



TITANS OF THE TRENT

Clive Rice and Richard Hadlee wrenched **Nottinghamshire** out of the doldrums, but the 1980s side was about more than just the two greats. Tim Robinson, Mick Newell and Andy Pick talk to *Jeremy Blackmore*

The 1980s was the golden age of the allrounder. Titans of the game who filled grounds and emptied bars. Nowhere was their impact felt more than at Trent Bridge where Nottinghamshire boasted two of the greats in one team.

Clive Rice, denied a chance to play Test cricket by South Africa's international exile, was appointed captain and together with Kiwi Richard Hadlee rejuvenated a side that had languished in mediocrity for half a century.

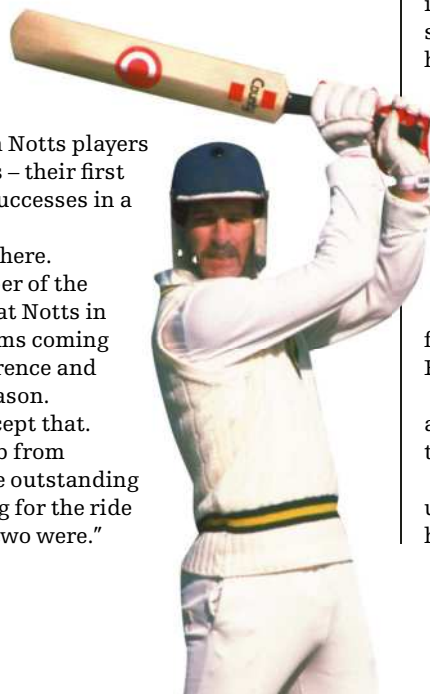
The pair inspired a group of homegrown Notts players to two Championship titles in seven years – their first since 1929 – and their first ever one-day successes in a double-winning year in 1987.

Notts in the 1970s was a club going nowhere. Mick Newell, a childhood fan and a member of the successful 1987 side, recalls: "If you look at Notts in the '70s, you've got some very average teams coming 16th or 17th. It was a fairly regular occurrence and beating Derby was the highlight of the season.

"Clive and Richard were not going to accept that. What they did in terms of getting this club from nowhere to county champions was a quite outstanding achievement. The other players went along for the ride because they knew how important those two were."

ABOVE
Notts celebrate the 1981 Championship victory at Trent Bridge

BELOW
Clive Rice batting in 1985



The story could have been very different. Rice had joined in 1975 as a replacement for Garfield Sobers. He made an immediate impression; topping 1,000 Championship runs and taking 53 wickets.

Recognising his skills as a tactician and combative approach, Notts appointed him captain in 1978 but promptly sacked him after he accepted an offer to play in Kerry Packer's World Series Cricket. Hadlee was duly signed as his replacement but when Rice challenged his dismissal in the courts, Notts relented. Rice was reinstated initially as a player only but was handed back the captaincy by late July 1979.

Rice's eventual successor Tim Robinson says: "The biggest cherry on the top was through default, we ended up with both Rice and Hadlee. When you put those two together, it's an unbelievable combination. "When Ricey took over, it was a complete transformation in our outlook and the way we prepared. He put us on a lot more of a professional footing. Also, Ken Taylor was appointed as the manager. From that point on, everything just went upwards."

Robinson says Rice was extremely confident in his ability and outlook. There was never a challenge he thought the team could not pull off.

"Probably his biggest asset was the fact that he told us what we all had to do and then he'd go out and do it himself, being a great allrounder. His positive attitude to

just about everything, that was the thing that rubbed off on us and the confidence he gave us all.”

For youngsters like Newell, who debuted in 1984, the captain was an inspiration, someone everyone wanted to impress.

In 1980, the first full year of Rice’s captaincy, Notts finished third, their highest placing since 1929. The following year they finally brought the Championship pennant back to Trent Bridge.

Rice reeled off six centuries and scored almost 1,500 runs. Meanwhile Hadlee adapted his game to suit the rigours of county cricket – to devastating effect. He claimed 105 wickets, more than anyone else on the circuit and formed a potent new-ball partnership with Rice. If there were mutterings about spicy pitches at Trent Bridge, it did not diminish the extraordinary impact the pair had.

“A guy who when he first burst on the scene with New Zealand, was young and wild, but probably his biggest attribute was to know his own game and what he had to do to prepare himself,” says Robinson.

“How he changed his action, how he cut his run-up down and became a genuine allrounder with the bat as well. That was probably when helmets came in, he became a lot more confident, and he played his shots.

