

Leg Before Wicket

Douglas Miller starts to look at the most controversial form of dismissal

Of the 40 wickets that fell in the match between Gloucestershire and Glamorgan at Cheltenham that ended on 1st August 2010 as many as 18 of the victims were dismissed lbw. Was this, I wondered, a possible world record? Asking Philip Bailey to interrogate the files of Cricket Archive, I discovered that it was not: back in 1953/54 a match between Patiala and Delhi had seen 19 batsmen lose their wickets in this way. However, until the start of the 2010 season the record in English first-class cricket had stood at 17, but, barely credibly, Cheltenham had provided the third instance of a match with 18 lbws in the course of the summer. Gloucestershire had already been involved in one of these, against Sussex at Bristol, while the third occasion was the Sussex-Middlesex match at Hove.

Was this startling statistic for 2010 an indication that leg before decisions are more freely given nowadays? It seemed to correlate with an impression that modern technology has given umpires a better feel for when a ball is likely to hit the wicket and that the days when batsmen could push forward and feel safe were now over. I determined to dig deeper and examine trends over time.

This article confines itself to matches played in the County Championship since World War I. I propose looking at Tests in a future issue. The table below shows how the incidence of lbw dismissals has fluctuated over time.

	LBWs per match	LBW as % of all dismissals
1919 – 1930	3.26	11.14
1931 – 1939	4.14	14.29
1946 – 1960	3.38	11.53
1961 – 1970	3.16	11.09
1971 – 1980	3.71	13.87
1981 – 1990	3.90	14.90
1991 – 2000	5.08	17.64
2001 – 2010	5.57	18.94

For half a century just over 11% of all dismissals were lbw with a short-term upward surge in the 1930s. From the 1970s the trend is then clearly upward, culminating in the highest figure on record, 22.08% in 2010, by which time leg before had become almost twice as prevalent a form of dismissal as it had been in the 1920s or in the immediate post-World War II decades.

There had already been signs of an increase in the 1930s, before the sharpest rise came in the years that led up to a major change to the lbw law. In 1935 a provision was first introduced experimentally whereby it was no longer a prerequisite for a successful lbw appeal that the ball should have pitched in a line between wicket and wicket. Instead, a decision could now be given against a batsman when a ball had pitched outside the off stump. The experiment ran for two English seasons before the

change was incorporated into the Laws in time for the 1936/37 MCC tour of Australia, where the new provision had initially been resisted.

The effect of this change can be seen in year by year figures from the 1930s:

	LBWs per match	LBW as % of all dismissals
1931 – 1934	3.81	13.49
1935	5.45	17.80
1936	4.80	16.51
1937 – 1939	3.94	13.37

In the first two experimental years umpires gave significantly more batsmen out lbw. In 1935 all decisions given under the new provision to balls pitching outside the off stump were recorded as lbw (N). Such decisions accounted for 31.7% of all leg before dismissals – very much in line with the overall increase in all lbws. However, it would seem that leg before decisions very soon reverted towards the same proportion of all dismissals as in the years immediately before the trial of the new law.

This decline in the three years from 1937 no doubt reflected the ability of batsmen to adapt their technique to the new requirements. The change was generally welcomed in promoting offside play, the prevailing feeling being that batsmen were now best advised to get onto the front foot and play the ball with their bats. ‘Quick footwork and a straight bat were used to solve the difficulty,’ was the view expressed in *Wisden’s* Notes.

In cricket’s earliest days it had been frowned upon for a batsman to use his legs in defence of his wicket, though Arthur Shrewsbury had become adept at using his pads as a second line of defence. However, as some critics had foreseen, before long pad play was thriving. Herbert Sutcliffe was a shrewd exponent, and in the post-war years Peter May and Colin Cowdrey exemplified the technique as they famously defied Sonny Ramadhin in their stand of 411 in the Edgbaston Test of 1957. For hours they thrust the pad outside the line of the stumps, knowing that they could do so with total safety, just as county batsmen like Gilbert Parkhouse, Brian Bolus and Ron Nicholls were frustrating bowlers every day of the week.

