



## **FIFTY YEARS AGO - GLAMORGAN'S FIRST CHAMPIONSHIP BY ANDREW HIGNALL**

Fifty years ago Glamorgan CCC were celebrating their first Championship title. It was a fairytale result for a county who had struggled in their early years in the County Championship and who had fought off various financial crises. The death of their captain, Maurice Turnbull, during the Normandy Invasion in 1944 was another severe blow, as together with Johnnie Clay, he had helped the club weather the storm. Clay was determined that his friend's efforts would not have been in vain, so he took over the captaincy for 1946 and helped to groom Wilf Wooller as the club's long-term leader. Wooller, the former Welsh rugby international and Cambridge Blue, had played for Glamorgan in 1938 and 1939 whilst working in the coal trade at Cardiff. After the War was over, Wooller's career changed direction as he took over the captaincy in 1947 and, to his mentor's delight, guided Glamorgan to their first Championship success in 1948.

During their Championship campaign in 1948 Glamorgan won 13 of their 26 fixtures - the most in their history, including home and away victories over Essex, Hampshire, Kent and Somerset. One of the reasons behind Glamorgan's success was their shrewd acquisition of players to strengthen their bowling. Len Muncer had moved from Middlesex in 1947 and in 1948 his former colleague Norman Hever also joined the Welsh county. Muncer developed into a fine all-rounder, whilst Hever matured into an effective shock bowler, with Wooller astutely using Hever in short bursts. A measure of his success was that Hever took 154 wickets in his first two seasons with Glamorgan.

The emergence of Gilbert Parkhouse as a top class batsman was another factor behind Glamorgan's success. He made his Championship debut in 1948 against Essex at Cardiff and the graceful right-hander proceeded to amass 1,200 runs in his first season of county cricket. Willie Jones was another batsman to sparkle in 1948, aggregating 1,655 runs including a purple patch during June when he struck two double centuries within a fortnight - 207 against Kent and 212\* against Essex, during which he shared a record partnership of 313 for the third wicket with Emrys Davies.

### **"Snappers Up..."**

Another element of Glamorgan's success was their exceptional close-to-the-wicket fielding. Haydn Davies had established himself as the county's wicket-keeper in the late 1930s and after the War, he was amongst the best in the country, winning a place in the 1946 Test trial. Allan Watkins was amongst the finest short-leg and leg-slip fielders in the county circuit and in 1948 he took 40 catches, as the Glamorgan bowlers fully utilised the leg trap which Wilf Wooller had cleverly placed for them. 1948 also saw Watkins' selection for the England team for the Ashes' series with Australia, but the loss of his services was not a cruel blow as it gave an extended opportunity to Phil Clift - another one of the Monmouthshire colts who had benefited from pre-war experience in the 2nd XI.

Wooller's leadership was the vital extra ingredient behind Glamorgan's Championship success, and although other sides had better batsmen or bowlers,

few had finer leaders. Wilf drew heavily on his experiences in a Japanese POW camp, where he had seen the value of firm leadership, mental resilience and strength of character. These were three things he put into practice after the War as a ruthless and often outspoken captain, but he was not afraid to ask anyone to do something he himself would not do. A tough competitor on the field, Wooller was always willing to have a drink and a chat with his team, as well as members of the opposition after play. Indeed, Wilf made sure that every player, no matter how junior, had a chance to make a contribution, and as a result a fine team spirit developed.

Glamorgan had been in contention for the Championship title since early May, and by August, Wooller's team knew that they had to win two of their last three games in order to secure the title. A few eyebrows were raised when Wilf Wooller included in the side against Surrey at Cardiff the 50 year-old Johnnie Clay. It was only Clay's fourth Championship appearance of the summer, but it proved to be a master stroke, as the veteran spinner took 10- 65 as Glamorgan won by an innings and 24 runs.

### **A Most Memorable Moment**

After this marvellous win, Glamorgan travelled to Bournemouth, knowing that the title would be theirs if they could beat Hampshire. Glamorgan batted first and made 315 before the Glamorgan bowlers, led by Len Muncer, dismissed Hampshire for 84. Wooller was able to enforce the follow-on, and the overjoyed Glamorgan captain led his side back out onto the field at Dean Park knowing that he was just ten more wickets away from the county title. He didn't have to wait for long as shortly after lunch on the final day, the last Hampshire wicket fell. One of the umpires was former Glamorgan stalwart Dai Davies. It seemed fitting that he should give out Charlie Knott, when the tailender was hit on the pads in front of the wicket by Johnnie Clay. Legend has it that in response to Clay's appeal, Dai said "That's out and we've won the Championship!"

Shortly afterwards, the Glamorgan team gathered on the balcony of the Bournemouth pavilion, receiving the hearty congratulations of the many Welshmen who had travelled down to the Hampshire resort. No doubt, there were tears in the eyes of many, and probably Johnnie Clay as well, realising that the dreams of Maurice Turnbull had come true. With Wilf Wooller having to travel up to Lord's for MCC business, it was Johnnie Clay who fittingly led the Glamorgan team back to South Wales and receive the congratulations of hundreds of people who had gathered at Cardiff General railway station to share in the club's marvellous success.

Wilf Wooller continued playing for Glamorgan until 1962 and he was the club's secretary in 1969 when the side became the County Champions for the second time. Once again, he had played a major role in helping Tony Lewis mould an effective playing unit, and it was Wilf who helped to persuade Majid Khan, the gifted Pakistani batsman to join the Welsh county. Indeed, Majid played a breathtaking innings on a difficult Cardiff wicket as Glamorgan defeated Worcestershire to become County Champions. Sadly, Wilf passed away in March 1997, but no doubt he was looking down on that September evening when Darren Thomas blasted away Somerset's resistance and Glamorgan became County Champions for the third time. No doubt Wilf would have had something to say on the subject to the angels - I hope they didn't blush!

So Glamorgan have had three Championship-winning teams, each very different - Wilf's side of 1948 with a subtle blend of local and imported talent, all complementing each other with bat and ball and in the field; Tony Lewis' team of 1969 containing such wily pros as Don Shepherd and Peter Walker, supported by the brilliance of Majid Khan, and now Matthew Maynard's XI in 1997, with four home-bred Test players in Hugh Morris, Robert Croft and Steve Watkins plus Maynard himself, but not forgetting the country's leading run-scorer in Steve James and the blistering pace of Waqar Younis. Now that we have got Fantasy Cricket, what about a triangular series between the three - now there's a thought.