



## PUKEKURA PARK IN 1985

### CENTRAL DISTRICTS v OTAGO - SHELL CUP

Large crowds attended this Christmas Holidays match, attracted by the coloured clothing and limited overs concept. The sightscreens are larger and black, to enable the white ball to be seen, and the pitch ran North - South. The Southern terrace was still the best viewing point.

## Success Again 1984-1994

As Taranaki entered its centenary year the past decade represented several satisfying aspects of the province's cricket; twice holder of the U-Bix Cup (the successor to the Hawke Cup), some outstanding individual performances to complement the team successes, Pukekura Park still a major venue for first class cricket be it domestic or international, the coaching structure which was a model for other associations and with a major local sponsor ensuring its viability, administration moving from the volunteer to professional basis, a new scoreboard for Pukekura Park, and a six-fold increase in the association's financial equity.

This period saw a continuance of the representative team's consistency of performance but this was extended to the U-Bix Cup challenges where, besides the two successful challenges, there were close (and frustrating) matches with Southland who were, with Nelson, the perennial holders. In 1985 Taranaki, for the last time, challenged Nelson for the Hawke Cup – Taranaki gained a first innings lead of 40 runs but in the end failed to win outright by 19 runs. Wayne Martin, with his accurate medium pace bowling, dominated the match capturing 10 wickets. Then in 1988, at Rangiora, Taranaki captured the U-Bix Cup from North Canterbury – winning a close encounter by 19 runs on the first innings – Alistar Jordan, in his 40<sup>th</sup> year and bowling 39 overs at fast medium pace, captured 6 for 61. Unfortunately Taranaki were to hold the trophy for only one game, for in the first defence of the next season Northland, fielding three international players in Lance and Chris Cairns and Bryan Young, proved too strong. Taranaki, batting first, scored too quickly, being dismissed for 328 early into the second day. Northland, being given almost two days to score the runs, did just that and lost only three wickets. The next time Taranaki held the Cup they had learnt this lesson well.

### WINNERS OF THE U-BIX CUP 1988



*Standing: Peter Plumtree (Manager), Alistar Jordan, John Kensington, Geoff Hall (Selector), Thelma Luxton (Scorer), Stephen Robertson, Rodney Brown, Tim Scriven, Ross Glover, Ian Snook (Captain)*

*Kneeling: Grant Gutschlag, Brian Richards, Mark O'Neill, Roger Stachurski, Peter Blackburn*

*The U-Bix Cup was won from North Canterbury in the last challenge of the season.*

Following this defeat Taranaki sustained four expensive and fruitless challenges against Southland – southern weather and obduracy being too much to overcome. In 1989 (for within the same season Southland had won the Cup from Northland and Taranaki had gained the right to challenge) three days at Invercargill allowed Taranaki only to score 84 for 4. Then, in the next season (1990), in another rain affected game, Stephen Robertson dominated the match scoring 169 in Taranaki's 367 for 8 declared and followed that up in taking 4 for 54 in Southland's reply of 232 for 6 (a moral victory!). Taranaki returned in 1991 and, in a match which had to have its dates changed due to floods in Southland, scored 311 (for this, and the previous season, recording the highest challengers total) only for Southland to reply with 314 for 5. The fourth challenge in four seasons was another rain affected match with Taranaki scoring 156 in reply to Southland's 176.

Finally in 1994 Taranaki's persistence and consistency won through – Marlborough now held the U-Bix Cup and in a low scoring game dominated by bowlers Taranaki overcame a 10 run first innings deficit to win the Cup outright by 2 wickets. At Pukekura Park a fortnight later Taranaki withstood Hamilton's challenge with Mark O'Neill and Rodney Brown scoring centuries, and so ensured that in Taranaki's centenary year their representative team was the pre-eminent national minor association side.

In this decade there were many outstanding individual performances: Rodney Brown, in his first match for Taranaki, scored 109 not out against Wanganui in a one day game. Four seasons later, in 1989, he established a new batting record for Taranaki scoring 200 not out against Hutt Valley in an innings which included six sixes and eighteen fours. Between his first century and setting the record, Brown had also been chosen as New Zealand's Young Player to Lords (thus following Gary Robertson). He was also selected for Central Districts, captaining the team in 1995-96. Brown, a right handed batsman, would rank with Henry Sampson as the most exciting and dashing batsman in the last forty years of Taranaki cricket and he had the added skill of being an accurate medium paced bowler, especially in the context of one day cricket. When he made his record score he surpassed the new mark set by Mark O'Neill the previous season when he had scored 168 against Nelson in the Chapple Cup final. O'Neill, together with Stephen Robertson and Ross Glover, made up a trio of stylish batsmen who gave Taranaki a very talented top batting order which complemented the highly experienced duo of Brian Richards and Ian Snook, who both made more than 100 appearances for Taranaki. Richards established the aggregate runs record for a Taranaki player, scoring 4947 in his 19 year career which included a record seven centuries. Snook holds second place in the aggregates with 3460 runs.