It was not until 1970 that the problem of pad play was addressed by amending the Laws, initially experimentally. If they wished to remain safe from the umpire’s raised finger, batsmen were now required to be playing a shot. However, the initial experimental law, which ran for two summers, offered them protection that they had not hitherto enjoyed: provided an attempt was made to play the ball, a batsman could not be out lbw to a delivery pitching outside off stump *even if the point of impact was between wicket and wicket*. After two years this protection was withdrawn and the provisions of the Law were essentially as they have remained to this day, with the playing of a shot offering the batsman safety only when the intercepting pad is outside the line of off stump. The effect of the two changes was dramatic:

	LBWs per match	LBW as % of all dismissals
1968	3.43	12.66
1969	2.92	11.21
1970	2.25	8.03
1971	2.24	8.17
1972	3.99	15.18
1973	4.24	15.55

At first there was a drop in leg before dismissals and then, once the current Law took effect, a sharp rise to a level approaching double that of the two experimental years. This new level was virtually unchanged, at an average of 14.74%, over the next 20 years.

However, from 1993 the trend line has moved steadily upwards again. Until that year only one English season, 1935, had seen lbws account for more than 17% of all dismissals. In 1993 the figure was 17.36% and in only two summers since, 1996 (16.59%) and 2001 (16.90%), has it dropped below 17.

The four years 1999 to 2002 are interesting:

	LBWs per match	LBW as % of all dismissals
1999	6.54	21.56
2000	5.81	20.91
2001	4.89	16.90
2002	6.21	20.00

Why, we may wonder, was there a sudden apparent reluctance to give batsmen out in 2001? This, it may be recalled, was the Ashes summer in which Channel Four first made full use of Hawkeye technology. Perhaps umpires at large were initially reluctant to accept the extravagant claims for near invincibility that were advanced for the new system. However, 2001 has proved to be but a blip in the trend with each season thereafter recording levels unthought of in the 1980s or earlier:

	LBWs per match	LBW as % of all dismissals
2003 - 2008	5.40	18.53
2009	5.28	18.92
2010	6.27	22.09

With the passage of time and the adoption of Hawkeye into other sports, together with presentations demonstrating its accuracy, cricket followers seem gradually to have accepted its predictions. Replay analyses have shown that a greater proportion of balls striking an outstretched leg go on to hit the wicket than had once been expected. Perhaps more importantly, the notion that there was once too much guesswork to give a batsman out with confidence when hit on an outstretched leg has eased as viewers – including, of course, umpires when not officiating – have acquired a better understanding of the likely path of a ball after striking a pad. The belief that a

batsman should not be given out if he stretches well forward served an earlier generation of umpires, but it is not good enough for those officiating today.

There have always been umpires whose finger rose more readily than others. On the other hand, the men chosen to officiate in Test matches traditionally tended to be those more inclined to keep the hand down. Clearly, given the trends shown above, modern umpires' propensity to give batsmen out will be greater than it was a generation ago, but there will always remain those regarded as 'not outers' and those seen as 'bowlers' umpires'.

It is impractical to trace every decision to the umpire who gave it, but analysis is possible based on the *pair* of umpires standing in a match. To obtain a more realistic estimate of a single umpire's propensity to give lbw decisions, we must attempt to eliminate the contribution of his colleague. This can be done, somewhat arbitrarily, by assuming that the decisions given by the various men with whom an umpire has stood will approximate to the prevailing overall average over the seasons in question. (The umpire under scrutiny will himself have contributed to that average, but this will be only a marginal influencing factor.)

Let us take an example. Confining the study to the 164 umpires with at least 50 championship matches since 1919, the man in whose games the highest proportion of wickets has fallen lbw is Neil Mallender with 21.00%. At the other end of the scale is Syd Buller with 8.69%. During the twelve seasons that Mallender has stood in the Championship the average for all matches was 19.34%, meaning that those in which he has been involved have been about 9% above the norm for the period. In the case of Buller, who umpired from 1951 to 1970, the norm for his career years was 11.08% but in matches where he was standing the figure was over 21% down at 8.69%.

