

## **1996 Eton Ramblers Cricket Tour to South Africa**

The tour party (18 Ramblers and 6 wives) assembled relatively without incident to catch 6.00pm flight from London on 11 January 1996. Fry was late but was so beautifully groomed on arrival that he was forgiven. The flight provided early evidence, if any was necessary, of the capacity of the younger Ramblers (ring leader Fleming T) to get thoroughly over-excited and over-indulged. It is now known that supplies of miniature vodkas on long-haul flights are not unlimited.

A pretty dishevelled bunch landed at Capetown at 7.00am the next day to a perfect South African day. Admin on arrival was remarkably straightforward. All tour members were admitted to the country and one Combi and five cars were waiting. The only trouble occurred when the Manager accepted Rawlinson's offer to navigate into town and ended up on the wrong side of Table Mountain.

Holiday Inn De Waal was found to provide a good central location with adequate facilities (including swimming pool) and a very large cooked breakfast.

After much needed rest, the cricketing element of the tour party left for "Bishop's" (Diocesan College) for nets and fielding practice which is best described as gentle. The next day's opposition came to observe and did not seem at all dismayed.

A team talk was held (mainly to emphasise the need for punctuality (!) and good manners towards our cricketing hosts) before repairing to the Waterfront for seafood with jazz or beer according to taste. Morale seems high; we are ready for the first match tomorrow.

Our first match was a 45 overs game against Bishop's staff team known as Stags, on the beautiful First XI ground at Diocesan Collage. The weather was perfect. The Ramblers lost the toss and were generously put into bat. After obligatory team photos etc. Messrs Macleay and Lee opened the innings promptly at 12pm. Lee's dismissal in the first over to a honeymoon shot led to an early order Rambling batting collapse (25 for 3). Macleay (33) and Powell (28) brought a brief semblance of respectability before a late order Rambler batting collapse left the innings tottering at 106 for 9. The generosity of the opposition together with sensible play by Fleming (T) and Blake eventually took the Ramblers score to 134 (in 37.3 overs). In summary, the Ramblers batting performance varied from the ill-disciplined to the appalling on what was a well grassed but sound wicket.

After a rousing team talk, Brooks led the Ramblers into the field. Steady bowling by Blake and Huntington made early inroads into the Stags batting line-up (22 for 3). Fleming (T) then commenced a long spell of 15 overs (surprising in a 45 overs match!) and bowling with commendable accuracy and variation, worked his way through the middle order. Stags skipper Hoefmayels made an elegant 57 including 2 towering sixes off the returning Blake. However, midst great excitement, Blake had the last word removing the skipper with the Stags score on 132 in the 43<sup>rd</sup> over to win the game for the Ramblers. This was a good performance in the field with sound catching (an outstanding one by Jenkins) and steady bowling (Blake 2 for 43, Huntington 3 for 16, Fleming 3 for 31). However, the Ramblers were lucky to win.

Celebrations started immediately after the game and continued throughout the night, the younger Ramblers having discovered Hemingway's, Capetown's Saturday night hot spot. They had to queue to get in and pass a "good looks" test. Surprisingly all were allowed in, unsurprisingly, having got in they were reluctant to leave. (Jenkins was the last to arrive back at 9.00 the next morning).

Our second match was a 45 overs game against Sporting Chance, a side based at Constantia C.C. (home of Kirsten, Kallis and Macmillan) played on the club's attractive ground with a fast, hard wicket and dry outfield. The weather was good. Back at the hotel the Ramblers made a very slow start, not unconnected with the travails of the night before. Transport Manager's (Inkin) performance was particularly undistinguished having to be woken 15 minutes after planned departure time.

Macleay won the toss and made an extremely popular decision to bat. Those sleeping off hangovers were not interrupted by a solidly unspectacular opening partnership of 102 between Macleay and Rawlinson. However, the stage was set for a display of carnage from Matt Fleming who mixed huge blows with miserable reverse sweeps to make 60 in 32 balls. Macleay (103) went on to make the first century of the tour and the final total of 246 for 4 looked defensible.

