Cricket Recollections

Around 1963 I used to ride my bike down Pennant Hills Road every day during the school holidays and play “Test Matches” in George Horwood’s (one of our coaches) backyard against his son Richard. These were tough no quarter given or asked encounters where we would play all day every day during the school holidays in middle of summer on a malthoid wicket. I remember batting all day on one occasion. Bowling on this malthoid pitch taught me to bowl with control as there was very little spin for my left arm orthodox deliveries. Sometimes John Benaud, who lived on the other side of Pennant Hills Road, would come over to have a hit. At first I was a bit overawed at having to bowl against a “First Grade” player but grew in confidence when I realised that I could sometimes trouble him.

Those long hot days playing backyard cricket obviously helped me because not long after I scored my first century against Parramatta Marist Under 16s. I had not scored more than 30 before this innings but was seeing the ball quite well. After a wicket fell, I asked the incoming batsman if he knew how many I was as I intended throwing my wicket away after I had reached fifty to give someone else a bat. He said “you are 88”. Three balls later I had reached my century.

At that time I was playing for Baulkham Hills Under 16s on Saturday mornings, C Grade in the afternoon and representing Parramatta High School in First Grade on Wednesdays and scored another century (for Parramatta High) and three scores over 50 that season.

I was first selected to play for Central Cumberland District Cricket Club in their Green Shield (Under 16) Team in 1963-64. I was quite surprised that I was selected as I was not one of the “stars” in the Baulkham Hills Cricket Club Cricket Under 16 Team. Our Green Shield coach was Lou Benaud (father of Richie and John Benaud) and a wonderful leg spin bowler for Cumberland for many years. He was a quietly spoken gentleman and I hung on every word he said regarding spin bowling and field placements. My Green Shield debut was rather inauspicious as I was the third one out in a hat trick (all LBW) against Bankstown Canterbury at Bankstown Oval. I was devastated and convinced that would be my one and only game for Central Cumberland District Cricket Club and I was letting down my family. My father, Fred, played a couple of seasons for CCDCC as an opening bowler just before World War II and on my mother’s side I was related to two of Cumberland’s greats, W. P. Howell who played for Australia and NSW and “Young Bill” Howell who also represented New South Wales.

The following season I was very surprised and excited to be selected in CCDCC’s Fourth Grade team to play Manly at Brookvale Oval. We fielded first and I managed to pick up a couple of wickets as we dismissed Manly for just over 100. It was quite dark in the Brookvale Oval dressing rooms as I looked over, the captain, Norm Witton’s shoulder to see where I was batting. I was somewhat surprised to see him start writing what I thought was “Will….” at number 5. We lost a couple of wickets and as I walked out to bat Norm was standing at the gate and he shook my hand and wished me luck. I thought that was a nice gesture.

I was 12 not out at the close of play and as I walked off the ground, once again Norm Witton was standing at the gate. He shook my hand and said “Well batted Geoff but do you know
you batted in my place? You were supposed to bat at number 11”. I was shocked and said “But Mr Witton you shook my hand as I was walking out to bat. Why didn’t you say something?” He said he was going to but I looked so excited and enthusiastic that he didn’t have the heart to say anything.

This time I was utterly convinced that I would never play for Cumberland again. How could I after batting in the captain’s spot? I have never heard of it happening before, or since. I was overjoyed to find I was selected for the next game and I did bat at number 11. I bumped into Norm at the 2010 Reunion (46 years later) and he said “Geoff Williams, I’ve just been talking about you.” I replied “I know, you have been talking about me batting in your spot”. I was correct.

I took 6 for 40 in my second match in 4th Grade and went on to take 40 wickets in eight games before I was prompted to 3rd grade. I was very surprised by my early success as a spin bowler as I had never been one of “the stars” playing junior cricket but suddenly finding I could take wickets gave me a lot of confidence. Most lower grade sides have one or two older experienced players and when I heard that “this player used to play 1st Grade”, that was the batsman I wanted to bowl at, that was the player I desperately wanted to dismiss. You just want to test yourself against the best.

