

History of DHS Old Boys Cricket 1890 – 1966

By LCW Theobald

Games have played a prominent part in the development of the D.H.S. tradition and the School's record is a proud one. Certainly the feats of the School and its Old Boys on the cricket field have won great fame. That nineteen Old Boys of the School have played cricket for South Africa (a number unsurpassed by any other South African school) and that D.H.S. boys have won twenty-four South African Schools caps at the Nuffield Cricket Week (second only to Bishop's) surely indicate that cricket has flourished on that small thirteen-acre expanse on the Berea.

It seems that cricket of a sort was played by D.H.S. boys in the earliest days — rather primitive cricket at first, no doubt, played in most primitive surroundings on the sandy soil that fringed the Bay. Writing of the 1870's in the D.H.S. Record, T. T. P. was moved to say: "Cricket was very rarely played and none of the boys excelled at the game later in life." School games seem to have languished in those early days for (continues T. T. P.) "though Mr. Sandford made an effort to start cricket, tennis and football, the want of ground and lack of enthusiasm on the part of the boys killed his good intentions". The move to the Berea in 1894 gave a fillip to games. The presentation of the Greenacre Cup for competition between the Maritzburg College and the Durban High School in 1897 undoubtedly aroused greater enthusiasm for cricket, and the foundation of a Games Club and a House system in 1902 gave games at D.H.S. for the first time that character that has been familiar to all Old Boys of this century.

The 1890's

Despite the lugubrious note sounded by T. T. P. it is evident that by the 1890's some Old Boys of the School were beginning to make their mark in South African cricket. E. G. Lamport (at School from 1880 to 1884) played cricket for Durban while still at school and in 1889 he played for Natal. G. C. Collins (1886-1894) played for Natal in 1898 and captained Natal in 1903. Moreover, within the space of two years the School was to produce its first two South African cricketers. G. H. Shepstone (1892-96) played for the Transvaal in 1898 and for South Africa in 1899 v. Lord Hawke's English touring team. B. C. Cooley (1886-90) was a member of the South African cricket team that toured England in 1901. Add to this 11st S. J. Pegler (1901-02) who played for South Africa in sixteen Test matches between 1909 and 1924 and we already have a reasonably imposing 11st of excellent players from a school where "none of the boys excelled at the game later in life".

It seems tolerably certain that the game was well established at the School by the turn of the century. The first number of the D.H.S. Magazine (April 1901) records that the 1900-01 season "was a very successful one: out of a grand total of 18 matches we have won 13, lost 3 and drawn the rest". At that time the School played in the men's league and the majority of the matches were played against men.

Old Boys Club founded

It was in 1901 that the Old Boys Club was founded and this seems to have led to a spate of activity: matches at cricket and football were played between the School and the Old Boys and there were numerous social activities. The first recorded cricket match between the School and the Old Boys took place on the Oval (now known as Albert Park) in December, 1901. The Old Boys were bundled out for 55 and the School knocked up 78. The scribe for the D.H.S. Magazine records that the Old Boys departed "better pleased at the strides their

old school had taken in the manly English national game". There was some truth in this: regular matches and even some professional coaching were now a feature of D.H.S. cricket, though the indifference of the Colonial administration to the condition of the school playing fields evoked the wrath of the D.H.S. Magazine on more than one occasion.

Nevertheless there was little sign of the formation of an Old Boys Cricket Club. A move in that direction occurred in 1906 (or 1907) when a team styling itself "Old Hessians" played in the Second League for a year or two. Regular players were A. E. Carlisle, Horace Chapman (later a Springbok cricketer) Jock Howden (later president of both the Natal and the South African Cricket Associations) and Graham MacKeurtan (who invented the name — a puckish corruption of Old H.S.-ians). This name was revived in the 1950's by a group of elderly Old Boy cricketers who played friendly Sunday cricket for some seasons.