“But when he bowled, we knew there was every chance we were going to get wickets, it was as simple as that. He was probably the best around.”

Winning the Championship in 1981 emphasised that Notts were on the right track and homegrown youngsters flourished under Rice’s leadership.

Seamer Andy Pick, who debuted aged 19 in 1983, recalls: “There was a winning mentality, which was personified pretty much in Richard and Clive. They held everybody to account with regards to expectation.

“They were outstanding cricketers themselves, but also

outstanding at doing their job. They fulfilled the role they were supposed to as international players and led from the front the whole time.”

The dressing room Pick walked into was full of internationals or players that would soon play Test cricket. In addition to Hadlee and Rice, Derek Randall and Eddie Hemmings had been key members of the Championship victory in 1981, while Mike Hendrick had recently moved across from Derbyshire. Robinson and wicketkeeper Bruce French made their England debuts during England’s tour of India in 1984/85 while Chris Broad, who joined from Gloucestershire in 1984, played his first Test at Lord’s that same summer.

Pick says: “It was an imposing dressing room to walk into. Not in a non-supportive way. I was made to feel very welcome in my first year on the staff.

“A lot of experienced cricketers, and a lot of hardened professionals. I’m just coming out of college. I made my debut in my first year. I was undoubtedly out of my depth, but we’d had quite a few injuries and I finished up playing. It gave me an insight into the level I needed to aspire to if I was going to make a career in the game.”

International recognition opened opportunities for a core of homegrown players throughout the decade.

“We were pretty confident we had a good squad. A lot has been made of the fact we had Rice and Hadlee, but there were a lot of other good players as well. We tended to blossom with them, and we got international recognition as well.

“We also had some good players who didn’t get international recognition, the likes of Kevin Cooper. He was a tremendous bowler for us. At that stage, it was probably a choice between Richard Ellison and Kevin Cooper who got the berth in the England side. The selectors went for Ellison, mainly because of his batting, but I think Kevin would have done just as good a job.”



ABOVE
Mick Newell

BELOW
Richard Hadlee and Clive Rice after beating Glamorgan to win the 1987 Championship



‘The cherry on the top was through default, we ended up with Rice and Hadlee... an unbelievable combination’



ABOVE
Kevin Cooper
bowling in 1986;
Hadlee and Rice on
the juice in 1987

BELOW
Bruce French
appeals against
Chris Penn,
June 1989



Notts registered two fourth places in 1982 and 1986 but slipped to 14th in 1983 while Hadlee was playing in the Test series against England. It underlined his importance. On his return Notts duly finished second in 1984.

In 1987 came Rice and Hadlee's swansong in county cricket. It served as an added incentive. Newell says there was a sense the pair would want to do something special in their final year.

Indeed, Hadlee finished with 97 Championship wickets and topped 1,000 runs while Rice also passed four figures and took 28 scalps.

Robinson, who captained some games that year to ease the transition, adds: "That was without a shadow of a doubt motivation for us to do well, certainly for those two, but for us as well, because we knew we were going to still be there when they left. We were the ones that had to try and carry on with the run and the success we'd achieved."

Notts had several notable absentees. Hadlee started the season on tour with New Zealand while Broad, Robinson and French all missed key matches on England duty. Randall was injured in mid-July and didn't play until the end of the season.

It meant having a squad of players capable of playing in the first team even if they had to spend long periods in the Seconds when the international players returned. Newell, who opened with Paul Pollard in Broad and Robinson's absence, says they understood opportunities would be more limited.

"There were a number of us who had to wait and be patient but could do a good job. So, Chris Scott keeping wicket to Hadlee and Rice and our seam bowling attack. That was a pressurised job. Bruce French set incredibly high standards.

"We knew we wouldn't play all the time, but when we did get the call up, we had to be ready to go because Clive was expecting a high standard."

Paul Johnson, who turned 22 at the start of the season, was leading run-scorer, while Newell broke Robinson's record by becoming the youngest player to score a double century. It was his breakthrough innings that guaranteed him the No.3 spot when Broad and Robinson returned.

Their runs as well as contributions from the experienced John Birch helped compensate for the loss of folk hero Randall.

Newell says: "Derek made an outstanding contribution over many years. A great thrill to have played with him. He scored a lot of runs. People think of him as a cover fielder and he was a brilliant cover fielder, but also, he took an awful lot of great slip catches.

