

# THE COUNTY GAME

## COUNTY MEMORIES – LANCASHIRE

# KINGS OF THE LORD'S FINAL

*Jeremy Blackmore speaks to John Crawley, Glen Chapple and Mike Watkinson about what made Lancashire the outstanding one-day side of the 1990s*

**A** side drawn from the Lancashire leagues with a proud identity achieved nine one-day trophies in 11 seasons – including three double-winning years – and came agonisingly close to adding an elusive Championship title.

New stars emerged such as crowd favourite Ian Austin and master of the run chase Neil Fairbrother. Pakistan great Wasim Akram added a major point of difference with the ball across many years.

By the late 1980s, though, Lancashire had tasted one-day success just once since 1975. A great team was breaking up. Defeat in the 1986 NatWest Trophy final prompted sweeping changes.

Out went cricket manager Jack Bond and coach Peter Lever. There was change in the boardroom too as Cedric Rhoades was replaced by Bob Bennett as chairman.

The club did not have to look far for the ideal replacements. In the seconds, David Hughes and coach Alan Ormrod were overseeing a run towards the Second XI Championship. Both men were elevated to the 1st XI to lead the revival.

Twenty years since his first-team debut and approaching his 40th birthday, Hughes had been pondering retirement. His appointment as club captain proved inspired. His contributions with the bat were modest and he rarely bowled, but as a Brearley-esque specialist captain, he made an immediate impact.

In 1987 he captained Lancashire to second place in the Championship, their highest finish in 27 years. They missed out only by failing to take maximum bonus points in their last game.

Graeme Fowler and Gehan Mendis proved a formidable opening partnership while the bowling was spearheaded by West Indian Patrick Patterson and former England seamer Paul Allott. Left-arm spinner Ian Folley and the veteran 'Flat Jack' Simmons (by now 46) with his off-breaks proved an effective pairing of their own with more

than 60 Championship wickets each.

Allrounder Mike Watkinson describes Hughes and Alan Ormrod as a double act, good 'people persons', who encouraged energy and enthusiasm.

"Alan was a good thinker of the game and David was cute in that when players became established and important to the side, he let them manage themselves in many ways.

"In the Championship, if you had the ball in your hand, you pretty much owned the field while you were bowling. He'd back you. They were clever how they managed younger players and older players like Simmo who was still around from the previous era. The players warmed to that and gave their returns out on the field."

With a young Mike Atherton batting at No.3, Fairbrother at No.4 and stacked with allrounders, Hughes dropped himself down the order to allow Watkinson to bat No.5.

Akram had already made an impact at Test level by the time he played the first of nine seasons for Lancashire in 1988.

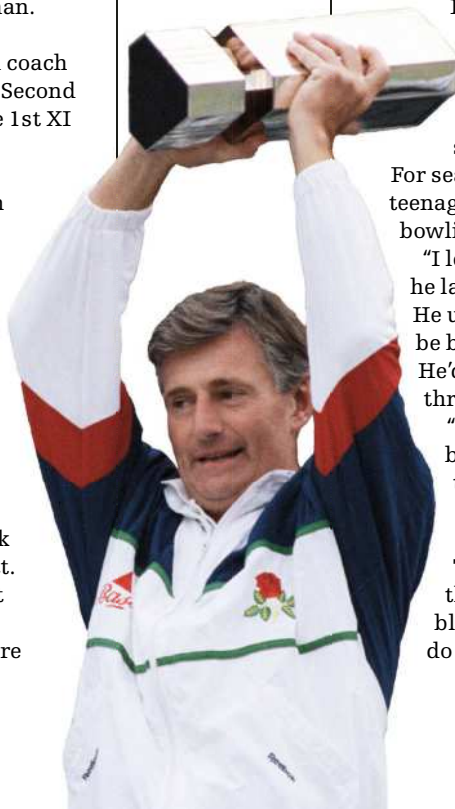
For seamer Glen Chapple, who debuted as a teenager in 1992, watching Akram in action was a bowling masterclass.

"I learned how to do what he did, but not as well," he laughs. "He had different fields to other people. He used to have his fine leg really fine, because he'd be bowling two yorkers an over even at the start. He'd be carrying it through to the keeper two or three yards further than everyone else could.