The best Old Boy cricketers, however, continued to play for the older and established Durban cricket clubs such as Queen's Park (later to become Berea). By 1924 three more Old Boys had played for South Africa — H. W. Chapman, D. P. Conyngham and H. G. Deane. The great H. W. Taylor had attended the D.H.S. but his formative cricket years were spent at Michaelhouse, and one hesitates to claim him as a D.H.S. product.

After the Great War

It was not until after the Great War of 1914-18 that the Old Boys Cricket Club made its bow with teams in the Durban Senior and Second Leagues. Their first match was played on the Albert Park Oval on November 22 and 29, 1919, against the Waverley G.G., and ended auspiciously enough in a win for the Old Boys. The names of those who played in this first match are worth recording: G. P. MacFarlane, E. E. Grice, H. Rachman, G. J. Risley, N. G. Dawber, X. de Gersigny, N. E. O. Jones, F. E. Colepeper, W. F. Hearne, J. G. Allsopp and H. S. Dyer. Waverley were bowled out for 194 (de Gersigny took five wickets for 35) and the following Saturday afternoon the Old Boys scored an exciting win with a total of 213 (MacFarlane 70, Risley 45, Jones 27 and Allsopp 29).

So began the long and illustrious story of the Old Boys Cricket Club in Durban and Natal cricket. In the 39 seasons since then the Old Boys have won the Senior League Championship eleven times and have been second nine times — a record surpassed only by the Berea Cricket Club (now Berea-Rovers) who have won the championship fifteen times. These two clubs have on the whole dominated Natal cricket for forty-five years. The Old Boys have had dozens of Natal cricketers in their ranks and a wealth of South African cricketers. Thirteen South African cricketers have played for the Club (though at the time of their selection for South Africa they were not necessarily members of the Cricket Club). They have been: H. G. Deane, V. G. Robbins, I. J. Siedle, J. F. W. Nicolson, E. L. Dalton, J. A. J. Christy, D. V. Dyer, H. J. Tayfield, T. L. Goddard, G. M. Griffin, G. Wesley, D. Gamsy and R. Dumbrell. (Another Old Boy of the School who won South African colours was J. P. Fellows-Smith — but he never played for the Club.)

Great Years

The 1920's and 1930's were great years. After a modest start in the 1920-21 season, the Old Boys were second in the League championship for the next four years running. They won it for the first time in 1925-26. In the nine seasons between 1925 and 1934 they won the championship five times and were second twice. In this period the batting strength was tremendous and surely never matched since. There were four Springbok cricketers in the 1925-26 side — I. J. Siedle, J. F. W. Nicolson, V. G. Robbins and E. L. Dalton — and in

addition four others who played for Natal — H. Fellows-Smith, G. E. Tutton, G. P. MacFarlane and J. G. Stirling. They won the championship in 1927-28 with largely the same team. They were champions again in 1930-31, 1932-33 and 1933-34. This was indeed a great period in the Club's history, matched only by the splendid sides of 1959-62. The old stalwarts were still playing: Siedle, Dalton, Tutton, Fellows-Smith and Nicolson (the latter up to 1931) were the solidest phalanx of batting the Club has ever had. J. A. J. Christy, another Springbok cricketer, made a brief mysterious appearance in 1931 — mysterious for he had never attended the School. Prominent younger players were N. V. Bellville and W. B. Gadsden (who took 8 wickets in his first match for Natal against the Transvaal in 1928). It was in this period that some preferred to play for the Old Boys 2nd XI or even for other clubs — so seldom did they get a knock in the 1st XI where week after week Siedle, Nicolson, Dalton, Tutton and Go. piled up the runs. In 1929 Nicolson and Siedle established the record for an opening partnership in Durban cricket with 290 v, Stamford Hill. They also held the South African record for the first wicket with 424 v. O.F.S. in 1926-27. Siedle later established the South African Test record opening partnership with Bruce Mitchell (260 v, England at Gape Town in 1931). Siedle had a tremendous season in the mid-thirties: in club cricket alone he scored 1,025 in 13 innings with an average of 113! On another occasion the Old Boys scored 424 for 6 wickets in one afternoon's batting (255 minutes).