By the end of this period Glen Sulzburger had established himself as a leading batsman – a graceful left hander in the style of Lawrie Miller, he had gained selection in the New Zealand Youth XI tour of India in 1992 and was also an accurate off-break bowler.

Taking over Alistar Jordan's role as Taranaki's strike bowler was Warren Wisneski, a highly combative fast-medium bowler for Inglewood and who, like Jordan, was also a gritty lower order batsman. Russell Dempster was the sides left arm spinner in the 1990's, with Jason Holland and Paul Hughes succeeding Peter Blackbourn in the wicket-keeping position.

In these ten seasons Taranaki played 76 games for 19 outright wins and 24 first innings leads – a success rate of 57%, very similar to the previous period, but with the Cup victories, more tangible measures of success. Geoff Hall held the position of sole selector from 1982 to 1992, as a former fast

bowler who had played for Taranaki in the 1950's, he had the gift of being able to assess and target players (especially batsmen's) weaknesses and the winning of the U-Bix Cup from Canterbury Country in his time was just compensation for the frustrating challenges against Southland. He was succeeded by Peter Plumtree, another former representative player, who crowned his selecting career by the win against Marlborough. He had previously been the Emerging Players selector, in which the team had consistently performed well in this Central Districts competition.

In the 1990-91 season the association obtained significant sponsorship of the representative team from Yarrows The Bakers, a firm centred in Manaia who had a policy of sponsoring Taranaki sport – rugby and netball were also beneficiaries of their vision. The team became known as Yarrows Taranaki and, significantly, the sponsors required standards of performance both on and off the field that was appropriate and desirable. The previous season misbehaviours at a Central Districts trials weekend had seen four Taranaki players excluded from representative selection for that season.

For most of the 1980's New Plymouth Old Boys continued their dominance of the senior/premier competition and yet, by the end of that decade, that club no longer existed, merging with Vogeltown. The amalgamation of urban clubs was very much a feature of this period – New Plymouth combining with Marist and the Hawera clubs forming Hawera United. In both cases the teams gained early success in becoming provincial champions. The country clubs, long a feature of Taranaki cricket, remained, often as one team clubs, but acting as a focus for their district and continuing an existence which went back to the beginnings of cricket in Taranaki.

With the beginning of a provincial competition at the senior level, two grades were established to cater for the existing divisional senior clubs, being named Senior 1<sup>st</sup> and Senior 2<sup>nd</sup>. By 1985 the titles were changed to Premier and Senior with automatic promotion and relegation between the two grades. These grades each had eight teams and quickly there developed an ongoing debate as to whether six or eight teams was the most appropriate for Taranaki cricket – each annual meeting featured impassioned arguments either way but in the end the voting was always supportive of the status quo i.e. eight teams.

Pukekura Park still continued to be a major venue for first class cricket although the changing nature of the game was revealed in that eight Shell Trophy, ten Shell Cup (one day) and eight international matches were staged there in that period. An innovation was the scheduling of two Shell Cup games back to back which did attract the hoped-for crowds. Martin Crowe, who was the outstanding New Zealand batsman of this period, had shown a liking for the Pukekura Park pitch throughout his career and here, in 1990, established a Central Districts record in scoring 242 against Otago.

On a level with the majesty of Martin Crowe was the excitement of the 1992 World Cup match staged at Pukekura Park between Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe, with the former winning in a game which saw 625 runs scored from 100 overs and only 11 wickets lost.

In 1990 the Park was the venue for the Shell Cup semi final between Central Districts and Wellington with the match being screened live on national television – another first for the sports ground. Taranaki also entertained international visitors to the park – Holland in 1988 and Berkshire the following year.

Ground facilities were also markedly improved – following player criticism in 1988 the downstairs pavilion was gutted and enlarged to provide better changing space whilst the upstairs catering and viewing areas were modernised and extended. The District Council named the redesigned pavilion after Brian Bellringer, recognising his services to cricket and the district as long serving Chairman of Parks.

The scoreboard built in the 1950's finally succumbed to the elements and physically collapsed in 1993. A new scoreboard, which retained the characteristics of the old one but could be worked at from two levels and from the rear rather than ladders at the front, was constructed in time for Taranaki to host the two North and South Island matches over Labour Weekend in 1994. But, whereas the cost in 1953 was \$2425, its replacement some forty years on was \$38775. The association was forced to raise a loan of \$18000 from the New Plymouth District Council, with executive members acting as surety.