The Ramblers though were not to know what from Kontoparakis (or Konti) was in. His previous innings was 18 months ago and before that he had not played for 8 years, so perhaps he had no excuse to be out of form. A fiery opening burst from Magnay allied with the steadiness of Blake into the wind, reduced Sporting Chance to 39 for 3. Konti's intentions remained clear, hitting selectively with the wind and being particularly severe on Magoo Giles. Incidentally Magoo somehow managed to bowl in an accobra running into a force 8 gale, disproving several scientific theories.

With 95 needed off the final 10 overs, Russell pronounced from the fence "this game is as good as over" and the Ramblers were of course immediately doomed. The professional managed to drop a simple chance off Konti at deep mid-wicket and the Ramblers' seemingly impregnable position crumbled. The end, though, came in bizarre circumstances. Needing 3 off the final delivery off Matt Fleming, Konti swung and missed. Alas, so did keeper Benji Fry and the resulting 4 byes brought "Sporting Chance" victory by 3 wickets.

The braai after the game was memorable for Brad Bing's speech which was only comprehensible when he professed his admiration for Caroline Fleming. An excellent day.

The next day was a free day. The tour party took full advantage to lick wounds, examine bruises etc. An early party made the trek up Table Mountain enjoying magnificent "photo fest" on a clear morning.

After serious transport negotiations over the breakfast table (held in the Transport Manager's presence for a change), cars were allotted and teams despatched to enjoy Capetown's sights by day. A team outing was arranged in the evening to Camp's Bay, ostensibly to watch the sun set from the Med pub – this provided little entertainment compared with the parallel opportunity to examine the local gilded and half-naked youth.

After drinks, on to Blue's Restaurant en bloc. At first sight this looked unpromising being situated over a Caltex petrol station, but after several Margheritas and a review of the menu (if not the prices) there was cause for more optimism. The evening proceeded smoothly until (a) a friend of James Scobie's appeared with a large drunken party at the next table and (b) Magoo decided to entertain the touring party (and the restaurant). Memories thereafter are varied but unclear.

Our third game was a 45 overs game against Wombats, a social team based on Capetown CC and played on the club's ground. Capetown CC (home of Jackman, Le Roux, Jeffries) claims to be the second oldest cricket club in South Africa. The ground was dry and the pitch varied in bounce, providing considerable help to (Their) spinners. Wombats put out a strong side including the club pro (Surrey's Richard Nowell).

The Ramblers batted first. After the early loss of Scobie, “fortress” Rawlinson (49) and Brooks (29) batted steadily against the pace attack. However, the introduction of spin undid them both to leave the score on 99 for 3. Matt Fleming (33) and Powell (20) continued on the good work but it took a splendidly unorthodox innings of 64\* from Russell, including 4 massive sixes to take the Ramblers innings to the relative respectability of 216 for 6.

Wombats started confidently, despatching anything short of a length, and were soon well up with the clock. The introduction of both Matt and Tom Fleming slowed things up, but the Ramblers dropped the first of a number of key catches to let Nowell (62) off the hook and were unable to capitalise on the opposition’s mistakes. 2 wickets from Brooks, bowling a variety of off-spin (?) reduced the Wombats to 113 for 3 but Thompson (64\*) assisted by Richards (36) and Zeedeberg (26\*) and some aggressive running between the wickets saw Wombats home relatively comfortably by 6 wickets with two overs to spare. The moral of the story remains – if you don’t catch your catches .... Magoo officiated at a dressing room ceremony in which offenders (Ramblers and Wombats) were forced to face execution Russian Roulette style, by water-filled condoms. Surprisingly, all survived – bar Nowell. For the record, and by specific request, it is pointed out that Russell (Ramblers’ man of the match) did catch his two outfield catches which were into the sun and almost impossibly difficult.....

