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Edited by
Nigel Hancock

Wisden editor Lawrence Booth. As soon as Tim Paine took over the side "it felt like an adult was in charge." He issued a statement to mark his first match as captain by stating that 'the Australian public and our fans don't necessarily like the way we go about it ... we have to improve our behaviour in the way we play the game.' Ex-captain Michael Clarke retorted that the team "were not going to win shit" if they pursued Paine's policy of treating the opposition with respect.

What's in a number? Some reflections on the 2018 season

by Edward Lloyd Jones

What's in a number? For cricketers and their followers often a lot. We have all experienced, at least vicariously, the joy of a batsman reaching a century and the despair of his falling a mere run short – remember Mike Atherton's doomed third run at Lord's in 1993 or, for younger readers, Jonny Bairstow's agonising l.b.w. at Old Trafford in 2017: illustrations both of cricket's Micawber Principle – a century happiness; 99, misery.

We are aware that such binary starkness, whilst emotionally resonant, is rationally absurd: an innings of 99 is as likely to influence the outcome of a match as one of 100; its certainly preferable to nicking off for nought! Perhaps so but that does not stop our stomach muscles tightening as our hero navigates a potentially perilous passage through the nineties.

The certainty of statistics co-exists with cricket's infinite variety of settings, conditions, weather, opinions and ball types (" That was never out, umpire" – " Read tomorrow's paper, son"). And yet numbers can take on a life of their own, evoking ghosts and fragments of past matches seen or read about. Listeners to Test Match Special will recall how Henry Blofeld would often be put in mind of a significant score from his youth as the scoreboard ticked over.....to 334 (Bradman's then Test highest score at Headingley in 1930).....or to 336 when Wally Hammond took over the mantle two years later. And one recollection can lead to another....at the Oval Ashes Test of 1993 my immediate neighbour was of advancing years but youthful demeanour and, it soon became apparent, had an extensive knowledge of cricket history. He asked when I had first attended a Test match and I told him of how I was taken to The Oval by my father in 1964 and that we had sat on the grass at The Vauxhall End where a youthful, bespectacled Yorkshire opening batsman, playing in his first Test series, was fielding at third man. My companion's first Test had been at Trent Bridge in 1930 (Bradman's first Test in England) when, as a schoolboy from Northern Ireland staying with friends in Nottingham, he had witnessed " Copley's catch" to dismiss Stan McCabe which proved pivotal in England's victory and propelled young Sydney Copley to centre stage from the obscurity to which he swiftly returned having played only one game for Nottinghamshire; in the scorebooks, however, McCabe was merely " c. sub."

It turned out that my fellow spectator was the Law Lord and former Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, Lord Lowry. I had the sense that for all the distinction of his legal career and public life cricket had been a profound and enduring consolation. On learning of my affection for Glamorgan (my father's county of birth) Lord Lowry said how much he enjoyed sitting on cases with Lord Griffiths, a recent President of M.C.C. and member of Glamorgan's first Championship winning team in 1948.

It was another Glamorgan cricketer who later illustrated players' awareness of their vital career statistics. In 2009 an acquaintance, Marc, was in London when Glamorgan were playing Middlesex at Lord's and was given tickets to attend by his schoolfriends, the Glamorgan players Mike Powell and Mark Wallace. Marc encountered an initial obstacle on seeking to enter the Pavilion as although impeccably attired in shirt, tie and jacket he was wearing (crisply pressed but nonetheless unacceptable) denim trousers. The situation was rescued when Mike Powell descended from the Glamorgan dressing room bearing his own mustard coloured, and hence acceptable, strides. " Take care of them, mind – we're off to Derby after this game and these are my only pair!"

Meanwhile excitement was mounting among Glamorgan supporters. Mark Wallace had reached his century and was closing in on his then highest first class score of 128. Having equalled this score, however, he was out to a loose stroke. As Mark returned to the Pavilion he was berated by Marc. Mark Wallace's twinkling reply was to the effect that it was early in the season (the game was played in April) and if you achieve a personal best you have to buy beer for the entire squad! In September of that same season, having no doubt saved up, Mark Wallace recorded what proved to be the highest score of his career, 139 against Surrey at The Oval.

An ostensibly dry number can summon shadows from our memories, direct or acquired. Brett D'Oliveira's delightful cameo for Worcestershire this early season at The Oval came 50 years after his grandfather, Basil, had played that innings of 158 which would surely lead to his wondrous return to South Africa.....although of more immediate concern on the last day of that Test was whether play could restart, after the storm, in time for England to press for the win which would, and did, square the series. With time ticking away(no over count in those days) D'Oliveira's breakthrough wicket prompted Underwood's decisive heroics culminating in the famous photograph of all players on the field as the final Australian wicket fell, l.b.w.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu has spoken of first being taken to Lord's, as a theology student, in 1963 and finding himself cheering for the West Indies against England. In the Test between the same teams 3 years later his allegiance had changed as his countryman Basil D'Oliveira was making his debut for England. 1968 was of course a year of momentous events – the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy; the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia; the " Rivers of Blood" speech and the evenements of the Paris Spring, which had particular resonance for me as I was in Paris on an exchange visit at the time. My

exchange Jean-Pierre had been much taken with Ken Barrington the previous summer and was intrigued by the significance of statistics to cricket. Why, I asked him and his friends, do you throw red paint during English and History lessons but not during maths and science? Well, they responded, we all speak English anyway and Marx has taught us all we need to know about history. But after the revolution we shall need scientists and mathematicians. Numeracy is key – you should understand that as a cricket lover!

Of all the tumultuous events of that year my most vivid teenage memory is of desperately wanting D'Oliveira to score a century on his return to the Test team and feeling the world to be back in balance when he did so. The past may be a foreign country but it felt very familiar as young Brett crashed the ball to the Oval's cover boundary.

And on another never to be forgotten final day of an Ashes series at The Oval some 37 years later a South African born batsman again came to England's rescue with a great innings ofyes, 158! It scarcely needs to be emphasised that Basil D'Oliveira and KP came from very different backgrounds in South Africa but they will always be bound together in glorious statistical union.

Now, as if in homage to these flickering spectres, young Olly Pope of Surrey plays an innings of grace and skill in testing conditions against Yorkshire under the attentive gaze of the England captain finishing undefeated on.... 158!

Meanwhile across London Glamorgan are welcomed back to Lord's. in contrast to the louring sky the announcer's voice is warm and friendly (for F.J. Titmus read Titmus F.J. is a distant and buried memory). " Bore da" he greets the team. Later, with Middlesex in the field in barely playable gloom, a young batsman makes his cautious way to the middle. " The next Glamorgan batsman is Aneurin Bevan....correction Aneurin Donald." Alas the weight of history proved too much for the poor lad who was out first ball (should he not have been given a "life" to compose himself?). Sympathy for Donald was tempered by reflections among the crowd of this being the 70th anniversary of the creation of the NHS. I wonder how popular Aneurin Bevan was at Lord's in 1948?

And now, with autumn's incipience already upon us, The Oval does us proud yet again – with Alastair Cook's farewell century followed by James Anderson's record-breaking wicket. Long after their remarkable career statistics have faded from memory we shall remember cook's smile to the heavens with helmet and bat in outstretched arms and the sight of Shami's stump careering towards the pavilion.

There is often more to a number than the figure it represents. As we watch play unfolding and the scoreboard revolving, or digitally evolving, we may find that each can prompt, unbidden and at random, an association with or memory of earlier matches viewed or read about. Oh my D'Oliveira and my Underwood long ago!