"He got reverse swing before anybody else could because of his pace, but he taught us how to do that. Different ways to do it and when to use it.

"Often, he would do the hard stuff. He could bowl as fast into the wind as downwind. At Old Trafford quite often, because the square was the other way than it is now, the wind used to blow straight down from Stretford and he'd often do the hard overs at the end of the innings into

**BELOW**  
Lancashire's 43-year-old skipper David Hughes lifts the NatWest Trophy in 1990





the wind, get even more swing and we could all roll down with the wind."

Akram finished as leading wicket-taker as the club won the Sunday League in 1989, with Fairbrother scoring almost 600 runs throughout the campaign.

Lancashire started the new decade in optimistic mood. Rightly so. In 1990 they achieved the Lord's cup final double in style. First Worcestershire were dispatched by 69 runs in a game billed as Hick v Akram. The Pakistani set up the prolific Graeme Hick with swing and pace to have him caught behind for just 1. Then in the second final that September, Phil DeFreitas ran through the Northamptonshire top order, taking five wickets before Fairbrother's 81 helped Lancashire make short work of it.

But two further trips to Lord's in 1991 and 1993 ended in defeat. Amid wholesale changes, Ormrod was removed alongside Fowler and Allott. DeFreitas joined Derbyshire.

A core group of young players took centre stage, initially under Fairbrother, and then Watkinson from 1994. By now the pair were the two senior players yet still only in their late twenties. Crucially, the youngsters were joining a club that had become used to winning trophies, one with expectations and belief.

John Crawley remembers: "It was very much a changing of the old guard for the new guard. It was remarkable how settled the old guard were before then for a prolonged period, and how settled the Lancashire team of the '90s was for the next decade. Jason Gallian and I were pretty much effectively replacing Fowler and Mendis."

Chapple agrees: "I came into a team already used to winning. So, it was a bit daunting for an 18-year-old because it felt like they had a divine right to win one-day trophies."

Fairbrother had already made his Test debut and shown his ability to play big innings, none more so than his 366 against Surrey at the Oval in 1990 – 311 of them in a single day. But it was in one-day cricket where he built his reputation. A nuggety batsman who could nurdle, manufacture shots and expertly pace an innings.

Chapple says: "He was unbelievable in all formats. But certainly, in one-day cricket, he was one of the old-school players who could pace an innings and take a team over the line. Really skilful, good between the wickets. A very intense player, very driven and desperate to win. That was the attitude I felt through the team: it was all about winning. A group of smart cricketers who had high skills and a real closeness."

As a multi-skilled allrounder, Watkinson was a highly underestimated cricketer and a good captain, says Crawley: "Mike worked things out for himself. To go from a very solid and very good medium-pace bowler to the offspinner he became was a tremendous feat.

"As captain, he was very laid back in many ways, quite keen to allow the players to do what they knew they could do well. He almost captained a little bit from the background which is not a bad approach at all. He'd realised he had a team which knew exactly what it was supposed to do."

Watkinson says he and Fairbrother followed the ethos they had inherited from their predecessor as captain: never give up.

"We never knew when we were beaten," he says. "That's one of the things we inherited from the Ormrod-Hughes era, where no matter the situation, we would always look to find a way to win. We never thought we were out of it.

"We'd have little standing jokes in the dressing room

**ABOVE**  
Glen Chapple bowls Peter Such to dismiss Essex for 57 in the 1996 NatWest Trophy final





**ABOVE**  
Neil Fairbrother drives during his pivotal 63 for Lancashire in the 1996 Benson & Hedges Cup final

**ABOVE RIGHT**  
Mike Watkinson holds the B&H Cup after Lancashire overcame Aravinda de Silva and Kent in the 1995 final

where sometimes the run-rate would creep up. We would call ourselves ‘Thunderbirds for International Rescue’, sat waiting there to go into bat. It’s up to eight at an over; what number have you got written on the end of your bat? It’s nine an over now; have you got nine written on yours? You’d better go in next.”

He points to two innings played by wicketkeeper Warren Hegg which exemplified this approach. In the 1990 final against Worcestershire, Hegg’s 31 not out off 17 balls at No.9 pushed Lancashire up to a competitive total. Then, in one of two big semi-finals against Roses rivals Yorkshire at Old Trafford in 1996, Hegg took the attack to Darren Gough and Craig White, dispatching them to all corners while scoring 81. Peter Martin hit two off the last ball to seal a nail-biting one wicket win.