A couple of seasons later, I was playing second grade at Merrylands Oval against Balmain DCC. We were 10 runs in front when their last man came in to bat. I bowled two overs at their number eleven batsman who was swinging wildly at every ball but did not hit one. The batsman at the other end scored a few runs and once again I was bowling to their last man. As I ran in to bowl, I thought they need six runs to win and he hasn’t put bat on ball for two overs, I am going to end it all and bowl him. This time he made contact and hit the ball straight to the fieldsman (Robert Anderson) at backward square leg but just over his head for six. I bowled him next ball but Balmain had won the game. I had taken 6 wickets in the innings but I was absolutely devastated as I felt I had lost the game for our team. The next week I was selected to play First Grade for the first time.

My first 1st Grade game was against Gordon DCC at Chatswood Oval. I was given a bowl earlier than I expected to Marshall Rosen, who was opening the batting for NSW at the time. He played me with respect for an over or so before being given out LBW – I had a 1st Grade wicket. Although on reflection the ball may have pitched outside leg stump but I was not going to argue. When the new batsman came in, our captain Ross Shepherd said “this bloke can’t hit, throw it up to him”. As the ball disappeared over the boundary and onto the railway tracks, I looked at the skipper who just said “Hmm, didn’t know he could do that”. I finished the day with one for 17 off 8 overs.

The first “Test player” that I dismissed was Brian Booth when he tried to sweep me at Merrylands Oval but only succeeded in getting a top edge which was caught by Greg Monaghan at backward square leg. Brian came and shook my hand after the game and said well bowled – he was a gentleman.

Some of my team mates said my best ball was my “toe ball”. My stock ball would tend to drift in to right handed batsmen and as they played forward, hit them on the front foot and
deflect to slip. From my end, 20 metres away, it often looked like a genuine edge to slip. I remember dismissing John Dyson with the “toe ball” twice in one day at Old Kings Oval only a few days after he had scored a century for Australia at the SCG. Needless to say “Dyso” was not as happy as I was.

I always enjoyed it when Doug Walters was captain. Test and State players played a lot more grade cricket in my day than now with so many limited overs games. Most captains would go through the routine of bowling the openers then the medium pacers and as a last resort the spinners. Often by the time I got the ball it had no shine, no seam and was going soft. Doug would regularly bring me on first change and my strike rate against opening batsman was pretty good. One time that comes to mind was at Caringbah Oval. Doug gave me a bowl after only a couple of overs and I bowled Andrew Hilditch around his legs when he attempted to sweep me. Hilditch stormed off the ground, threw down his bat and pads and sat moping in his car for the rest of the day. I really enjoyed bowling when a ball was hard and had a good seam. Although I did enjoy playing with Doug, he did cause me problems. He would sometimes move my bowling marker back half a pace at the start of an over, unbeknown to me, so that when I ran in to bowl that first ball of the over I would almost give myself a hernia as I over stretched. Other times he would hide my marker under grass clippings and I would be wandering around trying to find it at the start of an over.

I cannot remember the year, sometime in the early 70s, when I played my first game at the Sydney Cricket Ground against Balmain DCC. I have never heard a batsman “sledge” the fielding side the way Tony Steele did that day. Tony was in superb touch and every time he hit a boundary he would say something like “Don’t bowl that crap to me”. His “sledging” was incessant as he quickly raced into the 40s. Bill Lothian then moved me to fine leg right on the boundary in front of the Brewongle Stand. When Steele saw this he practised playing a hook shot and in response I practised catching it. Tony saw me do this and just gave a mock laugh. Two balls later, Bill bowled a short ball which Tony hooked in the air straight to me, I did not have to move and I delighted in mimicking Tony Steele’s laugh as he trudged off the field.

During the lunch break in a game against Northern District at Asquith Oval, John Aitken came up to me and said I had bowled three overs without having a run scored (this was in the days of eight ball overs). He then bet me $1 (JA was notoriously tight with his money) that I could not bowl 50 balls without having a run scored. When we went back onto the field JA made sure the batsmen were aware of our bet but he fielded enthusiastically and I won the bet. After 6.2 overs (50 balls) I had the figures of 0 wickets for 0 runs. I must have gotten a little excited at being the only person to win money off Johnny Aitken because my 51st delivery was hit for six.

