

Minutes of the 50th AGM of the Association of Cricket Statisticians and Historians held virtually via Zoom on Saturday, 18 March 2023

Members present (50): Philip Bailey, Ian Baker, Philip Banham, Pelham Barton, Martin Bevan, Martin Briggs, Dale Brown, John Bryant (Chair), Mervyn Carson, Mark Chaloner, Paul Dyson, Rick Eyre, Jonathan Farmer, Ric Finlay, Shaun Fisher, Roger Gibbons, Peter Gilbert, David Griffin, Peter Handford, Peter Hardy, Peter Hart, Jenny Heald, Andrew Hignell (Secretary), David Jeater, David Kendix (President), Julian Lawton Smith, Neil Leitch, Jeremy Lonsdale, Adam McKie, Eric Midwinter, Douglas Miller, Harriet Monkhouse, Denis Moore, Bryn Nathan, Huw Nathan, Serena Nathan, Jonathan Northall, Chris O'Brien, Brian O'Sullivan, Chris Overson, David Pracy, John Reddish, Andrew Samson, Graham Searle, Vijitha Senaratne, Brent Simmonds, Simon Sweetman, Peter Tatton, Garry Wallace (Treasurer) and Keith Walmsley.

1. PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

After the Secretary had explained the voting process, the meeting began at 10.05am with the President welcoming everyone joining from the UK and the rest of the world to the 50th AGM of the Association. He suggested that collectively the members should raise their bats to acknowledge this milestone before getting their heads down to complete the next fifty! He told members that further information would be provided at the end of the meeting about plans to celebrate the Association's Golden Jubilee, besides reminding everyone that during the course of the year another milestone had been reached in the publication of the 200th edition of the Journal. The President concluded his opening remarks by highlighting the fact that seven founder members of the Association were still members of the ACS – Philip Banham, Robert Brooke, David Gallagher, Peter Handford, Godfrey Prior, Norman Rogers and Martyn Taylor – and he congratulated them on reaching their own half-centuries.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Secretary read out apologies from the following members: Nigel Bratton, Robert Brooke, Ivan Burges, Chris Burgess, Keith Gerrish, Peter and Jenny Griffiths, Richard Isaacs, Tim Jones, Roger Moulton, Roger Page, David Parry, Mick Pope, Norman Rogers, Mel Smith, John Ward and Geoff Wellsted.

3. REMEMBERING OUR DECEASED MEMBERS

Julian Lawton Smith gave a short tribute to Tony Webb, a former Statistician of the Year and the leading light behind the Minor County Project, who had sadly died a few weeks before the meeting:

Tony was a Founder Member of the Association. His main interest was in Minor County cricket, and during his life he compiled an unprecedented amount of information about counties outside the first-class game. His output included 20 high quality annuals from 1895 until 1914, but there is plenty more available until more recent times and his papers have been digitised by Peter Griffiths so that members and other researchers can benefit from Tony's painstaking work. We will all miss his warmth and kindness.

During the year, the following members had also died: Travis Basevi, Robin Brodhurst, Jack Chapman, David Clutterbuck, Lionel Cooke, James Coombs, Graeme Crosby, Stan Dawson, Brian Evans, David Fryer, Clifford German, Michael Hill, William Hopkins, Tony Hutton, Vic Isaacs, Graham Kent, Tim McCann, Michael Morton and David Sherwood. The meeting duly observed a period of silence in memory of all deceased ACS members.

4. TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE 2022 AGM

The Secretary reminded the meeting that there had been one small amendment to the minutes, as printed in the Journal, with an additional apology for absence – which had also been noted in a subsequent issue of the Journal. Following a show of hands, the Secretary announced that the motion for the approval of the AGM minutes (proposed by Jenny Heald and seconded by Philip Banham) had been passed unanimously.

5. TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30/11/2022

The Chair said that the Association is continuing to adapt in the post-covid world, and making more and more use of electronic communications and slowly reducing the reliance on ink and paper. Committee meetings and members' meetings continue to be held, like this one, via virtual means. This will result in important changes in the membership profile. Amongst the highlights of the past year was being able to get rid of discrepancies between ACS records and Wisden records, and he thanked Lawrence Booth, the current editor of Wisden, for working with the ACS.