The team had a real love affair with Lord’s and relished every moment of the big day.

Watkinson says: “We just wanted to be there so much. All the little things that went with it. People would say it was a distraction. It wasn’t for us. It was motivation.

“We would get ourselves cup final suits; we wouldn’t always wear our blazers. We’d go to a local tailor, and we’d all get suits and matching ties. We’d order red roses. They’d be at the hotel across the road, they’d be fitted on our lapels. We’d walk to the game on match morning.

“We’d have arranged a night out somewhere. We might have arranged a few drinks at Stringfellows for the evening, win or lose, but we’re going to go and really enjoy the occasion. Supporters came down in their bus-loads, families, friends were there. They were just great days out and something to be really enjoyed and savoured rather than something to be nervous about.”

Chapple recalls his first trip to Lord’s in 1993. He was twelfth man but what stood out was a motivational word from his captain.

“I was 19 and Neil Fairbrother said to me, don’t worry

because you’ll be coming here a lot more in the next few years. I just believed him because you’ve no other reference points, have you? You just listen to one of your senior players. But he was right.”

Their return to NW8 in 1995 resulted in victory over Kent by 35 runs. Atherton made 93 and Crawley 83 before Watkinson and spinner Gary Yates claimed three wickets apiece as Lancashire bowled out their opponents.

“That’s the carbon copy of most of the Lord’s finals we played in,” says Crawley. “There was always one of us getting a lot of runs at the top of the order. That allowed us enough leeway – on what was a very flat, very good Lord’s pitch – for the bowlers to do their job. Even if somebody could produce an innings like Aravinda de Silva [112 for Kent] did in that match, then we’d still have plenty of runs to play with.

“The batting depth didn’t make us blasé. The modern-day way of playing one-day cricket is if you get out, as long as you’re trying to achieve your plan, then that’s fine. We didn’t think like that. We put a lot of pressure on ourselves to be the ones to score the runs to give that freedom for those further down in the last 10 overs to regularly post 100-plus.”

Chapple adds it didn’t matter whether they batted first or chased: “We were comfortable chasing scores down with the likes of Fairbrother and Graham Lloyd who formed a great partnership. Lloyd was one of the new era players who could reverse sweep and manufacture shots. He used to run really hard, which was relatively new. It was just a well-rounded team.”

Going into 1996 Lancashire lost coach David Lloyd to England, but with Watkinson at the helm it was a hugely successful year with the bowlers playing key roles in the club’s second Lord’s cup final double of the decade.

First Austin starred with four wickets in a 31-run victory over Northants after contributions with the bat

by Fairbrother and Atherton. Austin's rotund figure may have been out of fashion by the late '90s, but it did not detract from his ability with bat or ball. Akram described him as "the best death bowler I have ever seen".

Chapple says: "He never bowled a bad ball. He maybe didn't have much variation, but he hit the seam, he bowled at off-stump. Then he landed his yorkers. He just didn't put a foot wrong."

On their second visit to Lord's that summer, Crawley's 66 was the bedrock of Lancashire's 186 on a tricky surface, before Chapple and Martin skittled Essex for 57. Chapple finished with career-best figures of 6 for 18.

He says: "The weather was overcast, it was moving around a little bit, and we managed to scrape a score together. John Crawley played well, and we got 180-odd, which didn't look good enough. But we made early breakthroughs. I came on first change and luckily everything went very well for me."

Crawley, who says he should have been given out lbw on 0, recalls how difficult it was to lay bat on ball. At the halfway stage, he was confident that any score would be good enough given the quality of Lancashire's bowling, provided the pitch did not dry out.

Essex exuded confidence as they walked off, but it was a different story with bat in hand. Graham Gooch could only scrape his way to 10 off 55 balls.

Crawley says: "If you bowled in the right area, it was unplayable. Glen exactly did that. What we did very firmly is we stuck at it with the bat a little bit better than they did and bowled a much better length."

Chapple and Peter Martin had announced themselves as an exciting seam pairing with 50 wickets each in the 1994 Championship campaign. Chapple likens his team-mate to Angus Fraser with a bit more pace.

