



**HARRY PEARSON'S *CONNIE: THE MARVELLOUS LIFE OF LEARIE CONSTANTINE* WINS
THE CRICKET SOCIETY AND MCC BOOK OF THE YEAR AWARD 2018**

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- Writer Harry Pearson was tonight named the winner of this prestigious award, presented in a packed Long Room at Lord's, for his book, *Connie: The Marvellous Life of Learie Constantine*. Chair of Judges Vic Marks said 2017 was a year notable for the number of books about Yorkshire cricket or by authors with Yorkshire connections.
- Harry beat off strong competition from five other books – two about Jonny Bairstow and Geoff Cope, an Australian book about cricket photography, and an account of the 1939 Durban Test. Harry received a winner's certificate and a £3,000 award.
- Retiring head judge Vic Marks received champagne and a certificate for literary services after chairing the judges for the ninth time.
- This 49 year-old competition, run in partnership between The Cricket Society and MCC since 2009, has become a highlight of the cricketing year.

On Tuesday 17th April, Harry accepted his shortlisting and winner's certificates and a cheque for £3,000 after an Oscars-style countdown in the Long Room at Lord's, which was packed with MCC and Cricket Society Members and officers, authors and their publishers and guest cricketing journalists and writers. Four of the shortlisted authors, and the photographer subject of a fifth, spoke about their work. A delighted Harry paid tribute to his predecessor as Constantine's biographer and winner of the award in 1975, the late Gerald Howat, whose work had inspired his interest in cricket as a boy in Yorkshire.

Vic Marks surveyed the books considered by the judges, spoke about this year's unusually tricky processes in deciding upon first the shortlist and then the winner, and commented in detail on each of the six finalists. He complimented Harry's book for being a "properly critical and well researched" work that left the judges wanting more. In a light-hearted keynote address, writer and editor Emma John offered her reflections on how her early militancy as an England fan had softened into a wider appreciation of the game's beauties and nuances.

The competition, run by The Cricket Society since 1970 and in partnership with MCC since 2009, is for books nominated by Members and is highly regarded by writers and publishers. A previous winner, former *Wisden* editor Scyld Berry, hailed his award as "cricket's seal of literary approval." Another winner didn't realize the award had monetary value and a prolonged search of the Lord's dustbins failed to locate his excitedly discarded winner's cheque.

Notes for editors:

The six books on the shortlist (alphabetically by author) were:

- Jonny Bairstow and Duncan Hamilton, *A Clear Blue Sky*, HarperCollins
- Stephen Chalke, *In Sunshine and in Shadow: Geoff Cope and Yorkshire Cricket*, Fairfield Books
- John Lazenby, *Edging Towards Darkness*, Bloomsbury
- Harry Pearson – *Connie: The Marvellous Life of Learie Constantine Little*, Brown
- Christian Ryan, *Feeling is the thing that happens in 1000th of a second: a season of cricket photographer Patrick Eagar*, Riverrun
- Rajdeep Sardesai, *Democracy's XI: The Great Indian Cricket Story*, Juggernaut

A longlist of sixteen books from those nominated by either Cricket Society or MCC Members - not publishers - were whittled down to six by a panel of judges independently chaired by writer and broadcaster and former England and Somerset cricketer Vic Marks. The other judges are Robert Winder and Mike Selvey (MCC) and John Symons and Chris Lowe (The Cricket Society). Nigel Hancock is the competition's administrator and Chairman of the Cricket Society.

The Cricket Society – www.cricketsociety.com and Twitter @CricketSociety – has a worldwide membership of about 1800 people, and a charitable arm www.cricketsocietytrust.org.uk. It encourages a love of cricket through reading and listening, playing and watching. It makes ten annual awards at its Spring Lunch; holds regular meetings in London, Birmingham, Durham and Bath; publishes its acclaimed *Journal* and *Bulletin*; and has a cricket team.

MCC is the custodian of the Laws and Spirit of Cricket, an innovative independent voice in world cricket, and a passionate promoter of the game. It owns the most comprehensive collection of cricket artefacts and books in the world, housed in its museum and library at Lord's which is visited by tens of thousands of visitors from all over the world each year.

MCC is also the world's most active cricket-playing club and the owner of Lord's, the Home of Cricket. www.lords.org / Twitter: @HomeOfCricket.

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