

MAJOR FEATS IN MINOR CRICKET

INTRODUCTION

The literature of cricket is well stocked with details of outstanding performances – whether outstandingly good or outstandingly less-than-good – in cricket at first-class level, or equivalent shorter formats of the game. But the recording of performances at lower levels of the game are far less well known and less comprehensively documented. This, despite the best efforts of one cricket statistician in particular.

Ernest Kingsley Gross (1902-1985) was an accountant who devoted much of his life outside his profession to collecting details of cricketing feats in matches below first-class level. A copy of his full list of these feats runs to 62 very closely-typed pages. A year or two ago it was posted on the internet at http://crickethistory.website/research/ernest_gross/ernest_gross_research_cricket_feats/index.html.

Gross's list has been used as the starting-point for compiling an Index to what the present writer regards as the most important or interesting of those feats. This Index also includes equivalent performances in first-class cricket, to provide some context and to give some idea of how 'special' each of the feats recorded by Gross really was.

The scorecards of many of the most significant minor matches noted by Gross are now included in the database of the Cricket Archive website (www.cricketarhive.com), hereafter CA, where the full details of the matches concerned – or details that are as full as have so far been traced – are available for all to see.

But many of the matches noted by Gross are not included in CA's database, or in any other easily-accessible source. For example, while CA includes match details of all but three of the 69 known individual innings of 400 in organised cricket, it has only eight of the thirty-plus known instances of a complete side of 11 players being bowled out for 0.

In an effort to improve the record of the game, research has been initiated to try to assemble as much detail as possible of the scorecards of the most significant matches noted by Gross but that are not on CA. The ideal is to provide a full match scorecard, but potted scores of the match concerned are a lot better than nothing. Failing that, the search has been for at least some contemporary corroboration that the feat noted by Gross really did take place. For it has to be acknowledged that 'creative scorecarding' – the invention of completely fictitious performances – has sometimes taken place, particularly though not exclusively in the late 19th century; and that some of the 'performances' in these scorecards sometimes found their way into books of record, at least for a time. The research for the present exercise has shown that some of them even found their way into Ernest Gross's lists.

The most recent entry in Gross's lists was for a match in 1983. Since then minor matches have naturally continued to throw up performances that would have earned a place in those lists – performances to which I give the shorthand title of being 'Grossworthy'. Instances since 1983 of which the present writer has become aware are included in this document, but there are doubtless many more – including performances before 1983 as well as since – that have so far gone unrecorded. This may be particularly the case in Asian countries; no doubt because of limitations in the sources available to him, Gross's lists consist predominantly of instances in England, Australia and New Zealand, but with a smattering from elsewhere (including Fiji, France and Denmark) to show that his researches weren't limited solely to the most traditional cricket centres.

The two associated files set out the story so far in the research for scorecards of the most significant matches listed by Gross, and of other Grossworthy performances that he did not record. As noted, the first is an Index listing these performances. The final two columns of the Index show whether or not the performance listed was in a first-class match (with Test matches separately indicated), and where the score details of each match can be found. Matches with a scorecard in Cricket Archive are indicated by 'CA' in the final column, while those not currently in CA are indicated by 'Scores'.

'Scores' acts as a key to the scorecards in the second associated file. This consists of scorecards, as full as it has so far been possible to track down, of some 260 matches in which a Grossworthy performance is reported as taking place. These scorecards are presented in chronological order.

The headers to these scorecards are colour-coded to indicate how comprehensive the scorecard currently is, and to indicate the present writer's view as to the degree of certainty that the performance listed by Gross really did take place. The colour-coding is echoed in a number from 1 to 5 placed in the top right-hand corner of each scorecard, and also given after the word 'Scores' in the last column of the Index. The key to the numbers and colours is as follows:

1 (Green) Scorecards containing a significant level of detail of the match in question, or at least of the innings in which the notable performance occurred.

2 (Yellow) Scorecards for which very few details, if any, of the match or performance have been found, but for which the compiler has, at this stage, no reason to doubt that the Grossworthy performance really did take place.

3 (Orange) Scorecards of matches in which research to date has raised serious doubts in my mind as to whether the performance noted by Gross actually took place, but where as yet it has not been possible to establish this beyond reasonable doubt. The reasons for these doubts are explained in the notes below the scorecards.

4 (Pink) Scorecards where research has shown beyond reasonable doubt that Gross was in error in including the match in his lists. Again, the reasons leading to this conclusion are explained below the scorecard. Although as a result of this research these matches do not, after all, feature a Grossworthy performance, they are included in the Index and in the 'Scores' so that it is not thought that they have been omitted from the present study by oversight.

Performances in Classes 3 and 4 are printed in italics in the Index, to indicate that there is at least a degree of doubt regarding their inclusion.

