds.

Only two matches

There were only two matches against Maritzburg College in his day. The first was won by the School on the Durban Oval (Albert Park) by one run. 'The College team was assisted by Mr. G. W. Sweeney, then an Inter-town player. The enthusiasm can better be imagined than described when this Philistine Goliath was bowled by Windham Kirkman for a 'duck'. The return match, he states, was won easily by the School on the College ground. He also records what is undoubtedly a record in the School annals — the dismissal of Forbes 1st XI (Berea Academy) for two runs. Cooley, our first Springbok cricketer, took a large hand in causing this debacle. The two schools were great rivals and the Academy made up for this by inflicting many crushing defeats upon the School in the football season.

The next recorded matches are the Greenacre Cup series which began in 1897 and came to an unlucky end on April 11, 1906. The cup was presented by Sir Benjamin Greenacre for annual competition between the Durban High School and Maritzburg College. Hilton College by invitation took part in the first two years and then withdrew, after winning on both occasions. Thereafter, it was altered to an annual Intertown School contest.

The series began with a resounding win for Hilton, which had previously beaten Maritzburg College. The scores were Hilton College: 203 for 8 wickets declared against 51 by the School all out. The following year D.H.S. defeated College (88 runs to 68) and were in turn defeated by Hilton. After that, School held the cup on four occasions (1899, 1900, 1903-4, and 1904-5) and the College on four occasions (1901, 1902, 1903 and 1905-6). These games were the scenes of tremendous enthusiasm and it is interesting to note how many stalwarts of that time are still with us; notably Archie Findlay, who captained the 1897 side; Dr. Norman Mann, captain of the 1904-5 side; and others come to mind such as 'Jock' Howden, Dick Burne, 1 Arbuthnot and the Fletchers. Some were to fall in later wars, the first being V. J. Christopher, who lost his life in the 1906 Rebellion. His score of 54 was the highest made by a D.H.S. player in this series. Another, C. Lake, fell at Delville.

Bitterness over last match

The match played on April 11, 1906, was destined to be the last played for the cup and was to leave a drop of bitterness at the bottom of it. The game was played at the Albert Park in Durban. The match began late (at 11 o'clock) but by 4 o'clock both sides were out, College leading by 16 runs. (College: 80; D.H.S.: 64). Then H. W. Chapman gave a taste of his later prowess as a Springbok when he and Brownrigg put on 46 runs in a quarter of an hour. After an hour the School declared with 88 runs for two wickets — remarkably fast scoring for those days. College went in to bat with an hour left for play and in that time lost 7 wickets for 23 runs (Chapman 4 for 11). It was a most exciting match, and the losers were perhaps a trifle unlucky in view of the collapse of the College in their second innings.

No one, of course, would speculate on what could have happened had they been allowed another ten minutes of play in this most unpredictable game in the world, but that is precisely what one contributor (probably E. A. Belcher) to the School Record did:

'When time was called (he wrote) the College still required 51 runs to win, and there is little doubt that another ten minutes would have seen the High School pull the match very finely out of the fire. Some adverse comment was over some unnecessary delays in the course of the match, but these (though, perhaps, hardly very sportsmanlike) were strictly in accordance with the rules of cricket, and certainly won the match for the visitors.'

These fatuous remarks brought an instant and wrathful response from the College, and was expressed in a resolution of their Games Committee. The view of the permanent stigma cast upon the College in page 89 of the D.H.S. Record, the Games Committee cannot see its way clear to have any further connection with the D.H.S. as far as sport is concerned.'

Fortunately tempers cooled down and the long and fruitful interchange of experience between the School and College, in sport as in so many other matters, was not allowed to die. Within a year friendly matches between the two schools

were resumed. Many a glorious match has taken place between the two since. And what changes of fortune! One thinks of Cliff Tutton's 169 not out against College in 1923, and his taking 8 wickets for 43 (all clean bowled); and I can well remember a strong team led by John Stirling being skittled out for 36 runs by J. M. Hattingh and N. I. Boast the following year. (Incidentally there were no less than three boys with the name of Boast in the team which brought about the undoing of D.H.S. in 1906.) What leather hunting their Fell and Freakes gave us at the end of the twenties, and who can forget that lovely, full-length, one-handed catch from Noel Bellville which dismissed the latter before he had scored on one occasion.

No more cups for cricket or rugby

But the two schools had learned their lesson from the game of 1906 and since then there have been no more cups for cricket or rugby, either between College and D.H.S. or the rest of the schools of Natal. The Greenacre Cup was put away in a cupboard and remained there until J. H. Snow became Head Master of the College when he suggested it might be used as a trophy for Inter-Schools Athletics, and as such it has been used since.

Never, during the long cavalcade of the years, have the relations between the two schools at cricket been happier than at the present time. Through the inspiration of Mr. R. M. Chambers and with the blessing of the Head Master, the School team have since 1959 been made guests of Maritzburg College for some part of the Michaelmas holidays. The boys play one another, visiting Transvaal schools, and other Natal schools. One cannot overestimate the good for themselves and for cricket in general of this happy experiment. And they have had some surprising victories. In 1960 they met a side collected by Jackie McGlew, and including N. A. T. Adcock, and came off handsomely the winners. McGlew made 60 before he was bowled (by Wannenburg) but Adcock failed in nine overs to take a wicket and had 50 runs scored off him.