Siedle, Dalton, Tutton, Fellows-Smith and Bellville continued to play until 1939-40 and the Club continued to be a great force in Natal cricket although it was only in 1937-38 that they won the Senior Championship again. By now young players were making their contribution — notably R. R. Yuill, H. E. Dalton, F. A. Roach and G. S. Whitelaw, all of whom were to do such yeoman service after the Second World War.

After the Second World War

When the threads were picked up again after the War it was this younger generation that took over although some of the old names still appeared — E. L. Dalton played for several more seasons. But it was players such as R. R. Yuill, F. A. Roach and Howard Dalton who were to carry the Club for almost ten years. Some of the younger players came and went — such as T. L. Goddard, D. B. King and A. Tayfield. Two others in H. Knowles and K. H. D. Solomon captained the Club for short spells. The Old Boys won the Senior League Championship in 1947-48 and again in 1950-51. For the next eight seasons the Club had only fair success. H. J. Tayfield made a brief appearance: J. M. Kaplan joined the ranks after many seasons with Umbilo. But Yuill, Dalton and others were on the verge of retirement, and it was a group of promising young players from the School that was to bring about a renaissance in Old Boys cricket. In rapid succession C. Wesley, R. Dumbrill, D. Gamsy, G. M. Griffin, joined the club. It was these talented young cricketers under the energetic captaincy of J. M. Kaplan and stiffened by seasoned players in P. M. Dodds and L. Keats who were to form the nucleus of the three fine sides of 1959-62 when the Old Boys won the Senior Championship three years in succession.

Wesley, Griffin, Gamsy and Dumbrill have all played for South Africa and P. M. Dodds has been singularly unfortunate not to do so.

It is difficult to compare these latter sides with those of the halcyon days before the War. The pitches in the 1930's were undeniably easier for the batsmen: consequently the batsmen of the 1959-62 period did not reproduce the flood of runs that Siedle, Dalton and others did in their day. Nevertheless it is undeniable that the bowling and fielding of the 1959-62 sides were better. Dodds, Griffin, Keats, R. Dumbrill and Moody were all prolific wicket-takers

and in the 1961-62 season Dodds set a record for Natal cricket by taking 100 wickets in club cricket alone (average 8.94).

This account of the Old Boys at cricket has attempted to cover a hundred years and is inevitably a sketchy one. It has concentrated on the leading cricketers through the years and has largely ignored the hundreds of others who in their humbler spheres have enjoyed their cricket just as much as their fellows in the more rarefied atmosphere of provincial and Test cricket. Others too have worked tirelessly in the background at the unspectacular but necessary administrative tasks that keep the game going. To them I offer my apologies. But cricketers being the odd people that they are, they are without doubt perfectly content to have played their part, to applaud their heroes from the pavilion and to bask in their reflected glory.

This article was taken from the DHS Story 1866 - 1966



A Great Old Boys' Team — The 1st XI, 1937-38.

Back row: L. C. W. Theobald, F. A. Roach, Vaisey P. Court,
R. A. H. Millar, C. J. P. Hitchens, C. J. Lowell.

Front row: Eric Dalton, Jack Siedle, N. V. Bellville,
H. (Barty) Fellowes-Smith, R. R. Yuill.



Gordon Noyce turning the first sod for the Old Boys' Club.

Natal Mercury



TO THE MEMORY OF THOSE
OLD BOYS WHO SERVED
THEIR COUNTRY WELL

THIS STONE WAS LAID BY L. C. GRICE ESQ,
CHAIRMAN DURBAN HIGH SCHOOL
AND OLD BOYS' MEMORIAL TRUST
6th OCTOBER 1954

Natal Daily News

Leo Grice laying the Foundation Stone of the Clubhouse.