

Part 2: Cricket Isolation – 1900 to 1980

Further recognition of Tasmania's improvement came in 1904 when the touring English team, having insisted upon "odds" when playing Tasmania, consented to eleven-a-side matches in Hobart and Launceston.

The tension between Hobart and Launceston was never far from the surface, however, and in 1906, the Southern Tasmanian Cricket Association was renamed the Tasmanian Cricket Association as a consequence of the northern body withdrawing from the organisation of Tasmanian representative teams. An uneasy truce between the two centres was brokered by the Victorian Cricket Association soon after, and an Executive Cricket Council (later known as the Tasmanian Cricket Council), consisting of delegates from the north and the south, was formed soon after to regulate the selection of Tasmanian teams.

With the retirement of Burn and Eady at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, and despite the best efforts of other quality players in RJ Hawson and AC Newton, Tasmania suffered a downturn in its playing fortunes thereafter, a process hastened by the advent of the First World War. Apart from causing the death of many Tasmanian cricketers, the War dealt cricket a real blow through the suspension of club cricket, which was not properly revived until 1923 in the south.

Finance was a major problem for cricket administrators at this time, and the TCA Ground on the Queen's Domain in Hobart was sustained by a shoestring budget and the untiring efforts of volunteer labour. In these circumstances, Tasmania did well to put as many representative teams into the field as it did, even though the opposition was often a second eleven under the guise of a state banner. Many future Test cricketers from Victoria in particular were blooded this way, with Bill Ponsford (429 v Tasmania in 1923) providing the best example of a young player making the most of his opportunities at the start of his career.

Tasmania was never seriously considered a candidate to join the Sheffield Shield competition, and in fact refused an opportunity to join in a national competition in the early 1930s featuring Western Australia, Tasmania and the second elevens of the other states on financial grounds.

Tasmania produced some good players in the inter-War era, banking on a progressive policy of youth that allowed teenagers such as CL Badcock, RV Thomas and ROG Morrisby to play first-class cricket. Others such as AO Burrows, DC Green, SWL Putman, GTH James and GA Combes were selected in their early 20s, and usually gave a good account of themselves.

Team selection was still hampered somewhat by the need to give the north and the south equal representation in the side, which was not therefore always the best that might have been selected. Club cricket, meanwhile, was assuming the form that is recognisable today, and, unlike 25 years earlier, was sustained throughout the Second World War, allowing those available to keep their hand in. First-class cricket was resumed much sooner after the cessation of hostilities than it had been after the First World War, and some encouraging performances in the later 1940s gave some hope for the future.

However, the lack of a coordinated coaching programme and the VCA's comparative lack of enthusiasm for games against Tasmania resulted in a fall in the standard of Tasmanian play in first-class games, with only EE Rodwell and TJ Cowley showing consistent class against all opposition.

By the early 1960s, the VCA had determined to cease regular first-class cricket against Tasmania, and in 1962-63, the traditional game against the English tourists was downgraded to second-class status for the first time since 1897-98. Even the popular visit by the Australian team en route to England, a fixture since 1926, was similarly demoted in 1964, and dispensed with altogether in 1968.

In desperation, the Tasmanian administrators applied for admittance to the Sheffield Shield competition in 1963 as the only means left to offer first-class cricket to its best players. In

rejecting the application, the Australian Board of Control (ACB) offered hope for the future by nominating areas of the Tasmanian operation that would need to be improved before any future application would be approved. Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia sent full strength teams to play two day matches against Tasmania prior to playing in Shield fixtures in the late 1960s, and Tasmania was permitted to enter the new domestic one-day competition in 1969 as an equal partner. Off the field, the wise counsel of MJ Jillett assisted materially in fulfilling the financial and administrative requirements of the ACB, and the North-West Coast was made an equal partner on the Tasmanian Cricket Council. In 1977, after improved on-field performances, Tasmania was allowed into the Sheffield Shield competition on a part-time, provisional basis.

Tasmanian cricket since 1977, despite some disappointing years in the interim, has on the whole taken enormous strides to catch up to the other states, and is now considered to be an equal on the playing field, even if ACB representation (one vote in 14 nationally) does not reflect this. The Lancastrian Jack Simmons provided experienced guidance in the early days of Shield participation, assisting materially to win the Gillette Cup in 1979, while BF Davison scored heavily in his time as a player, and stayed on after to become involved in administration. DC Boon, RD Woolley, GD Campbell, S Young and RT Ponting justified Tasmania's elevation through selection for Australian Test teams, and in 1982, Tasmania was promoted to permanent, full-time status in the competition.

Compiled by Ric Finlay