

FORM AND FIGURES: New Zealand Cricket Under The Plunket System

SUMMER has gone and with the coming of winter the bright picture of cricket fades into memories of form, of tactics, of mistakes; of men who played, of men who were left out, of matches won and matches that should have been won; of matches lost. New Zealand cricket is organised, as the irreverent say, around the Plunket System. This article reviews the Plunket Shield series.

Without Vivian, New Zealand's best all-rounder, Auckland retained the Plunket Shield. But in Scott and Wallace she had two class batsmen who got among the runs, an excellent wicket-keeper in Blandford who is always good for runs, an all-rounder of ability in Weir, and two bowlers, Cowie and Cleverley, who could always be depended on to keep the batsmen guessing. Of the 54 wickets claimed by the Auckland bowlers, Cowie took 16 and Cleverley 14. Cleverley, a man of pace some years ago, bowled a fast-medium ball this year. But when he bowled his faster ball, it was fast and caught many batsmen napping.

Of Auckland's 1,507 runs from the bat, Scott (316) and Wallace (297) made 613 of them. Neither Matheson nor Whitelaw showed form consistent with former years, while Carson had only two innings for 38 runs. He startled the country in his first Shield season (1936/7) by amassing 500 runs with his four innings of 290, 194, 12 and 4. Against Otago that season he and Whitelaw made a world 3rd wicket record of 445 runs. Carson's total is 841 runs. He still tops the averages though he dropped this year from 100.37 to 84.10. Next to Carson in all Shield averages comes Scott who has made 654 runs at 72.66. Sale, apart from a 97, did not show the consistency of last year. Cowie's 16 wickets for 276 runs bring his total to 91 for 1,793. Matheson's 3 wickets were obtained at the high cost of 34.33 runs per wicket. His bag is now 116. He reached his century of wickets two years ago, and was the ninth to accomplish this rare feat. Others who have done so are:

Badcock	-	164	for	3,531
Merritt	-	141	"	3,207
McGirr	-	139	"	3,309
Dunning	-	129	"	3,124
S. G. Smith	-	121	"	2,448
Read	-	121	"	3,222
Dickinson	-	111	"	2,740
Brice	-	108	"	2,377

When Captain Wallace made his 211, he became the seventh batsman to register a 200 in the Shield games. His predecessors were: Blunt (338 N.O. and 221), Hiddleston (212 and 204), Kortlang (214 N.O.), Carson (290), Page (206), and Cox (204).

Weir has now totalled 2,011 runs. Only six other batsmen have made 2,000 runs in Shield games. Headed by Blunt with 2,597, Hiddleston follows with 2,571, McGirr 2,341, Page 2,140, Mills 2,044, and Badcock 2,015. Knocking at the

door are Whitelaw 1,963, Dempster 1,940, Kerr 1,921, and Cromb 1,882.

From the bat, Auckland scored 1,507 runs, and 39 wickets fell—average 38.64.

Canterbury Men

Canterbury, runners up to Auckland, lost 42 wickets for 1,365 scored from the bat—an average of 32.50.

Of the Canterbury men, Donnelly was outstanding. He was second to Scott in both aggregates (302) and averages (75.50). This was by far his best season in Plunket Shield Cricket. As brilliant as formerly, he showed more solidity in his batting. Donnelly has now scored 637 runs to average 33.52. Last season was a disastrous one for him. He had six innings for 79 runs! Yet strangely enough he had an excellent Club season. This year his club form was very mediocre. The Canterbury selector evidently had no fears as to his real ability. His left hand slows have netted him 11 wickets for 474 runs in all Shield games.

Cromb owes 171 of his 238 runs to the Wellington match—also 5 of his 8 wickets. This was Cromb's big moment and he made the most of it. Wellington paid the penalty in this game for taking the field without a slow-bowler. Selector Christopherson was evidently lulled into a sense of false security after the Auckland match. But whereas the Basin wicket for the first match was a fast bowler's paradise, that prepared for the Canterbury Game fairly howled for a man who could toss them up. Cromb owed his bowling success to length and flight and he bowled like a champion. When he went in to bat, after Donnelly and O'Brien had taken toll of the bowling, all bowlers came easily to him. He was eventually run out. In all Shield Cricket, Cromb has taken 92 wickets for 2,878 runs. O'Brien, after a few seasons for Leicestershire County, showed good and consistent form. Franks figures are now 698 runs for 19 innings.

Hadlee was more consistent than last year. His 148 runs bring his total to 1,172—average 34.47.

Kerr had a disastrous season. His 5 innings totalled 35 runs and 28 of these were made in one innings. In 55 completed innings Kerr has averaged 34.92.

