

Glamorgan v Essex St. Helen's, Swansea 30th August, 1st & 2nd September 1969



Eifion Jones

Richard Bentley recalls a previous Essex visit to Swansea ...

At Sophia Gardens in Cardiff during the first week of September 1969, Glamorgan's Don Shepherd took his record-breaking 2,000th wicket and Glamorgan defeated Worcestershire to win the Championship in their penultimate match of the season – the first team since 1930 to win the title unbeaten. But the Championship had effectively been won in the previous match against Essex at Swansea ...

As this match starts, an exciting Championship race is still in the balance. With three matches left, Glamorgan are top of the table, 13 points ahead of Surrey. But Surrey – at The Oval – will be the final match. Glamorgan need to win against Essex at St. Helen's.

Only too aware of the significance of the game, the Swansea crowds are large and excited. The second day gate of 12,000 is a post-War record for a Championship match at the ground.

But although keenly aware of the game's importance, the crowd is probably unaware that

the two captains – Tony Lewis and Brian Taylor – have agreed before the toss that whoever bats first will try to post a challenging but 'gettable' target for the opposition. These are two teams who relish their cricket – and enjoy competing against each other.

Between days 1 and 2, the sides meet on the same ground in the new John Player Sunday League. Essex win an exciting encounter by 1 run off the final ball, and the two teams retire to The Fountain for a few beers and some lusty singing – an important and popular tradition at St. Helen's.

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But the Championship match is to prove even more exciting.

The fluctuations of three exciting days of cricket are detailed in the now archived scorecard. There are useful individual Glamorgan performances with both bat and ball, the ever-reliable opener Alan Jones, West Indian international Bryan Davis (awarded his county cap during the game) and a defiant Peter Walker all contributing important scores. Ossie Wheatley, called out of retirement to help cover a fast-bowling injury crisis for the second successive season, takes three precious wickets in each innings. But less obvious from the scorecard are three outstanding pieces of fielding in the final hour...

Tony Lewis's declaration sets Essex 190 to win in just under two hours – and the challenge is accepted. Indeed, soon after umpires David Constant and George Pope signal the final 20 overs, with their score on 109 for 3, the visitors are in a potentially winning position. But then Keith Fletcher, looking in ominously good form, falls to a brilliant diving catch by Davis – the first of three game-changing contributions by fielders. Further wickets follow, and with four



Bryan Davis



Ossie Wheatley

overs remaining the Essex score has progressed to 163-7. Twenty-seven runs to win. It couldn't be tighter.

But the result is decided by more outstanding fielding...

With only one ball remaining, three runs required and the final pair at the wicket, John Lever chops the ball down in the direction of Ossie Wheatley at third man and sets off for what he sees as at least a safe two to tie the game. Ossie, by his own admission never regarded as the most nimble fielder in the side, has already bowled 36 tiring overs in the game. Peter Walker recalls how, 'galloping round' to his right, Ossie swoops to pick up the ball in his right hand and in the same movement release his long return. Keeper Eifion Jones – who always makes wicket-keeping look easy – calmly gathers a difficult bounce and breaks the wicket. A surprised John Lever is run out. Glamorgan players and their contented supporters celebrate a crucial victory. And another memorable St. Helen's occasion is written into the cricketing history books. Richard Bentley