



## **THE GOLDEN 19 FOR 90 BY TONY DERLIEN**

Fifty years ago, Jim Laker took 19 wickets for 90 runs for England versus Australia in the Old Trafford Test. He is still the only bowler to take 19 wickets in any first-class match, let alone a Test match. The next best first-class haul is 17 wickets (on 19 occasions), the most economical being 17 for 48 by Colin Blythe for Kent against Northampton-shire in 1907. The second best in a Test is 17 by Sydney Barnes alone: 17 for 159 for England versus South Africa in 1913/14.

Laker's 19 for 90 was made up of 9 for 37 and the first all-ten in Test history, 10 for 53. The latter has been emulated only once, by Anil Kumble's 10 for 74 for India against Pakistan in 1998/99. That analysis relegated George Lohmann's 9 for 28 for England versus South Africa in 1895/96 and Laker's 9 for 37, to the third and fourth best in a Test innings.

Laker's accurate variations of flight, pace and degree of spin, plus his disguised arm-ball, represented a challenge which Australian batsmen rarely met. Australian pitches and weather did not encourage off-spinners – nor three-man leg-traps.

But at Old Trafford in 1956, conditions were well-suited to Laker's skills. The pitch was not only shaven grassless but also short of watering, which convinced him that it would soon take spin. Despite its lifelessness when England scored 459 during the first one-and-a-half days, Benaud did produce one 'fizzer', which dismissed May. When Australia batted, they collapsed against Laker for 84, and followed on late on the Friday.

But heavy rain hit Old Trafford all weekend, restricting the Saturday and Monday play to a total of under two hours. The upshot was that England still needed eight more wickets after lunch on the Tuesday. Laker at lunch was pleased to see the sun at last coming out, because the morning's damp and sluggish pitch had yielded no wickets. But the subsequent two sunny periods (early in the afternoon, then after tea) produced a drying surface, which enabled Laker's off-spin to bite during both of his match-winning spells.

On the next day, however, the weather did not allow a ball to be bowled in any of the eight first-class fixtures. Those included Laker's Benefit match – Surrey versus Australians.