However, assuming that the lbw decisions of their respective colleagues standing at the other end represented the average of the period, then Mallender would be closer to 18% above the norm while Buller would be over 40% below it: Mallender 22.66%; Buller 6.30%. Even with a small adjustment for the extent to which the two umpires contributed to the overall average against which their deviation has been measured, it seems fair to say that Mallender is more than three times as likely to give an lbw decision against the batsman as Buller would have been. Yet, just as Buller was seen as a top umpire in his day, so is Mallender one of the more highly regarded in the modern game.

Categorising umpires from the match statistics available, which others are to be found in the 'trigger happy' camp with Mallender and which are alongside Buller in the 'batsman's benefit' category? A straight ranking of the 164 qualifying umpires would show that those immediately below Mallender are the officials with whom he now stands. Twelve of the top 13 were still officiating in 2010, their number including several who have been entrusted with Tests and ODIs: Mark Benson, Ian Gould, Jeremy Lloyds, Nigel Llong and Peter Hartley.

Umpires inevitably tend to become products of the era in which they stand, today's practitioners being quicker to give batsmen out lbw than even Ray Julian, at whose end it has been said that bowlers clamoured to operate, or Ken Palmer, generally

acknowledged as quicker to raise the finger than most of those with whom he stood in Test matches.

To define more clearly each umpire's proclivity to give lbw decisions in favour of the bowler, two other factors should be brought to bear: each umpire's statistics must be adjusted to reflect the overall average over the *precise* years in which he stood; and a crude but realistic assumption must be made that, over time, colleagues standing at the other end conformed to the average of the period in question. Taking note of these two factors it becomes possible to create an index for each umpire revealing the extent to which his inclination to give batsmen out lbw deviated from the norm of his time.

		First	Latest or		LBW as %	
		season	last	Matches	all wickets	Index
			season		in matches	
					officiated	
1	Harold Elliott	1939	1956	243	14.71	144
2	C Marshall	1920	1925	82	12.85	140
3	H Horton	1973	1979	60	17.50	140
4	C Cook	1965	1986	257	15.91	139
5	JP Whiteside	1919	1922	54	12.11	139
6	WE Phillipson	1956	1978	427	13.71	133
7	FC Gardner	1962	1965	77	13.33	133
8	AE Boulton-Carter	1951	1953	65	13.09	132
9	RS Herman	1979	1982	53	15.96	132
10	JA Jameson	1984	1987	74	17.06	132
11	PA Gibb	1957	1966	193	12.52	130
12	JD Bond	1988	1997	145	18.41	129
13	TJ Bartley	1948	1960	273	12.77	127
14	T Flowers	1919	1926	158	12.16	126
15	HE Hammond	1961	1963	56	12.07	124
16	PB Wight	1966	1995	483	15.63	123
17	WA Buswell	1923	1937	306	14.42	122
18	HG Baldwin	1932	1962	517	13.66	122
19	JA Cuffe	1925	1927	61	12.64	121
20	W Reeves	1921	1939	313	14.10	121
21	WT Jones	1952	1956	99	12.76	121
22	P Rochford	1975	1977	50	16.22	120
23	GM Lee	1935	1949	169	15.23	120
24	RA White	1983	2001	279	18.05	120
25	R Julian	1972	2001	447	17.17	118
26	JH Parks	1954	1964	115	11.91	118
27	NA Mallender	1999	2010	137	21.00	117
28	CV Tarbox	1936	1947	129	14.99	116
29	JH Board	1921	1923	64	11.26	115
30	JW Holder	1983	2009	367	18.38	115
31	LH Gray	1953	1975	360	12.39	114
32	AE Pothecary	1949	1958	203	12.27	114
33	RJ Bailey	2003	2010	57	20.37	114
34	J Birkenshaw	1982	1988	113	16.18	113
35	WE Alley	1969	1984	254	14.48	113
36	CT Spencer	1979	1983	82	15.27	113
37	B Leadbeater	1981	2008	392	17.78	112
38	WAJ West	1919	1925	134	11.15	111