Our fourth game was a 50 overs match against Western Province on the beautiful Impala Park near Newlands which provided an even paced batting strip and a fast outfield. At the request of the senior professions, a serious catching practice was ordered, prior to the game, which was watched with some awe and no little merriment, by the Tour Manager and the opposition early arrivals. After this exhausting preparation, Brooks won the toss and elected to field.

The fielding practice paid dividends and only six catches were dropped by assorted Ramblers during the Western Province’s innings. The match began inauspiciously as Magnay’s attempt to bowl the first delivery ended with the bowler flat on his back. Spikes are obviously a luxury these days. The entire WP batsman seemed to enjoy the Rambler attack with only the Flemings (Tom 2 for 30 Matt 1 for 43) demanding respect. Even on a flat pitch 251 seemed enough.

Chetwood (40) and Macleay (32) began confidently and positively. However, both fell carelessly either side of tea, to be followed by Matt Fleming and Jenkins and it seemed that a true Rambler collapse was in the offing. Jenkins’ innings of 1 was notable only for the fact that he was dropped off a dolly when on 0.

Cometh the hour, cometh the man. Russell (65\*) secured the game with a display of bottom-handed certainty, dispatching the bowling unerringly over mid wicket (4 sixes). At last Brooks (75) had found a productive partner and the Ramblers coasted to victory with 2 overs to spare, by 5 wickets.

Tom Fleming, on his birthday, fittingly, won the man of the match award for his tight spell, although the opposition captain’s raptures about his innings brought puzzled looks. Tom never got in to bat! The team were entertained to a braai and the opposition were entertained by another English defeat in the latest one day internationa

Our fifth game was a 40 overs match against Olympic Sports club on YMCA ground next door to Impala Park on a very flat, hard track in a howling gale. Olympic is a men-only drinking club, where matters sporting were the main topics of conversation. Their cricket side, well captained by Greg Bing, was a seriously social group.

Harry Chetwood won the toss and put Olympic in. Faced by the twin spearhead attack of Blake and Magoo Giles (into the wind) the early Olympic batsmen showed collective suicidal tendencies with some hilarious running between the wickets.

At 37 for 3, after a particularly good Magoo spell, the scene was set for the entry of Bossy Clark (ex WP player) who proceeded to murder the Rambler bowling in all its forms, on his way to 107 (with 7 sixes). The power of his hitting was awesome. A “champagne” moment was provided by the Tour Manager on the long-off boundary who, in attempting to cut off a particularly ferocious drive, succeeded only in diverting the ball with his heel into and through the top left hand window of a nearby community centre building. Good bowling by Chetwood (5 for 70) restricted Olympic to the massive score of 243 in 40 overs.

Ramblers batting was opened aggressively by Jenkins (62) and Rawlinson (39) who provided an excellent start in a stand of 102. The introduction of Sharp (4 for 31) slowed things down but Chetwood (71) assisted by Powell (35) played a very sensible and attractive captain's innings. However, wickets fell regularly and the last over commenced with 3 runs needed and the Ramblers last pair (Chetwood and Blake) at the wicket. A single and a bye (to the wicket keeper) brought the scores level and Chetwood was caught off the last ball of the innings with the score tied. A truly memorable match played in tremendous spirit.

Celebration continued late into the evening with the Olympics insisting Ramblers were introduced to their drinking establishment where beers proliferated and entertainment was provided by the Magoo commentary party piece, responded to in kind by an elderly Welsh Olympic.

Our sixth game was a 45 overs match played against Stellenbosch Farmers Winery on the beautiful Winery ground at Stellenbosch. The SFW team was captained by Wouter Pienaar, who proved a perfect host, on what was an extremely hot day. The pitch was hard but cracked providing some uneven bounce for the bowlers.

SFW won the toss and put the Ramblers in. The innings never really got going in the face of consistently accurate and steady bowling from a quartet of medium pacers. Only Chetwood (26) and Lee (22) showed any real resistance and Ramblers were eventually dismissed for 128 (in 40 overs) which was never going to be enough.