A fifth category is also used in a few instances:

5 (Blue) Scorecards of matches that are already in the CA database, but where research has either produced significant new details over and above those in the current CA scorecard, or else has shown that the scorecard in CA is to a greater or lesser extent erroneous. (For example, there are two cases where CA includes two different scorecards for the same match, neither of which tallies fully with the details tracked down for the present exercise in contemporary newspapers; in both cases, a note of the various differences between the scorecards is given here, together with the present writer's assessment of which is the 'best' or most credible version of the scorecard.)

The sources for the scorecards are given in each case, along with a note of sources that have been explored but that do not add anything further to the details from the principal sources.

It is not for a moment suggested that even the 'Class 1' scorecards are not beyond improvement if a further or better source could be found. Many of these scorecards have important details missing; or they have innings in which the batsmen's scores, or the bowlers' analyses, do not add up to the same figure as the given team total; or else the bowlers' full bowling figures are not recorded; or else the breakdown of Extras and the fall of wickets are lacking; and so on. There may be sources from which some of these gaps could be filled or corrected. But such errors and omissions are probably inevitable for matches which were generally scored – begging their pardon – by amateur scorers who may not have paid the same attention to complete accuracy or comprehensiveness as scorers in many minor matches do today. And of course it is always possible that the newspapers from which most of the 'Scores' derive made errors when

printing their match scores. All such mistakes are almost certainly incapable of accurate correction today – this is just something that we have to live with.

As mentioned, the ‘Scores’ file shows the current state of play on what is very definitely still a ‘work in progress’. I have not reached the end of my own researches on the subject. As the notes to some scorecards indicate, there are still some local newspapers that may repay investigation, and that investigation will resume when the present national lockdown comes to an end.

But there is much that fellow-researchers can do to improve our knowledge of matches in which a Grossworthy performance occurred – for example

- Obtaining details (including scorecard details where possible) of Grossworthy occurrences in minor cricket in any country since about the late 1970s, so that the lists and scorecards in the present document can be as comprehensive and up-to-date as possible.
- Looking into sources that might throw up better information on the matches in ‘Class 2’ as described above, or that would help to establish beyond reasonable doubt whether the ‘Class 3’ performances were or were not bona fide.
- Looking into sources that might help to resolve some of the more uncertain elements in particular ‘Class 1’ scorecards, or to add any of the missing details from these cards.
- Particularly for matches in Australia and New Zealand, exploring sources beyond those already examined by the present compiler (which have consisted very largely of the newspapers digitised in Trove and Papers Past respectively) to see if more match details can be obtained. This might apply especially, though not exclusively, to matches in these countries in the 1980s and 1990s – too recent to be covered by newspapers in those two invaluable repositories, but not so long ago that all record of them has disappeared from the documents or memories of the teams involved, or from newspaper archives that have yet to find their way into Trove or Papers Past.

Until now, the exercise to assemble details of these matches has been largely a personal quest. But this exercise is now thrown open to all as one of the ACS’s Collaborative Projects, and it is earnestly hoped that many others – ACS members and non-members alike – will want to share in the project to whatever extent pleases them.

A ‘place and date index’ to the matches in ‘Scores’ is included at the end of this Introduction, to assist those who may wish to focus their investigations on a particular geographical area.

Any cricket-lovers – or historians or others with no special interest in cricket, but who like a nice bit of detailed research – who would like to participate in this venture are encouraged to get in touch via the email address k.walmsley135@btinternet.com, and to offer anything that they can that may help to improve our knowledge of the major events in minor cricket that were so close to the heart of the late Ernest Gross. Thank you.

Keith Walmsley
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A word about results

Before 1884, the Laws of cricket did not make any specific provisions regarding the result of a match. In the new code of Laws adopted in that year, it was for the first time expressly stated that “the side which scores the greatest number of runs wins the match”. The 1884 Code also incorporated a specific provision for one-day matches, as follows: “The match, unless played out, shall be decided by the first innings.” A provision to this effect has remained in the Laws ever since.

In 1941, the question was raised (through a letter to *The Cricketer*) of how the result of a one-day match should be expressed, if the team batting second bats on after passing its opponents’ score, or if (by agreement) the match continues after each side had had one innings, but is not then ‘played out’ on the second innings. In August 1941 MCC made a specific ruling on the point, as follows:

“In a one-day match in which the side batting second passes their opponents’ total, they win the match by the number of wickets still then to fall, provided, of course, that the match is not played out on the second innings ... There is no objection to record being kept, for the purpose of averages etc, of such further play as may take place. [This ruling] should not be interpreted as suggesting that play should cease as soon as a result on the first innings is reached.”