The report was proposed by the committee and seconded by Bryn Nathan, and unanimously approved by those attending the meeting.

6. TO RECEIVE AND ADOPT THE ANNUAL ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30/10/2022

The Treasurer was pleased to report that over the past few years the ACS committee has gradually developed and implemented a business model that has provided a degree of financial stability, generating modest but consistent levels of profitability and positive cash flows. As a result, the ACS has not needed to access its investment funds for over four and a half years.

This position has been achieved by the combination of three initiatives. First, the development and implementation of sound, documented, business processes and procedures. Secondly, the achievement of cost savings across the range of ACS business activities, which have largely offset the impact of inflation. Thirdly, the application of a risk-based, benchmarked approach to setting cover prices and print runs for ACS publications, so as to optimise sales revenue.

Members had seen the fruits of this approach with membership subscriptions remaining unchanged for the past five years (and prospectively for a sixth year) and cover prices for standard ACS publications remaining stable for several years, subject only to scope changes (such as the impact of covid on the number of matches played). For these general reasons, the last financial year 2021/22 had delivered sound financial results, directionally in line with the previous two years.

Looking to the future, the Treasurer believed that the committee needs to be honest with members that the current extreme levels of inflation will not be capable of being offset by further cost savings either by our hard-pressed suppliers or ourselves at the ACS. One area in particular that needs to be highlighted is postage costs, which are escalating far more rapidly than the general level of inflation. Whilst our sound financial position means that the committee is recommending that subscriptions remain unchanged for a sixth year (2023/24), it is highly likely that the committee will be recommending an increase at the 2024 AGM.

For similar reasons it is anticipated that cover prices of ACS publications may have to increase over the coming months. He stated that the first evidence of this will be an increase in the cover price of the ACS Journal for its Summer 2023 edition. Members pay for the Journal via their annual subscription so will be shielded from this increase in the immediate future.

He concluded by saying that our external Accountant continues to provide services in a timely and effective manner. These include preparation of monthly accounts, annual financial statements, VAT returns and Corporate Income Tax returns together with sound advice on accounting and tax issues. Worth a special mention is the speed in obtaining the annual VAT refund from HMRC. The Accountant's fees have remained unchanged for two years and the committee is now recommending an increase of 8% – somewhat less than the rate of inflation – to £3,230 per annum.

The Treasurer finished by stating that, in summary, the committee was recommending the members' approval of the 2021/22 Accounts, as presented, the re-appointment of Judy Leng as ACS Accountant for the 2022/23 financial year at an annual fee of £3,230, and no change in the membership subscription rates for 2023/24 as compared with those for 2022/23.

Regarding the first point, the Treasurer recommended the approval of the accounts. He was seconded by Neil Leitch and, following a show of hands, the accounts were unanimously approved.

7. TO APPOINT AND AGREE REMUNERATION OF THE INDEPENDENT ACCOUNTANT

The Treasurer proposed the motion for the re-appointment of Judy Leng as ACS Accountant for the 2022/23 financial year at an annual fee of £3,230. This was seconded by Pelham Barton and, after a show of hands, the motion was unanimously approved.

8. TO APPROVE THE SUBSCRIPTION RATES FOR 2023/24

The Treasurer proposed the motion that there should be no change in the membership subscription rates for 2023/24 as compared with those for 2022/23. This was seconded by Neil Leitch and the motion was unanimously approved after a show of hands.

9. COMMITTEE ELECTIONS

The Secretary said that four nominations had been received for four places on the Association committee and so there was no requirement for an election. The following will therefore continue to serve on the committee – Ric Finlay (Proposer – Don Starr, Seconded – Richard Smith), Peter Griffiths (Proposer – Julian Lawton Smith, Seconded – Harry Watton), Chris Overson (Proposer – Robby Wilton, Seconded – Peter Gilbert) and Keith Walmsley (Proposer – David Jeater, Seconded – Martin Chandler).