Sensible bowling by Magnay, Gouriet and Blake reduced SFW to 30 for 3 but a good-looking innings from the younger Pienaar (39) assisted by Trollop (20) and Hendricks (27) saw SFW home comfortable in the 34<sup>th</sup> over for the loss of five wickets. This was a disappointing performance by the Ramblers in almost all respects, perhaps summed up by the effort of the 12<sup>th</sup> man, Charlie Huntington. Turning up without whites, he was of course required to field. Unfortunately his fielding duties coincided with his return from the tour of the winery. The captain was not amused by the subsequent misfields and dropped catch.

SFW very kindly entertained the Rambler squad to a BBQ after the game. Non combatants had earlier enjoyed a tour of the winery a much-needed lesson in the art of wine appreciation. After the game, return to Capetown for farewell drinks with the 3 wives (Mrs Brooks, Mrs Russell and Mrs Lee) who were due to leave the tour group in Capetown.

Transfer day from Capetown to Durban went relatively without hitch and surprisingly there were no financial disputes with Holiday Inn or between tour members on presentation of the week's bill. Tour Manager was not pleased to discover that on the final day no less than 29 breakfasts were put on his bill. This does, however, fairly represent the number of acolytes, male and female who had attached themselves to the tour party.

Transport Manager organised baggage/transport excellently. On arrival in Durban there was a one and a half hour drive past Pietermaritzburg up to the Rawdon's Country Hotel which proved to be a very pretty thatched hotel with excellent facilities, including trout lake, swimming pool, grass tennis courts and most originally, a volley ball court. The bad news on our arrival was the cancellation of our Umgeni (Hilton staff) game at Hilton College, due to

torrential rain in the week. Rawdon's fare (restaurant and pub) was tested and found to be acceptable. Ominously for some, the first cards of the tour were produced. Younger Ramblers took themselves down to Pietermaritzburg in search of the local Saturday night life which they described on their eventual return as "young".

Having already lost the Umgeni game, we woke to a beautiful Drakensburg day. After an excellent breakfast, the tour party divided into golfing and game reserving group. The latter headed for the Weenen Nature Reserve which was a seriously good trip<sup>0</sup> with much game (including Rhino) being sighted midst the most spectacular scenery and memorable photo opportunities. On arrival back at the hotel lawn tennis was played with many styles on show, followed by the most ferociously competitive and noisy game of volleyball even played at Rawdons. Surprisingly there were no serious casualties. After dinner, Magoo invited us to the first "rushes" of the tour video, which provided considerable embarrassment to certain members.

A single wicket competition was organised to keep the tour party fit, by kind permission of Hilton College who lent us grounds in the fine setting of the school and Drakensberg. It was another hot day and the tournament commenced after byzantine negotiations over rules etc and draw which was only partially fixed. The format was 2 overs each per player. There were also 16 competitors.

The feature of the first round (which seemed endless to those in the field) was a needle low scoring match between Scobie and Blake, which was narrowly won by Scobie. A particular source of amusement was Russell's score of -2 against Magoo. The second round saw Matt Fleming pitted against Tom Fleming in friendly fraternal competition. In the end the senior Pro's vast experience won the day in a high scoring match. The semifinals were contested between Chetwood and Matt Fleming, Scobie and Brooks. Fleming proved too strong for Chetwood but Scobie and Brooks had a thrilling match with Scobie doing particularly well to take Brooks to the wire.

The final between Fleming and Brooks was played in very poor light with 10 exhausted fielders in attendance. Fleming hit massively to all parts to record an unbeaten 36. Brooks produced some memorable blows but was forced to take unacceptable risks against some accurate bowling. Fleming was the deserving winner. We were all very pleased when it was over and we could return to Rawdons for dinner and bridge.

Our seventh game was a 45 overs match against Grasshoppers at Michaelhouse College. Grasshoppers is an exclusive social cricket club (by invitation only) with only 25 playing members. Matches between Grasshoppers and Ramblers have been played in both UK and South Africa regularly since the 1970's. Michaelhouse College is another magnificently appointed school in the Drakensburg with fine facilities.