John’s brother Bobby Aitken was a difficult character and as a finger spinner always saw me as competition. He was a very gifted player and I remember fielding at slip at Pratten Park when he beat Bobby Simpson yet again with a very good delivery. Simpson then turned around and said to the keeper and myself “If this bloke had a brain he would play for Australia”. The nicest thing Bobby Aitken said to me in twenty years as team mates was “Geoff, you bowl shit, but you bowl it well”. I thanked him for the compliment.
Bob and I had different ideas on bowling. He always wanted to bowl with the breeze so that the batsman was hitting into the breeze whereas I wanted to try and deceive the batsman before he hit the ball and bowling into the wind let me get more drift and drop. This meant we bowled in tandem quite a lot and our strike rates were similar.

Bobby Aitken used to get very upset when he was bowling to me in the nets because I would keep playing the sweep shot against him. He would yell down the wicket “The sweep shot is a shit shot, it’s a get out shot.” A couple of years later when I was playing for Balmain DCC against CCDCC at Old Kings Oval I took a wicket and next man in was Bobby Aitken. He played a couple of balls and then attempted to sweep me. He only succeeded in getting a top edge and as the ball was caught by Rod Tucker at mid-on I turned towards Bobby and said “The sweep Bob, see me after the game and I’ll show you how to play it”. He who laughs last…

In all my years playing grade cricket, I only took one hat trick while playing for Northern Districts in 1972 against Sydney DCC at Trumper Park, Glebe. I bowled a top spinner to a batsman who had been in for a while and he must have thought it was my stock ball, turning from leg to off, because he played outside it as it hit the top of middle stump. The next batsman was a left hander and I bowled him a well flighted stock ball which pitched outside his off stump and spun back between bat and pad to hit middle stump. As this batsman was walking out, I noticed he had a word to the incoming batsman. He had only faced one ball and it turned a lot. The new batsman was a right hander so I thought this batsman is expecting a big spinning “leg break” so I am going to bowl him an “arm ball”. Everything went perfectly. The batsman left a gap between bat and pad as he played for the “leg break” and the ball hit middle stump. I consider this a perfect hat trick. I had bowled three different balls, a top spinner, a stock ball and an arm ball and they all hit middle stump.

I played for Northern District in the 1972/73 season because the season before I was selected in the CCDCC First Grade team but after four games I had not been bowling well and correctly predicted I would be dropped to Second Grade. I took 4 wickets in this game and to my dismay I was dropped to Third Grade for the next game. I was devastated and nobody would tell me why I had been dropped. Years later I found out the reason was because Bert Alderson, the Second Grade captain had his two sons, Greg and Doug –both spin bowlers, in Second Grade and would not drop them. A few years earlier, before I had gained promotion to First Grade, Bert Alderson had given me great encouragement, telling me he considered me a fine bowler similar to Mick Pawley (who he had captained at Sydney University) – I did not really believe this as Pawley was in another league to me.

I played the remainder of that season in Third Grade and as I did not see any future with my beloved Cumberland, decided to try my luck elsewhere.

I was selected in Second Grade for my first game with Northern Districts at Sydney University No. 1 Oval. The captain was Neil “Harpo” Marks and after a couple of overs he told me to bowl two feet outside the leg stump. I said I was not comfortable doing this and after 7 overs none for 11, I was taken off and dropped to Third Grade for the following game. I took 9 for 34 including the above hat trick in this game and even though I took 40 wickets in the season could not gain promotion to Second Grade.
In those years the Cumberland boys would meet at Old Kings during the winter months to do some fielding drills, go for a run around Parramatta Park and play some touch football in preparation for the upcoming season. NDs did not do this so I went down to Old Kings to have a run with the boys. Ross Shepherd (CCDCC First Grade captain) called me aside during one of these sessions said things had changed and convinced me to come back to Cumberland.

The following season, I was disappointed to find I was selected in the CCDCC Fourth Grade side. That 1973/74 season CCDCC teams won the Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Grade Premierships. Although I performed well throughout the season everyone else in higher grades was also going well and I played the entire season in 4ths. We played Sutherland in the final at the SCG No 2 in which I top scored with 39 no and took 2 wickets for 1 run in the first innings and 8 for 21 in the second for an outright victory.

Although I was only 25 years old, I had given up any idea of ever playing First Grade again. I just loved playing cricket for Cumberland and wanted to play as long as I could.

The thing I remember over the next couple of seasons were the games against Northern Districts. Each time I came on to bowl Neil Marks was already out but I could hear him yelling out uncomplimentary remarks about my bowling. This surprised me as I never took less than four wickets against them. I finally came on to bowl in a game against Harpo and bowled him first ball between bat and pad as he played a forward defensive prod. My frustrations of previous seasons exploded as I held my hands apart an exaggerated amount and said “Gap that wide Harpo. Now piss off pensioner”. My team mates were as surprised as I was at this outburst.