39	BJ Meyer	1973	1997	339	16.12	111
40	JG Langridge	1956	1983	416	12.81	111
41	A Lockett	1948	1950	61	12.57	110
42	RT Robinson	2005	2010	54	19.96	110
43	A Nash	1926	1930	102	13.54	110
44	A Warren	1923	1926	79	11.79	109
45	MJ Harris	1998	2008	134	19.87	109
46	HR Butt	1919	1928	167	11.29	109
47	MR Benson	2000	2010	76	19.96	109
48	KE Palmer	1972	2002	410	16.58	109
49	TE Jesty	1994	2010	199	19.58	109
50	D Denton	1925	1930	129	12.32	108
51	GS Mobey	1951	1955	98	12.02	108
52	LC Braund	1923	1938	323	13.48	107
53	DE Davies	1955	1960	114	11.34	107
54	JF Steele	1997	2010	167	19.87	107
55	HL Parkin	1950	1952	65	11.95	107
56	GH Pope	1966	1976	157	12.92	107
57	WR Parry	1924	1935	184	13.25	106
58	W Phillips	1919	1930	211	11.48	106
59	JT Bell	1948	1951	83	12.16	106
60	J Arnold	1961	1972	233	11.43	106
61	CWL Parker	1936	1939	79	15.24	105
62	HL Palmer	1950	1954	106	11.75	105
63	HW Lee	1935	1946	133	14.87	104
64	AE Alderman	1966	1968	58	12.13	103
65	JA Smart	1937	1948	118	13.26	103
66	NL Bainton	2001	2010	72	19.24	103
67	H Cruice	1939	1948	84	12.86	103
68	WFF Price	1949	1967	370	11.40	103
69	JH Hampshire	1985	2005	269	17.20	103
70	D Hendren	1931	1949	241	13.87	102
71	P Willey	1993	2010	191	18.84	102
72	A Skelding	1931	1958	453	12.87	101
73	G Beet	1929	1946	236	13.98	101
74	NT Plews	1981	1999	248	16.04	101
75	J van Geloven	1977	1983	113	14.30	100
76	DGL Evans	1971	1989	240	14.44	100
77	CAR Coleman	1946	1957	120	11.68	100
78	JH Harris	1983	2000	251	16.40	100
79	B Flint	1946	1950	106	12.45	100
80	JA Newman	1932	1939	159	14.33	99
81	RSM Lay	1956	1968	255	11.05	99
82	WH Copson	1958	1967	203	10.84	99
83	IJ Gould	2002	2010	82	19.04	99
84	OW Herman	1963	1972	164	11.26	98
85	JJ Hills	1939	1956	231	11.85	97
86	Harry Elliott	1946	1960	207	11.37	97
87	J Hardstaff	1927	1946	264	13.33	97
88	VA Holder	1992	2010	228	18.16	97
89	GI Burgess	1991	2008	230	17.69	96
90	P Corral	1952	1957	122	11.30	96
91	N Oldfield	1954	1965	214	10.83	96
92	A Jepson	1960	1984	421	12.31	96