The Ramblers were put in and Macleay was subjected to a torrid opening spell as the ball "went through the top" on a damp pitch. Predictions that the pitch would deteriorate further were later to be disproved and the first hour turned out to be crucial as the Ramblers struggled to make any headway. "Fortress" Rawlinson (21) stayed firm but alas the heat took its toll on him. It was left to Matt Fleming (53) and Gouriet (26) to provide respectability, "Gobber" displaying an amazing propensity to attempt to hit to the furthest reaches of the ground. With the pitch still not straightforward the Ramblers were confident of defending their total of 164 off 45 overs. Unfortunately the Rambler attack was not up to the task. Matt Fleming was wayward in his opening spell and the two spinners, Tom Fleming and Harry Chetwood showed remarkable generosity. Wormington, a former Natal batsman filled his boots to make 79 which ultimately settled the outcome. However, a tight second spell by Matt Fleming (1 for 19) and a cunning display of swing bowling from Gouriet (2 for 28) showed what might have been and the Grasshoppers limped home with 10 balls to spare.

The game was somewhat marred by the inability of the home umpires to give even the most obvious decisions against their own players. A most frustrating day, although it must be noted that the Ramblers did not drop any catches.

After the match and obligatory speeches which had the effect of bringing on a major thunderstorm, an early return to Rawdons, pursued by more than half the Grasshoppers with drinks, followed by tour party dinner at Afton restaurant in Howick to say good-bye to Mrs Matt Fleming who was returning to the UK the next day. The “cherub” will be much missed, particularly by the younger Ramblers who depend on her for laundry and alka-seltzer.

A rest day, but ominously the previous evening’s storm had been succeeded by low-lying rain clouds and the forecast for the rest of the week is for more of the same. The day saw little activity from most of the younger Ramblers – although there were expeditions to Durban for saris, curry and botanical gardens, and to the Drakensburg. Russell was to be seen with rod and fly but no success. The evening saw entertainment in the bar from Clement Freud among others and more cards. The younger Ramblers woke up at this point having found some local ladies of an appropriate age. The evening’s festivities ended with champagne, swimming and volleyball, although it is believed that Gouriet was the only person capable of returning serve.

Predictable the game against I Zingari was abandoned and further entertainment was necessary. The limitations of Rawdons were beginning to be exposed as the rain continued to fall.

A golfing party consisting of Matt Fleming, Russell, Lee and Brooks left for Durban. Rawlinson organised an expedition, with military precision to the old battlefields, two hours north of Rawdons. Despite Magoo’s persistence it was not deemed tasteful to re-enact the Battle at Rorke’s Drift for the benefit of the Camcorder. A thoroughly enjoyable yet poignant trip.

Those returning to Rawdons brought with them reports of heavy rain and foreboding. The prospects of any play for the rest of the Pietermaritzburg leg were bleak and morale was plummeting.

The ground at Richmond Country Club was surprisingly deemed playable and the Ramblers made the long trip to the scenic ground to play a 45 over game. The pitch was slow which was not altogether a chock in the current conditions.

The Ramblers were put into bat and once again were not able to make a demanding total to defend reaching 159. Only Brooks (68) showed the necessary skill and aptitude to play a long innings, although Gouriet (29) again entertained at the end with some lusty blows. The Richmond attack was steady without ever looking penetrating and this was definitely a disappointing performance.

Alas, a similar lack of grit was displayed in the field as the Richmond openers looked to finish the job off as soon as possible and the home side raced to 90 for 1 off 16 overs. Only Huntingdon bowled with credit to take 1 for 19.

The match was brought to a premature end by one of the most incredible and murderous thunderstorms seen by anyone present. In minutes the ground was under water. A nearby gum tree was split by lightening. Thoughts were turned to Macleay and Matt. Fleming who were warming up for Sun City on the adjacent golf course. A search party led by the old “Fortress” was sent out which found them sitting cross-legged and drenched in the middle of the seventh fairway, discussing life as the lightning flashed around them. Clubs had been abandoned!!