I played Second Grade in seasons 80/81 and 81/82 and in those two seasons took 84 wickets averaging under 14 runs per wicket. I bowled just under 600 overs (more than 200 maidens) at less than two runs per over. We were minor premiers by a considerable margin in 81/82. Early in the season, we played Balmain at Drummoyne Oval. On the first day we scored more than 300. The second day, the wicket was damp and Balmain were in trouble at 8 for about 100 at lunch. During the break Mark van Epen, the Balmain skipper, said he would declare if we forfeited our second innings. Johnny Aitken, our captain, held a team meeting to discuss this offer. I said we should not do this as the wicket was drying out and they had a strong batting side with two sessions to score just over 200 runs. The majority of our team was in favour of forfeiting, which we did. Balmain ended up scoring the required runs with plenty of time to spare and the loss of only a few wickets. I was the only recognised bowler not called on to bowl in the second innings. This upset me a lot because although I did not agree with the decision to forfeit our second innings, I would not consider doing anything but my very best for the team.

That outright victory allowed Balmain to sneak into the semi-finals and we played them in the final at Old Kings. The wicket was damp and we sent Balmain in to bat. I was brought on to bowl fairly early and took a couple of quick wickets. When playing for Balmain a few seasons later, their captain Mark van Epen said he identified me as the most dangerous bowler and instructed his batsmen to attack me. He reasoned that if they hit me for a couple of boundaries Johnny Aitken would take me off. This is exactly what happened. I was not
brought back onto bowl until after another 70 odd runs had been added. I ended up taking 7 for 44. We lost the game by 65 runs. Mark van Epen conned JA twice that year to help his team win the premiership.

The loss in the final was tempered somewhat when I won the Bill Anderson Memorial Trophy for Cricketer of the Year. I was the first non-First Grade player to win this award. Winning this award was something very special to me as my family had known Bill Anderson and his family for as long as I can remember. My father Fred Williams used to play against Bill in the PDJCA A Grade competition. When I was old enough to play cricket, Dad took me up to Baulkham Hills where Bill Anderson and George Horwood were our coaches. The only junior competition that first year was Under 15 and our team was all about 12 years old. I still remember my first game against Wenty Waratahs. When I was told I was opening the batting I said “I am going to the toilet”. A nervous habit that happened before every game for my entire cricketing career. Bill Anderson used to take me to cricket practice. I would wait at the end of my street on the corner of Bettington Road and when Bill pulled up in his white Holden Ute I would hop in the back, something that would not be permitted these days. My parents and I spent many wonderful social occasions at Bill and Joan Anderson’s place singing around the pianola. Bill was a fine attacking batsman and he always seemed to be smiling and in good humour. I liked him a lot.

Bill’s son Robert and I played many years of cricket together, starting with junior games at Baulkham Hills Cricket Club and then Cumberland. Robert “Ando” Anderson was an attacking left handed middle order batsman and leg spin bowler. He inherited his father’s sense of humour and easy going personality. These traits and an astute cricket brain helped Ando to become a very successful captain at CCDCC. He was able to engender a great team spirit in players.

One game that demonstrates this was in 1975/76 against Bankstown Canterbury at Bankstown Oval. We batted first and were dismissed for 118. At the end of the first day Bankstown were 2 for 96. The next day when Bob Anderson and I came on to bowl, the team fielded brilliantly. A Greg Matthews run out of Mark Waugh and some amazing fielding and catching saw Bankstown dismissed 1 run short of our total. That team under Ando’s captaincy had a great belief that it could win from any situation and after this incredible win against Bankstown we went on to win the final against “Harpo” Mark’s Northern Districts team.