93	TW Oates	1927	1938	258	13.31	96
94	EF Field	1927	1934	151	12.43	96
95	SB Hassan	1988	1991	52	14.49	96
96	PJ Eele	1979	1990	102	14.33	96
97	JW Day	1926	1930	99	11.63	95
98	JW Lloyds	1998	2010	140	18.78	95
99	AE Dipper	1933	1936	85	14.69	95
100	NJ Llong	2002	2010	90	18.63	94
101	JF Crapp	1957	1978	370	11.47	94
102	E Cooke	1936	1956	315	12.19	94
103	PJ Hartley	2003	2010	82	18.49	94
104	RA Kettleborough	2004	2010	64	18.33	93
105	DJ Halfyard	1967	1981	96	12.55	93
106	DJ Constant	1969	2006	523	15.00	93
107	R Aspinall	1960	1981	399	11.78	93
108	TA Brown	1919	1922	80	9.78	93
109	J Stone	1925	1934	205	12.02	92
110	D Davies	1946	1961	310	10.98	92
111	CS Elliott	1956	1974	332	10.91	92
112	DJ Wood	1957	1962	129	9.88	92
113	A Clarkson	1996	2004	112	18.24	92
114	JC Balderstone	1988	1999	159	15.97	92
115	JH Evans	2001	2010	118	18.03	90
116	CG Pepper	1964	1978	239	11.92	90
117	EJ Smith	1931	1939	180	13.57	90
118	JH King	1926	1932	144	11.87	90
119	AA Jones	1985	2008	320	16.20	89
120	K McCanlis	1948	1956	181	11.00	89
121	J Moss	1919	1929	209	10.34	88
122	AE Fagg	1959	1976	262	11.07	88
123	WH Ashdown	1948	1950	62	11.24	88
124	CH Welch	1950	1952	64	10.84	88
125	AJ Atfield	1919	1924	100	9.72	87
126	NGC Cowley	1998	2010	125	18.04	87
127	F Parris	1919	1929	218	10.28	87
128	B Dudleston	1983	2010	367	18.00	87
129	G Sharp	1992	2010	228	17.23	87
130	AED Smith	1952	1965	115	10.32	87
131	H Bagshaw	1919	1923	78	9.53	86
132	RK Illingworth	2005	2010	60	17.66	86
133	H Yarnold	1959	1974	260	10.65	86
134	CN Woolley	1932	1949	254	12.79	86
135	AEG Rhodes	1958	1979	342	10.96	85
136	HI Young	1921	1931	227	10.47	85
137	DO Oslear	1975	1993	296	13.62	85
138	TM Russell	1919	1925	116	10.52	84
139	FI Walden	1930	1939	169	13.04	84
140	AGT Whitehead	1970	2005	511	14.30	84
141	MJ Kitchen	1982	2005	307	15.37	84
142	A Dolphin	1930	1939	196	12.99	84
143	AE Street	1919	1934	338	10.76	83
144	R Palmer	1979	2007	386	15.11	83
145	RD Burrows	1924	1931	164	10.87	82
146	DR Shepherd	1981	2005	269	15.02	81

147	JW Hitch	1932	1935	71	13.17	80
148	TW Spencer	1950	1980	570	10.54	78
149	A Morton	1927	1934	170	11.28	78
150	E Robinson	1937	1951	161	11.25	78
151	WL Budd	1969	1984	223	12.04	77
152	W Bestwick	1927	1937	209	12.00	77
153	J Blake	1919	1923	101	8.96	75
154	B Brown	1921	1925	98	9.39	74
155	FS Lee	1948	1963	312	9.72	74
156	F Jakeman	1961	1972	222	9.60	73
157	GP Harrison	1919	1924	102	8.85	71
158	T Drinkwater	1962	1965	66	9.61	68
159	F Chester	1922	1955	531	10.21	64
160	EA Roberts	1953	1957	87	9.43	62
161	H Mellows	1966	1970	95	8.94	61
162	JS Buller	1951	1970	379	8.69	57
163	HD Bird	1970	1998	351	11.41	54
164	KJ Lyons	1985	2002	160	12.66	51

Though Buller remains close to the bottom of the list, Mallender has dropped down to twenty-seventh when his decision making is set in the context of the most recent decade. Names shown in bold type are of those who stood in at least one Test match. It is clear that these umpires are to be found more readily in the lower reaches of the list, umpires with Test experience dividing thus between quartiles:

Top quartile	11
Second quartile	15
Third quartile	17
Fourth quartile	27

Very few of the acknowledged greats of umpiring are in the top half of the list. Readers may make their own minds up about the apparent practice of reserving Test match appointments for those most reluctant to give batsmen out. David Shepherd, Frank Lee, Frank Chester, Buller and Dickie Bird – rightly or wrongly, each of these was seen as the leading umpire of his day. All are well into the bottom quartile with Bird shown, in the context of the period when he was officiating, to be even more of a not outer than Buller.