There was little else to do but accept the hospitality of our hosts who did not let us down. As “Castles” flowed the Fleming brothers ruthlessly exposed the limitations of the opposition on the pool table.

The headlines, which greeted the Ramblers at the breakfast table, reported record rainfall and the game against Eston was naturally cancelled. Blake, Lee, Huntington and Russell rearranged their flights to leave in the evening, a day early.

A team meeting was called to sort out administrative matters for the move (a welcome one) to Jo’burg. The Powells (Mr and Mrs Manager) had departed to visit in-laws in Zimbabwe on Thursday so chaos was expected. Macleay and Brooks stressed the need for greater application on the playing field, otherwise considerable embarrassment was in store. As it happens, it appears that it was currently raining in Jo’burg! There could be murder!

Matters settled, bridge was resumed. Magoo summed up the frustration of the tour party by setting up the “murder” of each player. Days at Rawdons, alas, were becoming particularly long.

Transfer day from Durban to Jo’burg went smoothly, which was perhaps a miracle considering the state of most of the younger Ramblers. It was certainly not heart wrenching to leave Rawdons. In retrospect it was a mistake to have a party of predominantly under 30’s in a hotel so far from civilisation, although we were not to know the extent of the wet weather.

We were met at Jo’burg airport by Sandy Purbrick who kindly showed us the way to the Jo’burg Country Club which seemed like Jo’burg’s answer to Hurlingham. Sadly the site is under reconstruction. However, at least it was not raining.

A few Ramblers went off to the nets to try to remember what cricket was about and the rest took advantage of the tennis and swimming facilities. A team meeting was called to attempt to re-engage minds on the cricket at hand. The standard of performance in the last three games had been at best shoddy and that can partly be explained by several untimely hangovers. It was stressed that we have five hard consecutive games and that probably only Gobber could take a hammering the night before and still play to the best of his ability.

Jamie Carr had organised golf at Sun City, an offer taken up by Messrs Brooks, M. Fleming and Inkin, whose back was at last back in shape. The rest of the party decided to see what delights Sun City held.

The game park was largely disappointing unless you are into warthogs (Fry?) but the water slides and the artificial beach were much to everyone’s taste. The Ramblers, Tom Fleming apart, showed considerable bodysurfing prowess. Jenkins led a party to the gambling tables which, amazingly, was also successful. A thoroughly enjoyable day was had by all at a venue, which can be described at best, as glitzy, and at worst vulgar.

The opening match of the Jo’burg leg was played in the grounds of the Jo’burg Country Club against the Staggerers who have been frequent visitors to the UK – last having been in 1989. The ground was notable for the two trees either side of the square. The pitch was slow and almost subterranean and the outfield extremely lush after the recent wet spell.

It was discovered that the two trees were always “in play”, so after team catching practice out of the branches (there have been two catches out of the trees in the last ten years), Brooks won the toss and elected to the field.

Staggerers were limited to 131 all out in their allotted 45 overs, due to tight bowling and tigerish fielding. It took a keen memory to recall the last time the Ramblers secured two runs outs by direct hits. Jenkins and Matt Fleming being the two “culprits”. Magnay was particularly impressive taking 2 for 21 backed up by Gouriet (2 for 14) and Matt Fleming (3 for 11). Only Wynne Smith provided much resistance scoring 43.

In reply Jenkins forgot that it was a good idea to get on the front foot on a low wicket and was promptly dismissed, followed by Rawlinson. Brooks (39) and Inkin (38), however, then played sensibly to bring the Ramblers in sight of victory, which was finally reached by 6 wickets with 3 overs to spare. Matt Fleming (39\*) batted with controlled aggression to guide the Ramblers home. A satisfactory win and a markedly improved Rambler performance.

The evening saw a braai given by the Goblins/Staggerers at the Country Club pavilion. An increasingly noisy and boisterous evening culminated in the usual pompous speeches and the inevitable Magoo commentary, which, unusually, included the Barbarians’1973 try and a newly introduced table dive routine. Highest marks to our hosts (particularly Sandy Purbrick) for hospitality and tolerance.