In the mid-seventies I fell down some stairs and injured my back. This would come back to haunt me in later years. In one game against Balmain at Drummoyne Oval, I mentioned to my father, Fred, during the lunch break that my lower back was feeling very stiff and sore. Dad offered to massage my lower back. We did not have any liniment so Dad asked my team mates if anyone had some “Dencorub”. Mick Haire handed him a tube of Finalgon Ointment and said nothing. My father applied a liberal amount to my lower back as he gave me a massage. I had never used Finalgon before but after a few minutes, quickly found out it is activated by heat and should be used sparingly in amounts much, much, much less than had been absorbed into my back. My lower back felt like it was on fire so I rushed into the shower to try and wash it off but that only made it worse. Despite the pain I was in, I
experienced no stiffness when we went back onto the field. At the end of the day I had cooled down before it was time to drive home but as soon as I sat down on the hot car seat was instantly reminded that I had Finalgon on my back as “the fire” kicked in again and I was trying to drive the car as if it was a chariot with me attempting to stand up. I found Finalgon Ointment, when applied sparingly, was very effective in relieving my lower back stiffness and I used it regularly after that as did other team mates. Although very effective, Finalgon Ointment had to be used with caution as Ian Gibbs demonstrated in a game at Bankstown Oval. Gibbsie rubbed some on his leg between innings before going to the toilet. After a couple of overs in the field Ian asked the umpire for permission to leave the field as he had to wash his penis which was on fire. He had used the same hand that had rubbed in the Finalgon when he went to relieve himself.

CCDCC would arrange visits to play country teams during each season. One time we went to Lithgow to play a local team and when we arrived at Lithgow Show Ground it was raining quite heavily. Nevertheless, the locals wanted the game to be played as we had Doug Walters in our side. We fielded first in the rain and the ball actually made a splash when it hit the wicket. I cannot recall any other details of this match, only that it was the wettest conditions I have ever played in.

Each season we would send a team to Bathurst for their Diggers Day Knock Out Comp. As soon as we had finished playing the grade round on Saturday we would head straight to Bathurst. It was always on the first day of daylight saving each year which meant an extra hour of drinking when we arrived in Bathurst. This proved fatal to some. It took opening bowler Michael “Pubes” Haire three years before he completed an over. He would bowl a couple of balls and then have to leave the field and would not be sighted for the rest of the day. In later years he would explain it was a lot tougher in the days of eight ball overs (he never managed to bowl 6 balls before “retiring”).

One year we assembled for the first game on the Sunday morning and our skipper, Robert Anderson, was organising the team for the match when he opened the tailgate of Mark Sargent’s station wagon to find a very young, hung over Darren Tucker curled up in the foetal position. Ando just said “You failed the physical” as he slammed the tailgate shut.

That year we made the final and played Randwick DCC at Bathurst Sports Ground in front of a crowd of about two thousand people. We won the toss and thought we had a great advantage batting first because the light was fading fast and there was no lighting on the ground. A young Greg Matthews top scored for us and as he was leaving the ground the crowd rose to applaud him. On entering our dressing room all Greg could say was “I just love that applause.”

By the time Randwick batted it was almost dark and we soon realised that it was Randwick who had the advantage as the batsmen had sight boards to help them see the red cricket ball but in the field it was almost impossible. I was fielding on the midwicket boundary and heard the crowd behind me say that they wanted us to win. I turned to the crowd and said if they wanted us to win they would have to help and let me know if they saw the ball coming my way because I could not see it.
A couple of balls later I heard the crack of bat on ball and watched Robert Cadden who was fielding at mid-on, sprint to his left and away from me. I then heard a thud as the ball hit the ground a couple of metres on front of me. After returning the ball I turned to the crowd and said “I thought you were going to help me.” They replied en masse “We didn’t see it either.”

I played most of my grade cricket career bowling 8 ball overs. When 6 ball overs were introduced in the 1979/80 season I found that if a pace bowler was bowling at the other end after a couple of overs he would approach me panting and all out of breath and say “Geoff can you take longer to bowl your overs?” I also noticed that the number of maiden overs I bowled in a season doubled.

In 1982 a group of players from Cumberland formed a tour party called Cumberland Cavaliers to play games in the UK. Some of the players besides myself were Michael Wood, Steve Stewart and Peter Taylor from Petersham. People used to tell me that my style of bowling would suit English conditions and this proved correct as I took 5 wickets in each of the first three games we played. We won most of our games and had a wonderful time enjoying the hospitality as we travelled around England, Scotland and the Netherlands. We played 50 over games but there was no limit on the number of overs for each bowler. One game that really stands out in my memory was at Ormskirk just out of Liverpool. There was a large crowd to watch their team beat “the Aussies”. We batted first and were bowled out for 139. I came on to bowl early in Ormskirk’s innings against this tough old professional who had obviously had identified me as the danger bowler in our team because he would not let any of his team mates face more than a couple of balls from me. Even though I beat him and worried him on numerous occasions every over, I just could not get him out. He just clung in there like a limpit. At the completion of each of my overs the knowledgeable crowd would give us rousing applause as they appreciated the battle that was going on. Ormskirk won in the last over of the day with six wickets down. My figures were 22 overs, 9 maidens, 2 wickets, 30 runs. Even though I did not dismiss the old pro and we lost the game I had really enjoyed the tussle.