Few umpires, one suspects, would have been less comfortable than Bird at the prospect of having their not out decisions reviewed by Hawkeye. Meanwhile no-one higher up the list than Sam Cook (index 139) has umpired in more than his 257 championship matches. ‘We don’t want to go any worse than him,’ an England captain of the day is recalled as saying in reviewing officials at a county captains’ meeting. His words seem to echo the prejudice of his age, the 1970s and 1980s, as may the treatment of Eddie Phillipson, whose long career came to an end in 1978. Awarded 12 Tests between 1958 and 1965, he fell out of favour thereafter. In giving a significantly higher proportion of lbws than his colleagues at a time when it was not fashionable to do so, was he, perhaps, an umpire ahead of his time?

A thinking bowler with one of the longest playing careers of post-war cricketers, Glamorgan’s Don Shepherd, has looked with interest at the findings. He immediately

volunteered the impact of Hawkeye as a factor in the growth of leg before decisions, but he also wonders if today's covered pitches may produce fewer occasions on which the ball passes over the stumps for spinners. They used to bowl straighter in his day, he feels, but perhaps, at a time when slow bowlers delivered so many more overs, the unprotected pitches induced too much turn. The pecking order in the lists caused few surprises, though he had thought of Cec Pepper, like his fellow Australian Bill Alley, as more of a bowler's friend. 'That was a bloody awful shot – on your way!' Phillipson he had always held in high regard, but Don Shepherd remains a staunch advocate of those traditionally regarded as the best of his time. 'A very fine umpire' was his unequivocal view of Buller, and it was the same with Frank Lee. Shepherd reflects, too, on the ethos of the modern game with so much more appealing and teams going up in chorus. 'Even cover point joining in. I'm sure it must have some effect,' he speculates, 'especially with inexperienced umpires.'

My own view is that it is sad, even shameful, that those who have tried to give the bowler a fairer crack of the whip should have been penalised for doing so. Hawkeye suggests that the likes of Phillipson, Paul Gibb, Bond, Julian, Bob White and Peter Wight deserve credit for their refusal to hide so unswervingly behind the cover of giving the batsman the benefit of any doubt. Meanwhile, the earlier indications that the international umpires of today are much quicker to give batsmen out must be qualified by observing that, among their own peers, Gould matches the overall average, while a tightly-knit bunch of England's other current international officials can be found with indices around the 93 to 95 mark, suggesting just a marginal leaning towards the batsman: Lloyds and Llong are now joined by ODI umpires Richard Kettleborough, a recent appointment to the International Panel as its youngest member, and Peter Hartley.

It is also noteworthy that there is greater uniformity between the umpires on the list today than would have been the case in earlier decades. The range of indices for those standing in 2010 stretches from Mallender on 117 to Richard Illingworth on 86. By contrast, Cook and Bird overlapped on the panel for 16 years, the one with an index of 139, the other on 52. The greater uniformity must be applauded: it speaks well for the ECB's feedback and mentoring procedures.

There is little in the lists to support the occasionally heard contention that former bowlers like to support the cause of those plying the same trade. Cook, Phillipson and Mallender may be cited to illustrate this philosophy in action, but there are plenty of one-time bowlers who have been reluctant finger raisers. And there are former batsmen high among those quickest to side with the bowler. 'Poacher turned gamekeeper,' said one retired umpire of another who has since graduated to the list and emerges as a bowler's friend. 'He was never out when he was a player!'

Let us now move on to explore another popular belief – that captains are always better served by umpires than the rest of their team. Statistical analysis reveals some disturbing truths. The figures below now use a different norm: instead of expressing lbws as a proportion of all wickets, the analyses are based on all dismissals attributed to bowlers. (Hence run outs and the other more esoteric ways of getting out not credited to the bowler are ignored.) Figures in brackets provide an index showing the extent to which captains have diverged from the norm. They enable easy comparison of the different periods.