10. PRESENTATION OF THE STATISTICIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD FOR 2022 (BROOKE-LAMBERT TROPHY)

The Secretary announced that Travis Basevi, who had tragically died during October 2022, had been the committee's unanimous choice to receive the Brooke-Lambert Trophy. He read out a short citation based on a tribute written by Andrew Miller of CricInfo:

Travis Basevi, the architect of ESPN CricInfo's iconic StatsGuru search engine, and one of the website's most vital influences during the 1990s and 2000s, had died aged 47 following a two-year battle with cancer. Travis had been born in Geelong, Australia in March 1975, but it was whilst studying in Sydney as a teenager in the early 1990s that he first encountered the nascent CricInfo, via the Internet Relay Chat (IRC) system that helped connect its loose community of cricket fans before the dawn of the mainstream internet.

In keeping with many of the pioneers who helped to populate CricInfo's sprawling database in these formative early years, Travis was initially drawn in by the cricket chat, stayed as a volunteer to help build and populate scorecards, and ultimately became one of its key pillars as the new website rode the dotcom boom and bust at the turn of the Millennium.

Travis' imprint is there in every facet of the website, from its original static scorecards to ESPN CricInfo's Content Management System, which he built from scratch circa 2005 and remains an unimprovable tool for the site's global network of editors. "We instantly hit it off. Travis was a hilarious guy," recalls Vishal Mishra, his oldest colleague at CricInfo. "We collaborated on lots of things – the first and biggest one was the completion of the Test and ODI scorecard database in 1995. At that time, he didn't know how to program, but he painstakingly went through every scorecard and crosschecked them against other references such as Wisden to find and correct errors. We also had to ensure that the scorecards were pleasing to the eye and included the right amount of spacing for players such as Bromley-Davenport!"

Travis was one of the early pioneers of CricInfo's renowned ball-by-ball commentary, including at the 1999 World Cup, where he memorably described the clash of yellow and green kits for the Australia-Pakistan Final at Lord's as the "ripe bananas versus the unripe bananas"! However, Travis' crowning achievement was the creation of StatsGuru, the first iteration of which was in development from 1998 before going live on the eve of England's series against West Indies in June 2000. While other colleagues talked about the possibilities of mapping the range of data now populating the site, Travis simply went ahead and did it, using his self-taught brand of coding to connect every facet of a cricket scorecard, like a puppeteer with endless strings.

As CricInfo's global influence grew, Travis travelled the world for a series of assignments, including to Bangladesh in 1998 for the original Champions Trophy. In 2002 he was headhunted by the formative wisden.com, for whom he would build the bespoke Wisden Wizard stats engine, but one year later he returned to his original calling following CricInfo's acquisition by Wisden and the merger of the two websites.

Travis had moved to London in 2000 and made his home in Kilburn in easy commuting distance from his beloved Queens Park Rangers FC and several of his favourite pubs in Camden and Chalk Farm – visits which he would catalogue with the same forensic detail that he brought to his cricket statistics. Despite his imposing six-foot frame and undeniable cult status amongst his colleagues, Travis remained to the end one of the most laid-back individuals imaginable – invariably dressed in a T-shirt and cargo shorts, and deeply dismissive of any acclaim for his achievements, most of which were carried out while encased in his noise-filtering headphones and plugged into a typically eclectic range of music.

The Secretary concluded by adding that in 2014, Travis had taken up a new role as Chief Technology Officer at CricViz, which is such an important component of the statistical analysis of current international matches, as well as having become a vital element in the online coverage of county matches and the streaming of domestic games. After members had shown their appreciation of Travis' achievements, the Secretary concluded by adding that arrangements were being made to pass on the glass award to Travis' widow Jane and son Victor, and he hoped that a photograph of this would appear shortly on the Association's website.

11. AWARD OF LIFE MEMBERSHIP

Ric Finlay stated that it gave him great pleasure in proposing Roger Page for life membership of the Association.