Roberts was consistent with the bat and bowled steadily. His Shield figures are 1,668 runs at an average of 35.48. He has taken 47 wickets for 1,295. He played his first Shield game in 1927-8, scoring 7 in his one innings. In 1928/9, in 1.3 (one point three) overs, he took the wickets of Cavanagh and the two Alloos for 4 runs. These were his first wickets in Shield games.

Menzies failed to get going and never looked like equalling his 318 runs of last season. He has now made 615 runs in 19 completed innings. Much was

expected of Anderson but, apart from one innings of 70, he did little. He will come again.

Poverty In Otago

Otago had little to enthuse over. Fifteen players were called on as against Auckland 12 and Canterbury and Wellington 13. Only 988 runs were scored from the bat and 49 wickets fell—average 20.16.

Fraser, apart from his 118 against Wellington, batted consistently well. His century was his first in first-class cricket. The best of his 3 seasons.

Robertson's highest score was 83 which is his highest in Shield Cricket. A dour batsman, Robertson has amassed 461 runs in his 3 seasons.

Moloney was not the cricketer of former years. In 5 innings he aggregated only 70 runs and he took 7 for 299. His Shield figures are 1,378 runs, average 27.56, and 29 wickets for 1,249 runs.

Elmes had moderate success with the bat and took 9 wickets for 254. His full Shield figures read 1,463 runs for 61 completed innings and 58 wickets for 2,055 runs.

Lemin was by far the most successful Otago bowler. His 14 wickets cost only 18.92 each. He has never bowled better.

Lemin played for Otago in 1929-30 and 1930-31 but was not called upon again until 1938-39. He has taken 24 for 577.

A newcomer, Cameron, played his first Shield game against Wellington and got 26 and 18. His 26 was the highest in his side's first innings of 138. More should be heard of him. None of the others showed consistency with either bat or ball.

Shocks For Wellington

Wellington lost 57 wickets for 1,167 runs scored from the bat—an average of 20.47. The new Wellington selector gave followers of the game not a few shocks during the season. The first of these was the dropping of Lamason from the Captaincy yet still retaining him in the team. The player himself would admit that, if he were not in as Captain, his form of the past two seasons did not warrant his inclusion in the team. Yet I consider him next to Cromb as the best Captain in the country—particularly where the handling of slow-bowlers is concerned.

Perhaps that is why Mr. Christopherson gave him the sack, for herein lay shock No. 2. The Wellington team in its engagements with Auckland and Canterbury took the field burdened with the knowledge that they had not a recognised slow bowler with them who could tempt the batsmen. It transpired that for the Auckland game the wicket was what pace bowlers dream about; but the selector was not to know that. In a broadcast talk prior to the Auckland

game, Mr. Christopherson assured listeners that this department of the game—slow bowling—could be left to the capable fingers of the new skipper, McLeod. His optimism was hardly justified by McLeod's previous Shield figures: 8 wickets for 440 runs, average 55. He had taken his last wicket (Bill Cunningham's) in the 1930-31 season. His 2 wickets for 60 this year make his figures 10 for 500. Ongley, too, was cited as being something of a mystery bowler. We didn't swallow that because we have seen Joe bowl. The dropping of this young player after the Auckland match (he was subsequently reinstated, on Rice's defection, for the Otago game) was another of the selector's bombshells. Tom Lowry (no mean judge of a cricketer) was willing enough to have Ongley open for New Zealand; but Mr. Christopherson takes no pains to hide the fact that he thinks Joe is just "a flash in the pan" cricketer.

The resurrection of Airey heightened interest, too. Prior to this season Airey had played for Wellington in 1927-28 for scores of 8 and 19; and in 1929/30 for 0 and 47. This season he made 89 runs in six innings. These figures hardly justify his selection, particularly when so many younger and fitter players were endeavouring to make the team. At least one of these young players, Thompson, by his fielding alone would have been worth every one of Airey's 89 runs to Wellington.

"Opening Batsmen"

But the most amazing (I almost wrote "amusing") feature of Mr. Christopherson's selections is known only to those who heard his broadcasts. In the first of these he stated that at that particular time, five of the batsmen with the best figures in club games were *opening batsmen*. Though the figures of all five guaranteed them consideration, nevertheless only two of them could be selected as opening batsmen. If all of them were in the team, three would have to bat in unaccustomed positions on the list to their detriment. Mr. Christopherson went to some length to explain the why's and whereof's, such as: in batting further down the list than usual they would find the wicket more worn than they were accustomed to — "holes in the wicket" received special mention—having to face spin bowlers straight away instead of the expected battery, etc. "No," said Mr. Christopherson, "I want only two opening batsmen in my team"—or words to that effect. Well and good. We admired Mr. Christopherson for stating his facts. But we'd have admired him more if he had stuck to them. For the Otago match (original selection) Tindill, Rice, Wrigley, du Chateau and Heppburn were among the chosen. All five are recognised opening batsmen. Truly a volte face!

With the selector at sixes and sevens with himself, is it any wonder that the

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