I was selected in 1st Grade for the 1982/83 season. An exciting time for the club as John Benaud returned to CCDCC as 1st Grade captain and two young English County players, Chris Cowdrey and Jonathon “Aggers” Agnew, were also in the team. At a preseason practice session John Benaud was hitting balls to us for slip fielding practice. We were standing in an arc about 15 metres from JB when he mishit a ball and I raced in and lobbed it back to him from about 6 or 7 metres away. To my amazement he hit it as hard as he could straight at me. I caught the ball and threw it back at him as hard as I could, yelling at him “What are doing? Trying to kill me?”. JB calmly played the ball with a straight bat and said to me “You’ll field in the gully”.

During the first half of the season I took 17 wickets and some good catches. In the game against Randwick at Coogee Oval, I was bowling to Peter Clifford on 99 when he smashed a ball straight back down the wicket. It was hit that hard that I had to dive backwards and to my left to catch it about 2 feet (60cm) in front of Test umpire Dick French’s nose. I saved Dick French from serious injury as he had not moved and seemed in shock as he thanked me and said well caught. At Petersham Oval I was fielding at a fairly straight midwicket about
half way to the boundary for Bob Aitken bowling to a right handed batsman. I could see the batsman kept looking at the big gap between me square leg. Instead of walking towards the batsman, I began moving to my right as RA ran in to bowl. A few balls later the batsman pulled the ball very hard into the gap to my right. I ran a couple of steps and dived goalkeeper style low, to my right and backwards to take the catch about a foot off the ground. During the tea break an elderly gentleman came up to me and said that was a very good catch that I had taken. I thanked him and he said you dived to your right and caught it your left hand. I was surprised that his eyesight was that good as it was on the opposite side of the ground to where he was sitting. I was trying to catch it in both hands but it stuck in the left one.

A back injury I had suffered a few years previously reared its head during the second half of the season. Each day in the field, my back would increasingly become more stiff to the point where I had difficulty running and bending in the final session after the tea break. This greatly affected my bowling. I “retired” from Grade cricket the following season because of my lower back problems.

At the time I was a director of the Cricketers Club of NSW and the President, Ron Holmes, talked me into playing for the Cricketers Club team. Because of the shorter hours of play my back problem did not affect me as much. We played the final game of the season at Hunters Hill and after the game went to the 3Hs (Hunters Hill Hotel). The Balmain 1st Grade side were also celebrating their end of season at the 3Hs. I got talking to ex Cumberland players Darren and Rod Tucker and Mick Haire who together with their captain, Ian Davis, talked me into coming to Balmain the following season as they had “no spinners”.

The following September, I turned up at Drummoyne Oval and noticed a couple of young blokes named Gavin Robertson and Adrian Tucker who seemed pretty good spin bowlers to me. Gavin would go on to play for Australia as an off spin bowler and Adrian would take 6 wickets bowling leg spin against the England team a couple of years later. I was fortunate to be selected in the Balmain DCC 1st Grade team.

The Balmain side had a very strong batting line up with the likes of Ian Davis, Neil Howlett the Bermudan, Noel Gibbons and the Tucker boys. It made my job as a bowler much easier than the days at Cumberland often having to defend low totals. In one match against Waverley we scored well over 400 and it gave you so much confidence bowling with that size total on the board. I took 4 for 70 off 35 overs in that game. Another pleasing performance was my effort against Cumberland at Old Kings. The comments in the Herald Awards were:

2pts G Williams (B)  A fine display of accurate left arm spin bowling against his former club.  He captured 3-35 off 27 overs including 8 maidens.

This included the wicket of Bobby Aitken caught trying to sweep me.

In one match at Drummoyne Oval I was bowling to Brian Riley who was becoming frustrated in his efforts to try and hit me. At the end of one over me walked down the wicket and said “The next ball you bowl to me will hit the yacht with the orange sails.” I looked behind me
and saw “the yacht with the orange sails” was in the middle of Canada Bay more than half a kilometre away.