In scorecards here for matches that were scheduled for only one day’s play, and which were not played out over two innings per side, the result is usually expressed in accordance with MCC’s 1941 ruling. In the case of matches that were scheduled for two days or more, different rules apply: here the match was officially drawn if not played out in the teams’ second innings, but in some competitions, or some individual matches, a decision would be recorded on first innings if the teams’ second innings were not completed.

Abbreviations and explanations

Most of the terms used in the notes below the scorecards should be easily understood, but the following may be less familiar:

BL – British Library

BNA – British Newspaper Archive (online newspapers from – principally - the UK and Ireland)

MCC Scores – properly, ‘Matches for the season, with full scores and batting averages’, published annually or biennially by MCC to cover their matches in seasons from 1886 to 1949 inclusive

Papers Past, Trove – respectively, the New Zealand and Australian equivalents to the BNA

In the Index tables, the first two columns after the name/s of the player/s concerned give, first, the team for whom they were playing, and second the team they were opposing. As explained in more detail in the main Introduction above, the last three columns show the country in which the event concerned took place, whether or not it was in a first-class or Test match, and where the scorecard of the match (in whatever level of detail is available) can be found.

The scorecards themselves follow the usual conventions, with captains and wicketkeepers, where known, being indicated by * and + respectively, and changes to second innings batting or bowling orders – again, where known – being indicated by bracketed numbers.

One departure from the practice adopted in some quarters – including in Cricket Archive – is that, where two players of the same name played for the same side and the sources traced do not indicate which of them took a particular wicket or a particular catch, this is indicated here by naming the bowler or catcher as ‘ - Smith’ rather than (as would be the case in CA) ‘unknown’ with a footnote to explain that “the player was one or other of the Smiths, but it is not known which one”. In addition, players who started the match as wicketkeeper and who later took a catch in the field, or vice versa, are not distinguished in the scorecards here.

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Geoff Sando in Adelaide, for assistance with some of the scorecards in South Australia, and for supplying the scorecard template that I have used here (with his permission)

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And of course Ernest Gross himself, for the hard labour (but labour of love) which provided so much of the raw data that has fed into the undertaking of this project so far.

PLACE AND PAGE INDEX TO 'SCORES

Australia

New South Wales 11, 15, 19, 33, 34, 35, 42, 55, 56, 60, 75, 81, 106, 107, 127, 133, 138, 149, 162, 168, 170, 175, 190, 191, 198, 201, 207, 210, 212, 215, 218, 219, 222, 227, 238, 242, 244, 246, 254, 255, 257, 258, 265, 270, 272, 275, 276, 277
Queensland 268, 278
South Australia 84, 86, 100, 116, 152, 164, 248, 253, 280
Tasmania 96, 128, 241
Victoria 24, 35, 39, 54, 77, 82, 91, 97, 109, 115, 123, 131, 172, 206, 233, 235, 237, 269, 274
Western Australia 192, 271

Canada 28, 74, 240

Denmark 247

Egypt 202

England

Bedfordshire 178
Berkshire 154, 182
Bristol 155, 259
Buckinghamshire 27, 98, 185, 186, 264
Cambridgeshire 47, 62, 129, 251, 252
Cheshire 52, 93, 260
Derbyshire 180
Devon 32, 89, 208
Dorset 40, 203, 229
Durham 273
Essex 50, 183, 230
Gloucestershire (see also Bristol) 12, 20, 70, 103, 111
Hampshire 36, 37, 41, 43, 49, 79, 119, 239
Hertfordshire 26, 94, 158, 173, 209
Kent 46, 63, 105, 108, 113, 122, 130, 147, 148, 179
Lancashire 44, 187, 193

Leicestershire 8

Lincolnshire 65, 176, 211

London 9, 45, 104, 120, 134, 214

Middlesex 16, 58, 90, 101, 125, 177, 194, 196, 205, 221, 266

Norfolk 6, 139

Northamptonshire 57, 110

Nottinghamshire 51, 188, 189

Oxfordshire 71

Rutland 13

Somerset 18, 53

Staffordshire 25, 126

Suffolk 72

Surrey 7, 10, 38, 64, 83, 112, 124, 161, 165, 171, 220, 231, 256

Sussex 67, 87, 95, 160, 163, 195, 200

Warwickshire 21, 80, 213

Westmorland 88

Wiltshire 66, 118, 153

Worcestershire 204

Yorkshire 14, 59, 68, 102, 141, 144, 157, 224, 267

Fiji 199

France 142

India 78, 92, 136, 184, 197, 225, 232, 236, 245

Ireland 73, 114

New Zealand 48, 85, 132, 135, 145, 146, 156, 166, 167, 169, 243, 249

Scotland 17, 137, 234

South Africa 76, 99, 117, 181, 216, 217, 250, 263, 279

Sri Lanka 140, 143, 174, 223, 226, 228, 261, 262

Wales 69, 121, 159

West Indies 150