The second match of the Jo’burg leg was played against the Goblins led by Sandy Purbrick on the Country Club ground. The Goblins are old adversaries of the Ramblers. Sandy Purbrick is the type of captain that keeps dog-eared clippings from newspapers recording past triumphs. Clearly the Ramblers could expect a very competitive 45 overs match on a pitch that played even lower than the day before.

Macleay won the toss on a very hot day and inexplicably decided to field (ominous mutterings from the senior pro and others). At 123 for 1 the decision looked unfortunate, at 176 for 2 it looked worse as Sandy Purbrick (79), Ryan (56) and latterly Mark Cullinan (35) batted with power and flair against a Rambler attack which persevered and ultimately gained some reward for their efforts, containing Goblins to 213 for 7 in 45 overs. Tom Fleming (3 for 45) and Gouriet (1 for 22) were the pick of the bowlers. The fielding was mixed with outstanding catches interspersed with efforts best forgotten. In the context of yesterday’s Staggerers’ match and a low pitch 213 looked like a big score.

The Rambler innings started slowly against an accurate attack bowling to its field (lessons to be learnt here). After the openers had gone, Matt Fleming played with increasing aggression in partnership with Macleay (33) and then Powell (17) to lead the counter-attack. However, his dismissal for an outstanding 78 at 155 for 4 in the 37<sup>th</sup> over left too much to do for the middle order which could manage only to help the Rambler score to 197 in the 45<sup>th</sup> over. At least Sandy Purbrick was pleased with the result!

After drinks players from both sides left to watch, live, the semi-final of the Africa’s Cup between South Africa (Bafana Bafana) and Ghana (tournament favourites). Amongst hysterical excitement South Africa (Shoes and Fish outstanding) swept to 3-0 victory and set the town alight, almost literally.

The Ramblers made the short journey to the Wanderers to play a 45 over match against the Wanderers Nomads, a side, which included Graeme Pollock. After a shambolic fielding practice, Brooks lost the toss and the Nomads elected to bat in drizzle.

Understandably the bowlers found difficulty in controlling the wet ball and the Nomads made an ominous start, before Matt Fleming finally broke through. A Jenkins bouncer did not unduly perturb Graeme Pollock and it seemed that the Ramblers were to be handed out a batting lesson. However, Tom Fleming finally worked out that it was a bonus to pitch the ball, which was too much of a shock for Pollock who was promptly bowled. Tom Fleming then exerted a vice-like grip on the Nomads, taking 2 for 29. Gouriet (2 for 22), Matt Fleming (2



for 29) and Magnay (1 for 27) became equally miserly and the Nomads were restricted to 173 for 7.

The target was reduced to 140 in 35 overs after a brief thunderstorm. Openers Macleay and Jenkins were dismissed cheaply. Brooks, though, was in top nick, making a swift 39 and the target was made to look extremely inadequate by Matt Fleming who smashed 38. Inkin was left stranded, much to the team's delight, on 49\* as the Ramblers coasted home by 6 wickets with 10 overs to spare.

It was a thoroughly professional performance. The day had begun with a champagne breakfast to celebrate Skipper Brooks' 30<sup>th</sup> birthday. Perhaps an early alcohol injection is the catalyst for a Rambler success?

In the evening the Ramblers went off to Chiados, a Portuguese restaurant, for the leaving dinner. Rambler Blazers were compulsory which did not seem to raise the standard of dress. The standard of public speaking also did not prove to be of high quality as several Ramblers attempted to sum up their impressions of the tour. Not much else of the evening can be recalled.

The fourth match of the Jo'burg leg brought a new cricketing experience for all Eton Ramblers involved. We were to be the Guests of the I Zambesi, a mixed cricket team promoted by the British Consulate in Jo'burg, playing their cricket at Elkah stadium in Soweto. Elkah was the scene of a visit by the England XI in the early days of the tour where they met Nelson Mandela. Ramblers were led in convoy through the streets of Soweto to the stadium, which provided a reasonable cricket wicket and relatively lush outfield (partly due to a plumbing problem). At a ceremony before the game, the Tour Manager presented 8 of the Soweto cricketers with I Zambesi cricket shirts on behalf of the Eton Ramblers.