"Clive would just let him be, let him have his slightly quirky methods, as long as he produced on the field. Clive allowed people to do their own thing, to have their different interests as long as they came together and did a good job on the field."

With two allrounders in Rice and Hadlee and useful runs from French and Hemmings, the side had plenty of balance that allowed Notts to make the most of green seaming wickets.

Pick says: "With quality players around you, if you're a bit expensive, you've probably got Kevin Cooper at the other end, who's going for one-and-a-half and Richard Hadlee who's going for one-and-a-half. So, it's not a game changer in that the opposition race away from you. I was always encouraged to bowl quick, try to get people out. That was a nice, simple brief."

Despite the focus on the role seam bowling played during Notts' success in the '80s, Hemmings played a significant threat both home and away.

He had finished third behind only Hadlee and Joel Garner among the leading wicket-takers in 1981, while his 82 wickets in 1987 soon earned him an England recall.

If opposition counties were wary of preparing pitches that suited Rice and Hadlee, Hemmings and Andy Afford offered a dual spin threat.

Pick says: "Andy was a fine spinner and played a good foil to Eddie. So, it was difficult for teams to negate. Whichever way they wanted to play it, we had the tools in the toolbag.

"The thing with Eddie as well, which made him such a good bowler, he openly said he wasn't necessarily concerned about how much the pitch turned, so long as it bounced.

"He got quite a lot of wickets where he would put some flight on the ball, the ball would bounce and hit

somebody on the glove and pop out to either silly mid-off or short-leg. They weren't all big spinning pitches; he could bowl and get people out even on pitches which you would think are not conducive to your spinner."

Nottinghamshire started the 1987 Championship with seven draws, but after one early defeat to Worcestershire, they got on a winning run, dominating the opposition, and winning four games by an innings.

Pick says their reputation preceded them. Teams were reluctant to declare and happy to walk away with a draw.

"With the side we had, especially later in the season, when we were playing well, people came into the games with limited expectation of success against us.

"Some teams I can remember being pretty much resigned. They would turn up and at the toss, everything was OK, but as soon as the game started, and Richard bowled his first spell and nicked three off pretty quickly, there was an air of inevitability about some of the games among the opposition."

He adds that guidance from senior pros who had already won the Championship in 1981, greatly helped the younger players during the run-in, when there could have been a temptation to overthink things.

There was a lot to play for throughout September with the treble in their sights. Every game had something riding on it.

The NatWest Trophy final concluded on the reserve day after rain stopped play. Northamptonshire had posted 228 for 3 but Nottinghamshire lost quick wickets in reply and slumped to 146 for 6 with Rice falling for 63. On the Monday Hadlee (70 not out) and French shared a crucial partnership of 75 for the seventh wicket to pull off victory.

Robinson recalls Hadlee did not appear particularly confident but drew inspiration from French, who took the initiative with a quickfire 35.

"Frenchy didn't say a great deal, but when he did, most people listened. He was the one who had the confidence to go out there and win the game for us and I think it rubbed off on Richard and we pulled it off."

'We had to continue the success. A lot of people labelled us as two great players and that was it. But we had to prove there were still some very good players'

The Sunday League remained just out of their grasp. Robinson is still frustrated by that runners-up spot.


"That's probably a sign of how successful we were that it still grates a little bit that we didn't get the treble. There were a couple of games where we didn't have a great side out when we lost a couple of games, which in the end proved pretty crucial."

Robinson agrees the club became more adept at one-day cricket following Rice and Hadlee's departure. In 1989 they won the Benson & Hedges Cup at Lord's and added the Sunday League title in 1991.

"The big thing we had to do was to make sure we tried to continue the success," he says. "A lot of people labelled us as two great players and that was it. But we had to prove there were still some very good players.

"The overseas signing we made in Franklyn Stephenson, he took a little bit of time, but he certainly played an exceptional part in the performances. He was fantastic. No matter what the situation was, you'd throw him the ball and he'd bowl his heart out. He was a dangerous batsman."

The 1989 Lord's final against Essex was a thriller and a personal triumph for Robinson who scored a match-winning 86 before French and Hemmings saw them home by three wickets. Hemmings carved John Lever through point for four off the last ball.

Robinson says: "If I picked any single game in my career, that was probably the one where everything went right for us and we played really well. We just proved to people we were still a force, even without Rice and Hadlee." 

BELOW
Franklyn Stephenson bowling against Worcestershire in 1988; Tim Robinson with the Benson & Hedges Trophy in July 1989

