

## MAJOR FEATS IN MINOR CRICKET

### INTRODUCTION TO THE THIRD EDITION

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 in equivalent shorter formats of the game. But the recording of performances at lower levels of the game, which for brevity alone I here call ‘minor cricket’, are far less well or 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 few years ago it was posted on the internet at [http://crickethistory.website/research/ernest\\_gross/ernest\\_gross\\_research\\_cricket\\_feats/index.html](http://crickethistory.website/research/ernest_gross/ernest_gross_research_cricket_feats/index.html)).

The aim of the ‘major feats’ project is to find and bring together scorecards of the matches, anywhere in the world, in which the most significant or striking of the feats recorded by Gross took place – along with equivalent feats in matches since his records ended around the year 1983. Many of these scorecards are included in the database of the Cricket Archive website ([www.cricketarchive.com](http://www.cricketarchive.com)), 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 more of the ‘major feats’ matches are not in Cricket Archive, and details can only be found in such sources as contemporary local newspapers and cricket magazines, or else – with a little luck – from one or both of the clubs involved.

Using Gross’s lists as its starting point, aided by further research from these sources, the first edition of ‘Major Feats in Minor Cricket’ was posted in May 2020, with a revised and enlarged second edition following seven months later. Now, in June 2023, we have reached the third edition, which includes many enhancements to the scorecards included in earlier editions, and also adds over 150 new scorecards to the list of those in which ‘major feats’ occurred, or are claimed to have occurred.

The main component of the third edition comprises nearly 500 scorecards, organised into a single chronological set. For ease of handling this set has been split into three roughly equal parts. The first (with pages numbered as 1-168) covers the period to the end of the 1906/07 season, the second (pages 169-326) takes the story to the end of the Second World War, and the third (pages 327-487) brings it right up to date to include matches in the 2022/23 season; it also includes a handful of matches for which no reliable or even approximate date can be given.

As in the earlier editions, the headers to the scorecards are colour-coded to indicate how comprehensive the scorecard currently is, and how well the feat in question has, or has not, been authenticated from the many sources investigated. This colour-coding is echoed in a number from 1 to 6 placed in the top right-hand corner of each scorecard. The coding used in the third edition differs to some extent from that used in previous editions; the categories are now defined as follows:

**1 (Green)** Scorecards of matches in which the details and authenticity of the ‘major feat’ in question have been corroborated from the sources named, and scorecard details confirming the feat have been traced.

Instances of pre-1983 feats that appear well-sourced but that were not included in Ernest Gross’s own lists are given the number ‘1N’. Whether these feats were omitted by Gross because they never came to his attention, or because he knew about them but had some reason for doubting their authenticity, I cannot tell. For my part, I have no evidence on which to base any such doubt – beyond the fact that they were not listed by Gross.

**2 (Yellow)** As above, except that the exact details of the feat are not confirmed in the sources named, even though the scorecard suggests that it is very likely. (Usually this applies in the case of large partnerships, where the scorecard shows that a substantial number of runs were added for a particular wicket, but where the precise number of runs in the partnership is not stated.)

**3 (Pale tan)** As Classes 1 or 2 above, but with few if any scorecard details available.

**4 (Orange)** Instances in which no grounds have been found to doubt the authenticity of the feat as recorded in the sources named, but no further or corroborating details have to date been traced.

**5 (Red)** Instances that cannot be corroborated despite attempts to do so in a range of sources, and for which the evidence available – or lack of it – gives rise to strong suspicions that the feat as recorded by Gross or others may not have occurred at all.

**6 (Blue)** Matches already in Cricket Archive, but where research for this project has identified significant additional or corrected details of the scorecard as given there.

The dividing-lines between these classes are not always clear-cut. In particular, some matches currently in Class 4 are to my mind very close to meriting inclusion in Class 5, but in such cases I have, for now at least, given the matches the benefit of the doubt and left them in Class 4.