"Peter got bounce off a good length, so it would always be at the top of the bat. Once he was in his mid-twenties, he very rarely had a bad day. Tall, accurate, swung it away. Good at making breakthroughs with the new ball. But the whole bowling unit, were able to build pressure as well as take wickets."

With Akram as captain, 1998 was another double-winning year. Lancashire clinched a dramatic NatWest final played over two days due to rain.

Derbyshire openers Michael Slater and Kim Barnett looked untroubled at 70 for 0. Then a remarkable bowling performance from Austin (10-5-14-3) rocked their opponents with Martin chiming in with four wickets. With both finding plenty of movement, Derbyshire lost 10 for 38. The following day Crawley and Fairbrother knocked off the required runs with almost 30 overs to spare and nine wickets in hand.

They rounded off the year with by winning the Sunday League in emphatic style.

One prize remained out of reach. The treble was on going into September 1998, but they narrowly missed out on adding the four-day title to their two one-day trophies. Indeed, Lancashire finished runners-up in the Championship three seasons running between 1998 and 2000.

Chapple says: "It's almost a crime we didn't win the four-day stuff because we were equally as good in that. We had periods where we couldn't get results at Old Trafford. People talk about the weather in

**'We'd all go to a tailor and get ourselves cup final suits and matching ties. We'd order red roses and they'd be fitted on our lapels. We'd walk to Lord's in the morning'**

**BELOW**  
John Crawley was the only man to reach 50 during the 1996 NatWest final against Essex



Manchester. That played a factor now and again, but we came second several times. It's a strange period. Given we were winning one-day trophies, there didn't seem to be the pressure on us to win the four-day stuff."

Crawley tried to shift the club's priorities towards Championship cricket when he became captain in 1999: "I think a lot of the club hierarchy were very keen on any trophies and they perceived our best shot was always one-day stuff. I just think culturally, we would have benefited from a real concerted attempt to go for the Championship as well as the one-day competitions early in the '90s."

He recalls the weather playing a detrimental role, which meant the club were unable to capitalise fully on Muttiah Muralitharan's signing in 1999.

"It was such a shame, with Murali that year," he says. "Before they did all the work and re-laid the outfield, in the first two weeks of the season, you would put your foot down on the outfield if it had been raining, and the whole six feet around you would just move. It was that soggy."

"Anybody who asks 'why haven't Lancashire won more Championships?', you've got to look at the weather. It's not helpful, particularly early season."

He also believes the large number of international call-ups had a detrimental impact, whereas England players were usually available for cup ties.

Crawley scored almost 1,700 runs in the 1998 Championship campaign, but ranks his performance for Hampshire in 2002, when he had to adjust to different types of challenging pitches at Southampton, as superior.

Watkinson says: "A class act, John Crawley, no doubt about it. He should have played more Test matches and got more runs for England. A top-drawer player."

"Athers also made an impact for us. He wasn't quite like Gooch who would get 150 for England, then get 150 for Essex the next day. When Athers was England captain, that was very tiring for him. He would give of his all. But when he would come back to us, I would captain the team and he would go and chill out at third man and just get his head right and go and have a bat and get some runs."

Lancashire won the National League under Crawley in 1999 with an emerging Andrew Flintoff contributing with bat and ball. It was their last silverware until the Championship title was finally won in 2011.

Crawley's Lancashire career ended in late 2001 after the club asked him not to reapply for the captaincy. He asked to be released from his contract, citing "irreconcilable differences" and sought legal representation from Cherie Blair. Twenty years on he would rather not go over old ground, but says one positive was that the fallout led to changes in the way the club was run.

Crawley's overriding memories are of a welcoming, family-friendly club with a group of players who mostly knew each other from a young age and got on well. Players who had come through a strong youth system combined with excellent overseas signings.

Watkinson says the players of that golden era should be proud: "There are so many little moments in games and contributions from players. The team spirit – 'We are Lancashire' – the signings that came from outside, they became Lancastrians. That was very important to us. We wanted to keep our Red Rose identity and play for the history and heritage of the county."

"Jack Bond had given most of us our opportunity as young players and that was one of his big drivers: 'remember where you've come from, remember who you're playing for'." 📌