Rugby, however, has always been the College's first love, as in general and with some qualifications, cricket has been that of D.H.S. The sharp winters of the uplands lend themselves to that exhilarating game, while here on the coast the warm, dry winter days drowse away and are, I suspect, simply regarded as waste of good cricket weather by enthusiasts like Mr. Theobald. At the time of writing both schools have unbeaten teams in their favourite spheres, and the supremacy dates back a dozen years or more so that during that period any school that defeats College at rugby or D.H.S. at cricket can congratulate itself on having a first-rate team or a very favourable turn of fortune's wheel. The advantage, of course, is purely temporary. Sooner or later the other schools will catch up. There is no such thing as a Divine Right to ascendancy given to any school.

No better example of this could be found than our experience at cricket with Michaelhouse. For many years we suffered a monotonous succession of defeats from this fine school and the first victory that can be recorded with any certainty occurred in 1930. Since then the School has steadily overhauled Michaelhouse's lead and at the time of writing the score between the two schools is exactly even — 29 games won each. This is how it should be; and this is probably the ultimate end of all games between two given schools of equal standing if the period is extended long enough. In the meantime the D.H.S. teams are proud to have set a target for other schools such as Michaelhouse set them. They have a lead at the moment, and judging from their present standard they are not likely to abandon it lightly. This also is how it should be.

Three epochs when DHS cricket reached superb heights

Everyone will have his own happy memories of the game, but here it will be possible to dilate only on three epochs when D.H.S. cricket reached superb heights — the period following the first Great War; that around 1930 to 1932, and finally the recent period culminating in 1962.

The first began with the accomplished batting of Jack Siedle, who gave no uncertain signs of his great cricketing future while he was at school, and it was augmented by the brilliant batting of Cliff Tutton and John Stirling, both of whom were fine bowlers as well. In 1921 the first match between the combined Transvaal schools and those of Natal took place. Five from the School were in the Natal team — Siedle, Preen, Tutton, Boardman and Gillatt. Natal schools won by six wickets, and all the School members did well, especially Tutton who made 130 runs in the second innings.

The next period was distinguished by fine cricketers in all the schools. The School had what perhaps was the finest opening shock attack that any school has ever had in the two fast bowlers, Dudley and Harry Sparks. It was a good opening pair that could withstand Harry's inswingers at one end and Dudley's outswingers at the other; and the latter was so economical in his action that he could go on bowling right through an innings if necessary. It is not surprising that until recently he held the record for the greatest number of wickets taken in Natal cricket in one season. (The record was beaten in 1962 by another Old Boy, Peter Dodds.) But there was plenty of material in the other schools to test the mettle of the two brothers, and one has only to mention Fell and Freakes at College, Wade at Hilton, and at Michaelhouse the greatest of them all, Alan Melville.

The match against Michaelhouse and Alan Melville

Perhaps the finest match in this series was fought out at Michaelhouse at the end of 1929. D.H.S. batted first and the two opening batsmen, Collins and Blakeway, put on the useful score of 70 before they were dismissed. Then there was a collapse and eight wickets were down for 126 runs. Defeat now stared them in the face. But the game was not over yet, and L. O. Waller, playing the first of his two great innings against Michaelhouse, went on batting unperturbedly and his carefully compiled 71, aided by a surprising 30 by his partner Gamley, who was playing above his usual level, changed the whole situation. A few wild hits by Dudley Sparks brought another eight runs, and when the innings closed Michaelhouse was faced with the prospect of having to pass the impressive total of 234 runs against some of the best bowling in the schools.

When Alan Melville came in to bat three wickets had fallen for 24 runs, the two openers having been caught by C. Bennett off Dudley's bowling (Harvey 6, Morphew 6) and Harry clean bowled Dales for 12. It was a distinctly black outlook for Michaelhouse and one that would have made most schoolboy captains consider the advisability of playing out time. The future South African captain, however, was made of other stuff. From the outset he sailed into the bowling and in ninety minutes made a whirlwind 141 before he fell lbw. to Dudley Sparks. It was the highest score made against the School, remarkable enough in any circumstances but still more when the quick loss of his wicket would have been certain disaster for Michaelhouse.

When this formidable opponent was gone, prospects still looked good for D.H.S. with nine wickets down for 214. The last over was played in an almost religious hush and, one may add, in a dim religious light. A boundary and a single would have won the game for Michaelhouse, but in the dusk it was a chance that few would have cared to risk against fierce, accurate bowling. As it was the light favoured the defenders for a chance was lost in the slips that would have decided the match. Turner and Payn, the last two batsmen, carried their bats with the score at 230, four runs behind the D.H.S. total. A great match had ended, perhaps fittingly, in a draw. During that day the players had seen every turn of fortune and skill possible in the great game of cricket. It was memorable chiefly for an intense duel between a great batsman and a great bowler, for against Melville's 141 runs must be set Dudley Sparks' no less impressive 6 wickets for 66 runs, but memorable also for Waller's stout-hearted knock which gave point to the great contest that was to follow.