He has been a major figure in facilitating the recording of cricket history for over 65 years, besides which he has been instrumental in administering the affairs of overseas members on behalf of the Association since its formation 50 years ago.

Roger Page was born in North London, England, and arrived in Tasmania, Australia as a 12-year-old in the late 1940s. He first made his mark in the cricket world by authoring at a very young age, while a University of Tasmania student, his iconic History of Tasmanian Cricket in 1957, and it was this publication, and him personally, that I leant on heavily for my update on this topic in 1992. He continued his youthful enthusiasm by contributing several pieces to Roland Bowen's Cricket Quarterly in the 1960s, while working as a teacher in the small Tasmanian town of Ulverstone. In late 1971 he had a significant career change by leaving his teaching job and moving to Melbourne where he became a full-time cricket-book seller (having dabbled in it part-time whilst in Tasmania). Shortly after the Association was formed in 1973, he took a leading role in recruiting Australian members to the Association, one of which, in 1976, was the author of this citation. He continues this invaluable work to this day, and it is no coincidence that the majority of overseas members of the Association are Australian.

His interest in recording the game was not neglected while taking on this administrative role, however, and in the late 1970s and early 1980s, he was the driving force behind the publication of the Australian States booklets on first-class players. Again, I had first-hand experience of dealing with him during this project, and he served as a wonderful clearing house for the massive biographical data that was collected and published during this period of ten or so years. He receded somewhat from his own research after this, but was always on hand to assist with quality Australian cricket bibliography, notably Ray Webster's two-volume history of first-class cricket in that country, a seminal work that will surely stand the test of time.

Though now well into his eighties, Roger Page continues to work for the Association by servicing its Australian members with characteristic efficiency and business acumen, alongside his passion of circulating cricket books (including ACS publications) for his many collector customers – this one can vouch for his diligence in this area, having commandeered a room in my house to accommodate it all. The Association has been very fortunate in coming to the notice of this engaging man, and I thoroughly recommend his elevation to life membership to all members.

After a show of hands, the proposal (seconded by Harriet Monkhouse) was passed unanimously.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Secretary reported that there were four items of Any Other Business which had been submitted by the due date.

- (a) The Secretary reported that the committee was planning a 50th anniversary event on 14 October in the Charles Palmer Suite at the Grace Road ground in Leicester. He added that information about the three-course lunch, plus tea and coffee, would be shared with the membership once an agreement had been finalised with Leicestershire County Cricket Club. He expected that the price would be in the region of £40 per person, and that a well-known statistician has been invited to speak after the meal. The Secretary added that he hoped a recording of the speech and other tributes would be made and added to the Association's website.
- (b) Jonathan Northall then spoke briefly about his plans as the newly-appointed Editor of the Journal, which had reached its 200th edition during the past year. Simon Sweetman, the retiring Editor, also thanked members for their contributions with those attending the meeting then showing their appreciation of Simon's efforts with a sustained round of applause.
- (c) The Chair spoke about the bequest of material to the Association by the late Tony Webb. Tony had a vast collection of items at his home in Ealing and his wishes were that county yearbooks be offered to County Record Offices whilst the rest of the collection should be offered for sale to ACS members to raise funds on behalf of the Association. 50 boxes of books and other items have now been taken to City Press (ACS Sales) in Leeds, where they will be catalogued prior to being offered for sale in a similar manner to the Wilkinson bequest two years ago. The Chair concluded by saying that further information about the sale will be shared with members in due course, besides thanking Tony's daughter Mary for her kind assistance.
- (d) Finally, the Secretary outlined the discussions which had taken place over the course of the past nine months about the creation of an ACS Archive at Trent Bridge. He said that discussions had taken place between him, Peter Griffiths and Steve Le Mottee, the recently-appointed Heritage Officer of Nottinghamshire County Cricket Club. He added that further information about this exciting project – which could involve the digitisation of manuscripts and other papers – would follow later in the year once a memorandum of agreement is in place with Nottinghamshire.

The President closed the meeting at 11.10am.