Throughout this period the association continued its coaching programme, initially with coaches whose strength lay in their own cricketing prowess. When Yarrows took up their sponsorship of the representative team they also undertook funding of the coaching programme, seeking a complete coverage for all Taranaki schools. With a now secure financial base coaches were selected for administrative and management skills, combining provincial coverage with age group development. The success of this change of focus was seen in the Taranaki scheme being regarded as the model for other areas.

At the national level the Post Office was sponsoring the laying of artificial pitches for schools cricket so this gave further impetus to the spread of cricket.

The JAB continued to administer age-group cricket at this level but still regarded as irksome Taranaki's rein on financial matters – a relationship which was common throughout the Central Districts area.

In 1985 the executive of TCA became responsible for all cricket within Taranaki but with lower grade cricket still organised on the two division concept. This was to continue throughout the period but the problem of finding sufficient enthusiasts to administer and manage club, representative and first class cricket was not resolved. Annual reports continued to regret the resignation of executive members of the work load – it was becoming increasingly apparent that administration was no longer able to rely solely on volunteers. In 1987 B.Bellringer, who had retired as Central Districts secretary in 1982, was appointed the association's treasurer and then the next year he became secretary again, after an absence of 14 years. But on this occasion it was a paid position, though there was at annual meetings ongoing debate on the real worth of this decision.

In 1990 E.P.Allen, who had been the association's patron since 1966, died and he was succeeded by S.H.Betts, whose family had long been intimately associated with Taranaki cricket. His younger son, M.H.Betts, had been executive chairman in the mid 1980's and had been instrumental in introducing a more businesslike approach to the association's affairs. By the end of the period N.Frampton had become chairman, having been secretary in the 1980's, and brought to the office a whimsical approach which built up an effective and united committee. In 1990 B.Bellringer was elected as the North Island Minors representative on the Domestic Committee of New Zealand Cricket – the first Taranakian to hold an elected national position.



Seasonal finances continued their almost traditional pattern of feasts and famines but nevertheless overall the financial strength of the association increased markedly over the period. In 1984 the next equity was \$7113, by 1994 the amount was \$41,462 and more than fifty percent of the new scoreboard cost of \$38,775 had been directly funded from TCA's own resources. Innovative ways were still used to assist with fund raising – in 1985 the sale of bobby calves raised over \$4200 - but the major change in the sources of finances came through the gaining of corporate sponsorship from Yarrows and DB. This gave the association assured and ongoing sources of income which enabled long term commitments in coaching and representative expenses. Surety of income produced assured playing field performances.

Thus as the association entered its second century it could look forward to the future with confidence - an experienced and successful representative team with promising players coming through from the schools; a well structured coaching scheme; a sound financial base; an experienced core of administrators; and a quality venue at Pukekura Park that ensured a continuance of first class cricket in the province.

#### **HAPPINESS IS REGAINING THE U-BIX CUP 1994**



*Standing: Trevor Smith (Manager), Brent Coombe, Warren Wisneski, Hamesh Goonewardene, Peter Plumtree (Selector), Peter O'Neill, Tyler Kennedy, Aaron Hooper, Russell Dempster, Thelma Luxton (Scorer)*

*Kneeling: Jason Holland, Rodney Brown (Captain), Mark Ebert, Glen Sulzberger*

The team came from being behind on the 1st innings, to defeat Marlborough outright.

## THE 1988 KAPONGA PREMIER GRADE XI - WINNERS OF THE TARANAKI ONE DAY COMPETITION



*Standing: Kelvin Sharpe, Leo Crowley, Paul Harrop, Chris Chamberlain, Darren Murray, Simon Urbahn  
Kneeling: Lyall Smart, Peter Eliason, John Kensington (Captain), John Goodin, Paul Hughes*

This rural club has long been a force in Taranaki cricket - three senior Provincial Titles - 1935, 1936 and 1950, and also the 1990 One Day winners.



Glen Sulzberger guides Jamie Watkins in batting technique. Supported by Yarrows The Bakers sponsorship, coaching in the schools and of age group squads was a feature of the 1990's.

Glen Sulzberger and Regan West (far left) were both selected for New Zealand Under-19 teams, and for the Central Districts Shell XI. Paul Lightoller (centre back) and Thomas Henderson (back right), and Jamie Watkins were all to play for Taranaki by the end of the 1990's, with Watkins being the 1999 -2000 Provincial Coaching Co-ordinator.