

‘Ossie’s Tamed the Aussies’

‘Ossie’s Tamed the Aussies’ was just one of the excited headlines as the national sporting press clamoured to report how the 1964 Glamorgan team, astutely captained by their popular fast-bowler Ossie Wheatley, had defeated the formidable Australian tourists at St. Helen’s.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of this historic match, Ossie reminisces with Richard Bentley ...

“A pretty good side”

It was almost sixteen years since Don Bradman’s proud 1948 ‘Invincibles’ had returned home unbeaten, but when Bobby Simpson’s 1964 squad arrived in Swansea for the traditional August Bank Holiday fixture they probably felt equally invincible. After all, they were unbeaten on the tour, and one up in the Test series. Their fourth match against England, played only a week earlier, saw them score 656-8 declared (Simpson 311).

As well as form, history was on their side. Since 1912, only one county side – the formidable 1950s Surrey team – had beaten touring Australians.

It was a confident, tight-knit and talented team that arrived at St. Helen’s. As Ossie wryly observes: “A pretty good side!”

“This was the game we fancied”

Tipping the scales even further, Glamorgan were enjoying only a modest season. They weren’t overawed, though. The two sides had already played a Whitsun draw at Cardiff. But Ossie recalls: “This was the game we fancied, on the Swansea wicket.” It was an opportunity for the relatively inexperienced Glamorgan players to show what they could do. “Because it was a young team, and because it was Australia, they were keen – a good bunch of lads.” The dressing room was a positive place. Spirits and self-belief were high. “We really did feel we could win it.”

The Glamorgan players knew, too, that their opponents didn’t hold all the aces. The St. Helen’s pitch, carefully tended by George Clement, was “a goodish batting wicket, but not too good - a slow turner, with even bounce” and Glamorgan’s spin attack – with three very different spinners – was “well equipped to bowl on it, and we knew the form”. In addition, the tourist match at Swansea was always a popular event; the home team would enjoy the enthusiastic support of a large and knowledgeable crowd.

Winning the toss, Ossie elected to bat, reckoning that if they could post a decent first innings score they would have a chance. “We were quite capable at Swansea of bowling anybody out – we needed to get a couple of hundred on the board, preferably 250.” In the end, it was 197, boosted by runs from batsmen Alan Rees, Peter Walker and Alan Jones, together with some important hard-hitting at

the end from Don Shepherd with 24 from only 9 balls (the last two wickets putting on 42 precious runs). “It wasn’t a good score, but it was OK.”

And this score of almost 200 was soon to look even better by the end of the day, with Australia subsiding to 63-6, and a clutch of star batsmen back in the pavilion.

“A very enjoyable weekend”

The pleasure the Glamorgan players surely felt as they climbed the long steps to the pavilion at close of play was continued into the evening when players from both sides visited the National Eisteddford being held just down the road – almost within singing distance – at Singleton Park.

During the day, BBC Wales television coverage of the cricket had been shown on sets dotted around the Eisteddford field, and had attracted a great deal of enthusiastic (and partisan!) interest. In the evening, both sets of smartly-blazered players took a bow on the main stage.

On Sunday, the players enjoyed a relaxing round of golf after first rendezvousing at *The Osborne* at Rotherslade – a favourite base during matches at Swansea. Another was *The Fountain* at Pontardulais, and it was here that a memorable weekend was rounded off – with, Ossie recalls, more singing. “We had a terrific day out with them. They had a bloomin’ good time and made lots of friends.”

“Like a game of chess ...”

The events of the next two days are well-documented and have passed into cricketing legend. Fifty years later, they still read like a story from a *‘Boys’ Own’* annual ...

Monday. Another huge holiday crowd of 20,000. St Helen’s at its sunny best. Despite some hard-hitting resistance from the relatively unknown spinner Tom Veivers, Don Shepherd and Jim Pressdee continue to dismantle the visitors’ batting. When they are all out for only 101, Shepherd has taken 4 for 22 in 17 overs (12 of them maidens), while his spin-partner has bagged 6 for 58.

The pre-match belief within the Glamorgan team is reinforced. But they know it won’t be easy. “The Swansea wickets got better as they went on – that was the perverse thing about them – and so it became difficult in the fourth innings to get people out.” Still, their lead of almost a hundred is a significant one.

The Glamorgan second innings sees wickets lost at regular intervals. Alan Rees, top scorer in the first innings with 48, top scores again with 47 – unlucky not to get a deserved half-century. Tony Lewis gets a useful 36, Pressdee 24. Glamorgan 172 all out. But the Australian batting collapse of the first day is not repeated. The always stubborn Bill Lawry, with opening partner Simpson, gets off to a steady start and by close of play Australia, at 75 for 1, are on the way to their target of 269. Lawry is still there with hard-hitting Norman O’Neill, with plenty of batting to come. The balance of the match seems to be changing again. “I really enjoyed this sort of game,” Ossie enthuses, “good fun – like a game of chess ...”

“They battled hard”

Tuesday sees many people returning to work, but there are still more than 10,000 at St. Helen’s to enjoy what promises to be another exciting – and warm – last day. Batting is now easier, and victory is going to take a very special and patient effort from Glamorgan.

O’Neill falls to the third spinner, Lewis. Another danger-man, Redpath, goes cheaply. 88-3. Then Potter falls. 92-4. This fascinating match is swinging Glamorgan’s way again. But Lawry is still there, and patiently figures in important stands with first Veivers and then wicket-keeper Jarman. The score passes the 200 mark. Australia have regained the upper hand.

But just when it looks as if the dour Lawry (five hours accumulating 64 careful runs) will win the day – he’s caught by Rees. The vital wicket. “An outstanding catch by an outstanding fielder.” Glamorgan’s bowling perseverance, supported by thoughtful field-placing and top-class fielding, is paying off.

The match is not in the balance for much longer. Soon Hawke, the last Australian wicket, falls. A home victory by 36 runs. Shepherd and Pressdee claiming 19 of the 20 wickets. Don Shepherd’s astonishing second-innings analysis reveals the extent of the pressure he has exerted on Australia’s powerful Test line-up: 52-29-71-5. “Shep was monumental! He loved bowling.” Euros Lewis and Jim Pressdee have shared 54 overs at the other end.

Had the captain at any time during this roller-coaster last day felt that the match might slip away? “Never quite, but you were always concerned. They battled hard.”

“Sporting opponents” – and celebrations!

In their excitement, spectators spontaneously spill on to the field at the moment of victory and gather at the foot of the pavilion steps. Singing. Photographs. Speeches. More singing. Ossie recalls the generosity of the Australians in defeat – a defeat which, he concedes, clearly hurt them – and which they had fought hard to avoid. “They were very sporting opponents. Bobby Simpson was very gracious... a good friend, a nice guy. He spoke to the crowd and congratulated us.” Some of the travelling Australian press – and perhaps some of the players, too – cling to the fact that the tourists remain undefeated in England. They have lost to Wales!

In his post-match remarks, Simpson jokes that Australians have long memories and that the next touring side would remember this defeat and avenge it. Certainly the Welsh cricketing public have continued to remember – and celebrate – the glorious victory by Ossie Wheatley’s ’64 side. And we are still enjoying celebrating it now, fifty years on...

PS Happily, Simpson’s prediction was only half accurate! The 1968 tourists again lost to Glamorgan – captained on this occasion by Don Shepherd – in the Bank Holiday game at Swansea. But he was right in that the ’64 defeat was remembered, the Aussie’s captain Barry Jarman famously remarking after the game: “So we’ve been beaten by Glamorgan! What’s new?”