

## **The Wilf Isaac's Cricket Tour 1969**

The disruption of the first match of the Wilf Isaacs Tour was described by Peter Hain as the opening shot in the campaign which eventually stopped the 1970 Cricket Tour. The tour was a private one led by Wilfred Isaacs, a Johannesburg estate agent, who is devoted to cricket and is an anglophile.

Born in 1917, and still playing first class cricket, at the age of 52, Isaacs fought against Hitler in the Second World War as a fighter pilot with the South African Air Force. Although he once played rugby for Rosslyn Park, his great enthusiasm is cricket. He loves the way a game of cricket is played in England, and for many years has tried to instil the spirit of English cricket in South African schoolboys. They have always been white schoolboys, not because Isaacs is a racist but because that is the way things are organised in South Africa. He has captained his own Cricket XI for more than twenty years, during which he has led the team against many South African schools and university teams. He is dedicated to the encouragement of young cricketers and is chairman of an organisation which has been responsible for sending South African schools XIs to England in 1963 and 1967 and bringing a MCC schoolboys XI to South Africa.

The Wilf Isaacs XI first toured England in 1969, when the team included the former South African Test players Neil Adcock, Ken Funston, Jackie McGlew, Roy McLean and Hugh Tayfield, as well as three young cricketers of promise: Barry Richards, Michael Procter and Lee Irvine.

The 1969 team was not so strong, and only included one former Test cricketer, John Waite. It was however strengthened by the occasional appearance of Graeme Pollock and Mike Procter. The team was selected on principles which Isaacs defended in the Court proceedings. Its unofficial motto was 'From experience comes maturity: cricket is all'. Basically, it consisted of cricketers young and old who regularly turned out for the team in mid-week matches played against South African schools with the object of giving young cricketers experience against senior players. Excluding Isaacs and Waite the touring team of fifteen had an average age of just over 22.

The young players were regarded as being on the threshold of important cricketing careers. They were regarded as having a two-fold task. One was to retain South Africa's cricket image of displaying a vigorous and positive approach in all departments. The other was to help the young players develop so as to become candidates for the full Springbok visit to England in the following year. The tour, giving young players experience of English conditions, was regarded as being of great value to South African cricket. Before leaving South Africa Isaacs said that it was reasonable to suppose that many in his team would show a vast improvement in all-round technique as a result of playing on different types of wicket, in varying weather and against a variety of opponents ranging from internationals to those of their own rank. The whole emphasis was on cricket, and a very full fixture list of seventeen matches had been arranged for the six-week tour.

The team were not unprepared for demonstrations. As the team left South Africa it was reported in the Johannesburg press that there might be a few demonstrations of protest. The report added 'though this sort of thing has been going on ever since Jackie McGlew's Springboks went there nine years ago'. The comment made by Isaacs was: 'We have no intention of being drawn into any arguments. Our aim is to provide some joy for the genuine cricket lovers'. When asked in Court whether his team was selected on a racial basis Isaacs commented that he did not know whether it would have been possible for any coloured people to be in his team, adding 'I did not ask any'. The composition of the team was

nobody's business, than that of the organizers. In Court he stated his position by saying: 'My love for the way cricket is played in England includes the fact that it is played without regard for colour or race.'

The Young Liberals, led by Hain, took a different view. They determined to protest against the presence in England of a team from with no non-white players. They determined to make their point in the very first match of the tour, which was played against the full Essex side at Basildon on July 5th, 7th and 8th 1969. The first disruption, by about a dozen young Liberals, interrupted the game for about a quarter of an hour. It took place while a West Indian, Keith Boyce, was bowling for Essex. Hain alleged that Boyce was asked by the Essex captain to bowl at the demonstrators but refused, whereupon the Essex captain contented himself with kicking a demonstrator. This appears to be a complete fabrication. Hain himself was one of the demonstrators, but complained later that he had been hampered in his activities by a plain clothes policeman who managed to prevent him from invading the pitch. Quaintly, considering his contempt for the law, Hain later claimed that the policeman had 'illegally' demanded his name and address. The demonstrators sat on the pitch and had to be carried off by the police. According to the Essex Secretary, Major 'Popper' Brown, the spectators were very irate at the interruptions.

The team's next match was against Oxford University, where much more serious trouble occurred. Two days before the match, Isaacs received a telephone call from the MCC Secretary, Billy Griffiths, to say that a trench 45 yards long had been dug across the historic Parks Ground at Oxford - a desecration which would appall any cricket lover. The pitch was repaired sufficiently to enable the match to begin, but it was seriously disrupted by large numbers of demonstrators - at one point they interrupted for about three quarters of an hour. Demonstrators ran on to the pitch and grabbed stumps. Others blew whistles or shouted 'No ball'. Mirrors were used to reflect light into the eyes of players. Isaacs recalled that people had shouted 'Fascist scum' at him - a strange taunt to make to an ex-fighter pilot in the War against Hitler. Asked what the players' reaction was, Isaacs commented 'They just stood by and acted in the gentlemanly way of the game of cricket'.

After the Oxford game, Isaacs mingled unrecognised with demonstrators in a pub. He claims some of them told him they were being paid for demonstrating. One of them told him he was being paid by the BBC. Isaacs was particularly incensed by the attitude of television cameramen who told him they were not interested in the brilliant innings of 231 by Graeme Pollock. They had simply come to film the demonstrations.

The tour continued, hampered by disruptions. At the Oval in London, demonstrators ran on to the wicket and stamped stones into it. At Leinster they used smoke bombs and engaged in hand-to-hand fighting with the police. For his match at Eastbourne, Isaacs tried to demonstrate his lack of racial prejudice by making a special request for an umpire from British Guiana, Peter Wight, who had officiated at the Oxford match. The demonstrators were unimpressed.

At the end of the tour, Isaacs defiantly said that the Springboks in 1970 would be warmly received in England by all but a vindictive few who would not be allowed to call the tune. With unjustified confidence he added 'Cricket followers are yearning for some aggressive play after the disappointing West Indies and New Zealand tours, and they won't allow a few agitators to spoil their cricket'. During the tour the team played against fifteen opponents, all of whom said Isaacs, were concerned only about the cricket. Isaacs expressed himself satisfied with the tour, and with its success in bleeding young cricketers. The South African players had received willing and variable advice from such stars as Jim Laker, Colin Cowdrey, Alec Bedser and Derek Underwood. One innings by Graeme Pollock of 150 at Eastbourne was described by Isaacs as the finest he had ever seen.

Francis Bennion

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