True to his word, Riles charged down the wicket and had a huge swing at the next ball I bowled to him. He only succeeded in getting a fine outside edge as the ball clipped the off bail before the keeper caught it and stumped him. Although I knew he was out bowled, I could not resist the urge to ask Riles if he would like to choose his method of dismissal as he was out three different ways (bowled, caught and stumped) on the same ball.

My lower back continued to give me problems to such an extent that I was eventually admitted to hospital and put in traction. I went to hospital on Monday morning where I had a belt placed around my waist with two 20kg bags of water attached to it and hung over the foot of the bed. The foot of the bed was raised so that it was above the level of my head. I spent the entire week lying flat on my back in this modern form of “the rack” before leaving hospital on Friday evening.

The following day, after spending 5 days flat on my back unable to move, I played 2nd Grade at North Sydney Oval and bowled more 30 overs unchanged with no discomfort in my back. I captained Balmain Second Grade the following season before retiring to spend more time with my family after the birth of my son Ryan.

I was not a big turner of the ball and had to rely on accuracy and subtle variation to be successful. During my early days of playing cricket, video cameras were not nearly as common as today. The first time I saw a movie of myself bowling I noticed that during my delivery stride my back (left) leg actually came over the top of the stumps. This surprised me as I never made contact with the stumps. I liked delivering the ball close to the stumps with a high arm action as this helped me to be more accurate and release the ball “wicket to wicket”. Most of the time this was not a problem but some umpires would tell me I was running in front of them.

In one game at Old Kings Oval playing against Randwick, I was bowling to Tom Wood who had “defected” from Cumberland the season before. Having been a team mate and friend of Tom’s for a long time, I desperately wanted to get him out. After bowling half a dozen overs I got Tom to inside edge a ball with a big deflection onto his pad before being caught at silly mid-on. “Got him” I thought as I turned to appeal to the umpire. I was shocked when the umpire said “Not Out. You have been running in front of me. You have been doing it every ball.” I had bowled half a dozen overs and the umpire waited until I got a wicket to tell me I had been running in front of him every ball. As you can imagine I was not a happy camper.

I would try to “visualise” each ball before delivery. I would bowl my stock ball pitched up on middle and off stumps trying to get the batsman playing forward and edging to slip or mistiming a drive to cover or mid-off. I was surprised over my career to have more batsmen caught behind than at slip.

During my early years at Cumberland, I was trying to develop a delivery that came into the batsman. I thought wrist spinners bowl a wrong un by delivering the ball with the back of the hand facing the batsman. I tried doing this as a finger spinner but after some time abandoned this idea as I realised it was impossible to deliver this as a finger spinner without bending
your elbow to get enough pace and rotation on the ball. More than twenty years later Muralitheran and other spinners from the subcontinent would call this ball a “doosra” and have the no ball rule changed twice to make it legal.

My birthday is 29th September a couple of days before the start of each cricket season and all I ever wanted for my birthday was a “Michelle” (rhyming slang for a “five fa” i.e. 5 wickets in an innings after the actress Michelle Pfeiffer) in the first game, but it never happened.

I have been avid reader of cricket books all my life and remember being somewhat bemused when reading in a book by an English Test player (cannot remember who it was) that “every left arm orthodox spinner will lose his run up at some time during his career”. I thought this cannot happen when you have been doing the same thing for years. Then it happened to me. For more than 20 years when brought on to bowl I would start from the stumps and run backwards away from the stumps. I would place the marker where my front foot landed. Suddenly, I started getting no balled for over stepping with my front foot. This did not worry me greatly at first but as the frequency of no balls increased I became very hesitant in my run up and then did not even know which foot to start off from. I had to completely re-invent my run up and I found this very distressing for quite some time. Something that I had been doing for years and years without a problem was suddenly a big problem. To this day, I do not know if my “new run up” was the same as the old one.

**Grade Career**

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<th>Overs</th>
<th>Mdns</th>
<th>Runs</th>
<th>Wkts</th>
<th>Avge</th>
<th>Econ</th>
<th>5 wkts innings</th>
<th>10 wkts match</th>
<th>Cl</th>
<th>Inn</th>
<th>Runs</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>HS</th>
<th>Avge</th>
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