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

Alongside these three main project files, this third edition also includes:

- A file setting out record-lists for all the ‘major feats’ covered in this project. This ‘Record Index’ includes equivalent performances in ‘major’ cricket as well as those in minor cricket, to provide some context to the performances in minor cricket and to give some idea of how ‘special’ each of the feats recorded in this project really was.  
For the third edition this Record Index has been expanded to cover a number of feats that were not included in previous editions, such as batters carrying their bats through an innings without scoring, and cricketers scoring a century and taking all ten wickets in an innings in the same match. The Index includes a cross-reference to the place where a full score of the match – or as full a score as has been traced – can be found. Matches already included in the Cricket Archive database are indicated by the letters ‘CA’; all other matches are given their page reference in the three principal project files.
- A file giving notes on some ‘major feats’ that do not show up from individual match scorecards (e.g. feats across a season or a complete career), and also explaining why some matches that were included in previous editions have now been excluded from this edition.
- A file including scorecards of matches that are considered to be of sufficient interest to justify their being recorded as part of the project, even though they do not quite meet the criteria for inclusion in the principal project files.
- A file giving scorecards (whether or not genuine) of matches whose details have appeared in print in the past, but where it is now known that the ‘major feat’ claimed for the match either did not happen at all, or else was contrived by the players and therefore cannot be regarded as constituting genuine ‘major feats’.

For this project, a decision has been taken to exclude instances of ‘major feats’ that occurred in matches where one or both teams fielded fewer than nine players. I have been made aware, for example, of a number of instances of ‘0 all out’ by teams that were at least three players short, but I feel that to include

these would devalue to a degree the 'quality' of the record achieved. I have however made one exception for a feat in a match in which 11 players faced just a single opponent. This instance can be found in the file mentioned in the third of the above bullets.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Major Feats project does not end here. I will always be pleased to hear of other matches, past or recent, in any part of the world, in which a performance qualifying for the project has been recorded. Equally, I will always be pleased to receive additional details of any of the matches already included in this edition of the project. There's still plenty of work that could be done to improve further our knowledge of these 'major feats' and the matches in which they occurred, and I would encourage anyone, cricket-lover or not, to participate in helping to fill the existing gaps. In particular, might I make a plea to potential researchers in Australia and New Zealand to explore sources beyond those already examined for the project – and especially to explore newspapers and magazines more recent than those currently available in Trove and in Papers Past, or even to contact some of the clubs involved – in the hope of learning more about some of the 'Category 4' matches included in the principal project files. I'm sure some more details of at least some of these games must be out there somewhere! Thank you.

### **A brief word about results**

In the scorecards in this third edition, the results of matches are generally given in accordance with the Laws of cricket as they applied at the time of the match, while also taking account of an implicitly-retrospective MCC ruling in 1941 which stated that in a one-day match where the side batting second batted on after passing their opponents' score, the result should be expressed in terms of the number of wickets outstanding when that score was passed. Even if one or both teams batted a second time, the first innings result was decisive unless both sides completed their second innings. Such matches could not properly be recorded as a 'draw', unless factors such as weather prevented a result being obtained even on first innings. In the case of matches that were scheduled for two days or more, different rules applied: 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)

*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 of the BNA

In the Record 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. The last three columns show the country in which the event concerned took place, whether or not it was in a first-class, Test, or List A match, and – as explained above - 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. 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.

## **Acknowledgements**

This project started out largely as a personal quest, but since it went live in May 2020 a very large number of cricket-lovers and others around the world have contributed to its improvement and enlargement, and I am hugely grateful to them all.

Unquestionably ‘first among equals’ among the contributors has been Harry Watton, whose researches in online newspapers, at the British Library, and through direct contact with archivists and the like who might be able to assist on particular matches have provided enhancements to a very large proportion of the scorecards now included in the project. Harry has also unearthed many previously-unrecorded performances of ‘major feats’ which as a result have been added to the second and third editions of the project. I cannot thank him enough for his continuing high-quality involvement in this project.

The many matches in which the main input has come from Harry or myself are not individually noted in the project files; you may take it that any scorecards for which no other named source is given derive largely if not entirely from the results of our efforts, either individually or combined.

But we are by no means alone in helping to progress this project beyond its original edition. The names of all others who have contributed on particular matches are given on the relevant scorecard or scorecards in the project files. Without in any way wishing to detract from the sincerity of my thanks to all who have contributed in this way, I should like here to express my particular appreciation of those who have taken their time and trouble to contribute on a number of matches: Philip Bailey, Marque Dobrow (Victoria), Alfred James (New South Wales), Francis Payne (New Zealand), William Rice (Cricket Victoria), Geoff Sando (Adelaide), and Ken Williams (Victoria). As many as 62 other names also appear on the scorecards as contributors in respect of, generally, just one or two matches; I hope I may be forgiven for not naming them individually here as well as on ‘their’ scorecards.

Further contributions to this project are always very welcome from anyone, anywhere. So here's to more of the same ahead of a possible fourth edition!

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June 2023