	Lbw as % of all bowlers' dismissals	Captains when batting	Captains when bowling
1919 - 1930	11.14	9.56 (86)	13.51 (121)
1931 - 1939	14.68	12.49 (85)	18.51 (126)
1946 - 1960	11.89	10.85 (91)	15.70 (145)
1961 - 1970	11.45	9.97 (87)	16.46 (144)
1971 - 1980	14.29	12.60 (88)	17.09 (120)
1981 - 1990	15.29	14.18 (92)	14.94 (98)
1991 - 2000	18.05	17.47 (97)	20.68 (115)
2001 - 2010	19.33	19.62 (101)	22.83 (118)

In only one of the periods examined, the most recent decade, has a captain at the crease not been at an advantage over the rest of his team when the bowler has appealed against him for lbw. Moreover, the 1980s apart, captains also appear to have received special favours from umpires when taking their turn with the ball.

A trend can be seen wherein the bias in favour of captains as batsmen has eased and now appears to have disappeared altogether. However, the evidence still points to preferential treatment for skippers when they are bowling, the 1980s seeming to be a minor exception to the overall trend.

All captains, of course, are expected to bat, whereas many have had little pretence to bowl. This means that the bowling indices have been constructed from a less robust statistical base with wider variations from one season to the next than with batting figures. Over the whole of the period under consideration captains have claimed 4.7% of the wickets that have fallen to bowlers in the Championship. There have been times when their influence was greater: in the late 1920s with Percy Fender and JC White in their prime; in the mid-1950s when Robin Marlar, Stuart Surridge and Wilfred Wooller were all captaining their counties; in the mid-1960s with Trevor Bailey, Tony Lock, Derek Morgan, John Mortimore, Brian Statham, Fred Titmus and Ossie Wheatley all overlapping in 1966, the only season in which county skippers have been responsible for 10% of all bowlers' wickets in the Championship.

The bias in favour of captains might have been expected to ease once amateur status was laid to rest after the 1962 season. However, while some counties still preferred a public school type as leader, for others the days when it had been *de rigueur* for their captain to be an amateur were already long past. Changes to the social mores of the game were already afoot, but the pace did not noticeably quicken for some time. The sea change, it has been suggested, came in the early 1990s. By this time the game was starting to develop a more professional face that would lead to disciplined warm downs replacing the close of play drink with the opposition. Backroom staff were soon to multiply, bringing with them such innovations as ice baths, pre-match fielding drills and lap top analyses that have left old-timers rubbing their eyes in disbelief.

This trend has seen the captain merge into the track-suited ranks, often holding office for only a short period, while the umpire has become a better paid, less serf-like figure. The once all too obvious social gap has evaporated. Moreover, where an umpire's livelihood once lay at the whim of a few disgruntled captains, now television cameras and their attendant technology visit the county game and enable the

competence of officials to be more objectively assessed. So it may be no coincidence that the statistics show that from 1994 captains have ceased enjoying favours from umpires when they come out to bat.

Notwithstanding this trend, the skipper still appears to enjoy a statistical benefit of rather more than 15% as a bowler. Put simply, six successful shouts for the price of five seems to be the captain's bonus at the present time. But, to place this in perspective, it is not the deal it once was. In the early post-war years through to 1970 the going rate was not 15 to 20% but 45% or more – almost, extending the supermarket vernacular, buy two wickets and get one free.

The summer of 1952 was a vintage season for bowling captains, the index rising to 173. This was the peak year in a period when there were the richest pickings for those who led their counties. And what men they were – Freddie Brown at Northants and the aforementioned Surridge and Wooller. These were the principal bowling captains – the others were mainly batsmen – and a formidable triumvirate they make. It is surely not too much to suppose that their sheer force of personality, allied to their social status, helped them to their share of the 73 lbws that fell the way of all county captains that summer. Are captains of such commanding presence consigned to the past? Well there has been a certain Shane Warne in recent times!

This article first appeared in the ACS Journal, the Cricket Statistician, in March 2011.