Waller was to have his reward the following year, when again he alone kept his cool judgment in a welter of falling wickets and his 83 not only saved the day for the School but brought victory at last for D.H.S. against Michaelhouse. His was the only considerable score in a low-scoring match on both sides, Melville being no longer there to electrify his side.

These games were something of a turning point for D.H.S. cricket for in the next two years, under the careful coaching of Tregear and Goldwater, they achieved well-balanced sides which culminated in the unbeaten team of

1932. Some of them like M. C. F. Bennett and R. S. Getkate had been tried in the fire of the previous encounters already mentioned. The Sparks brothers had gone but opposing schools found C. J. Lowell's spinners no less deadly, backed up as they were by superb fielding.

The great team of 1962

Another thirty years was to pass before the D.H.S. was to produce another unbeaten team, and it is interesting to note that the small boy who sits in the front row of the 1932 team, one L. C. W. Theobald, was to be the guide and inspiration of the great 1962 team. For the truly majestic heights to which cricket has risen at the School during recent years has been almost entirely due to Mr. Theobald's intense devotion to the game. The School has been fortunate in having the very best of coaching from quite early times, A. D. Nourse and H. W. Chapman having assisted Mr. Martin when he was sportsmaster; and before Tregear we had (through the kindness of the Durban Cricket Union) the part-time services of Vogler, Blanckenberg and Kennedy, and after them the splendid and fruitful period of Tregear and Goldwater, but the flowering out of talent under Mr. Theobald has been quite exceptional both for this and any other school.

Besides the two great periods already mentioned we had that of the Tayfields in the late forties, but for power and rapidity of scoring the 1962 team must stand alone. Their rate of scoring, which averaged 81 runs per hour, is one we would fain see repeated in higher cricket. The two most outstanding batsmen were B. L. Irvine and B. A. Richards. Irvine's record of 1,310 runs in 21 matches must be hard to beat in school annals. Among them were five centuries; and Richards was not far behind with 898. Their respective averages were 68.95 and 49.88.

The season was remarkable for the number of partnerships of 100 and more. There were nine of them altogether.

1st Wicket (4):

166: Irvine and Heath versus St. Henry's.

151: Irvine and Heath versus Glenwood.

105: Irvine and Heath versus St. Charles's.

103: Irvine and Heath versus Hilton.

2nd Wicket (3):

197: Irvine and Richards versus Hilton.

132: Irvine and Richards versus Hilton.

109: Irvine and Richards versus MaritzburgCollege.

3rd Wicket (1):

124: Irvine and Theunissen versus MaritzburgCollege.

4th Wicket (1):

162: Richards and Theunissen versus Kearsney.

On three occasions this team scored more than 300 runs in an innings (338 for 3 v. Nel's Rust C.C.; 304 for 4 v. Kearsney; 302 for 4 v. Hilton) and the longest time taken was 187 minutes!

Irvine was captain of the S.A. Schools XI at Cape Town in January, 1963, and Richards and Heath played in the South African Schools XI which toured England in June-July, 1963. Richards was chosen as captain. The team played against nine of the great public schools there and did not lose a match in spite of the unfamiliar conditions and

frequent wet wickets. Perhaps their greatest feat was the innings defeat of Winchester College. Both the School representatives did well, but Richards in particular won unstinted praise for his captaincy, batting and wicket-keeping. The team also played against the second teams of several counties. Cricket experts praised the high standard of play of the team as a whole, and the School can well be proud of the no small part in it of our representatives.

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God's Little Acre

The subject of the soubriquets given by boys to masters has always been a fascinating one. Sometimes they are extremely apt, and sometimes just plainly but intriguingly, idiotic. For Leslie Christian Wilfred Theobald, however, has been reserved the oddest and greatest of school appellations. For many years he has been known to all of us, masters, boys and Old Boys, by the shortened form of his surname, Theo. Then, quite recently, some sixth-form etymologist discovered that 'theos' was the Greek form of the Latin, deus, a god. So 'Theo' became 'God' for the boys, and by an amusing extension of the same idea, the cricket pitch that he so zealously tends, became 'God's little acre'.

There is nothing derogatory, or even irreverent, in the periphrase. His own brilliant teaching of Latin has taught the boys that every Roman garden hid its own tutelary deity; and it is in that role they see him, and the cricket pitch sanctus sanctorum of the playing field, the garden path up which his teams had led to many doughty opponents, the grove sacred to the god, Theocricketus.

The above was taken from The DHS Story 1866 – 1966 published on the occasion of the school's centenary in 1966. The book was written by Hubert Jennings with an acknowledgement to LCW Theobald for the section on sport.

Five Springboks: *Left to right—Jon Fellowes-Smith, Geoff Griffin, Colin Wesley, Trevor Goddard and Hugh Tayfield.*



Above the five DHS Old Boys were selected for the 1960 Springbok cricket trip to England. Four DHS Old Boys were selected for the first two tests against Australia in 1970. They were Trevor Goddard, Dennis Gamsy, Lee Irvine, and Barry Richards.