It was agreed to play a 45 overs game. Brooks won the toss and elected to field. Against an accurate Ramblers attack the openers batted correctly but without any great sense of purpose to reach 58 for 0 in 25 overs, at which point Tom Fleming bowled Templeton (24) and proceeded to play in the quick fall of each of the next 3 wickets. Tom Fleming (2 for 13) and Chetwood (1 for 16) bowled very well to reduce I Zambesi to 109 for 5. Some interesting bowling changes brought on Scobie, Brooks and even Rawlinson (whose rhythm sadly was not with him) but finally it was Magoo Giles (3 for 25) who bowled the last tight overs to limit I Zambesi to 168 for 9, leaving opener Cyril Cetcape undefeated for a battling 75\*.

The Rambler openers then faced some of the most hostile bowling of the tour from Flush and Templeton which backed up by enthusiastic and athletic fielding. However, the real problems were caused by off-spinner Shabangu (4 for 30) and with the departure of Brooks (23) at 54 for 5, the innings was on the edge of collapse. However, some very sensible and good batting by Chetwood (31) and Macleay (41) in the face of high quality bowling brought hope until Chetwood was dismissed at the beginning of the last over with 18 still needed. The Rambler score ended 10 short on 148.

After the game, which was played in the best of spirits, and in front of the largest crowd of the tour (average age 10), further speeches were made and the Tour Manager presented a trophy for the use of the Soweto Cricket Club to be known as the Eton Ramblers Award, to help promote enthusiasm for cricket among the Soweto community. After the game, back in convoy to Jo'burg.

The last day of the tour saw the fifth match of the Jo'burg leg against Nicky Oppenheimer's XI (captained by Johnnie Oppenheimer) which was played in surroundings which could hardly have provided a more complete contrast to the previous day. Nicky Oppenheimer has built a spectacular ground at Randjiesfontein some 50km north of Jo'burg. England played here on their tour (against NFO XI). The wicket was superb with a flat, beautifully grassed outfield. The pavilion stood like an ocean liner with every comfort known to cricketers, umpire or official, including a physio specially hired for the day (and much used by the Ramblers) and an electronic scoreboard.

The Ramblers selected their 9 fit (?) players, together with Macleay and Fry (each with finger problems). Brooks won the toss and elected to field in a declaration game. NFO innings was opened by Teeger ( Rambler) who with his partner looked ominously good until both were accounted for by Gourié long-hops. Pagden (69) and Pfaff (56) then put on a confident 120 to take NFO score to 141 for 2 before the Ramblers luck turned again and steady bowling, supported by tight fielding, reduced the home side to 186 for 7.

Enter Vinny Van der Bijl (Middlesex and South Africa) who promptly took 30 off an over from the persevering Magoo Giles to ruin his analysis, damage 2 more Ramblers fingers and usher in the declaration at 238 for 7 off 49 overs.

Rambler openers went into face Van der Bijl and "Books" Hanley (Northants) for a torrid session. With the departure of Brooks for an elegant 24, the innings was tottering at 55 for 3, but Macleay (33\*) and Powell (22\*) took advantage of the good batting wicket and at 107 for 3 (with about 24 overs to go) were making satisfactory progress towards the target; when the heavens opened and produced hailstones almost as big as the Cullinan diamond, to bring the game to an premature end.

Thereafter, the Ramblers enjoyed the legendary Oppenheimer hospitality, Bafanas winning the Africa Cup and more speeches, before gathering their wounded (including tweaked buttocks, pulled thighs, damaged fingers and Durban tummy) and repairing in convoy to Jan Smuts Airport and the long trip home. Suffice to say exhaustion (nervous, physical and alcoholic) ensured an unexpected restful flight home.... All arrived safely.

Bruce Powell