

# An eventful tour of Japan - 1998

by Ken Medlock

Few English cricket clubs have toured Japan. The MCC were the first and not far behind them came the Forty Club. Our intrepid party of thirty-three players, umpires, friends and womenfolk, which later rose to thirty-seven, left on October 27 for a twelve day trip and played four matches, winning three and losing one.

It was, everyone agreed, a unique experience. Those who had read page 1278 of the 1995 edition of "Wisden" would have known that cricket was played all over Japan and that one new university team was taking it up every year. They would also have known that Jeff 'Thommo' Thomson had been there to conduct a three day coaching school. Fortunately for the XL players Thommo had not been successful in discovering any fast bowlers which was just as well considering the state of the pitches. With the exception of the match at Nara where rubber matting was laid on a firm sand base the pitches were rubber placed on uneven, soft surfaces which meant the ball behaved in a peculiar fashion and scoring runs was extremely difficult.

Even such a prolific scorer as Roger Bassett, the tour manager who scored more runs than anyone for the XL Club in 1998, found it difficult to play his normal game. There were other problems, too. Like the absence of a pavilion to change in, the acute shortage of seats to sit on and the rarity of anyone present who could speak good English. A coach journey of between two and three hours was needed to get to the venues.

The cost of living came as a nasty shock to those used to touring such places as South Africa, Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka. A coffee cost £5 and a meal for two at an ordinary restaurant anything up to £100.

Fielding was a perilous occupation because of the rough state of the outfielders. Extras figured high in the totals, which were all relatively small. Despite all these hiccoughs everyone agreed it was a memorable experience and as with all pioneers those involved came back with a sense of pride that they had achieved something really worthwhile, in this case playing a part in the development of cricket in Japan.

The tour was arranged by Trevor Bayley in support of the UK-98 Cultural Exchange launched by Tony Blair the previous January. On arrival at Kansai International Airport the more alert of the members might have suspected Geoffrey Boycott had a hand in affairs when they were greeted with a banner saying "Welcome to the Forty Club Cricket Tour". Gordon Potter, as organising secretary, had not found it easy to set up the itinerary but deserves to be complimented on his efforts.

When the party arrived at Nara to take on the Doshisha University XL who were meeting an overseas club for the first time they discovered there was not even a chair or table for the scorers and certainly nowhere for the players to change. But they cheerfully set about restricting the enthusiastic home players to 121-9 in their 40 overs, 33 of which were extras. The Doshisha bowling was so erratic that the XL won in the 31st over by two wickets, Roger Bassett, 38 not out batting in heavy rain in the final half hour.



Mike Smith, Japan Captain and Albert van Nierop

The second match was at Miyagimura, the ground sixty miles from Tokyo which the Japan Cricket Association hope to make their base. There were 42 extras in the Club's 144-9, not quite enough because the Combined Universities won with three balls left.

Match three against the Niseed University was played on a baseball ground and the Club's 142-8 (27 extras) enabled them to squeeze home by five runs. The final match was against the All Japan XI at Macbashi and this time there was a changing hut. Asked to bat, the Club owed their 147 principally to the 35 of Chris Brothers and tight bowling from Simon Klimcke and Peter Wharton at the start and Gordon Potter at the end saw the home side dismissed for 109. There was slight confusion at one stage when Japan's leading batsman Miyaeki retired at 50 only to return with four overs left. Skipper Potter bowled him first ball however and it was all over.

Later some of the XL players did some coaching which was much appreciated and the British Embassy hosted a farewell cocktail party. Sights eeing was much enjoyed and Ken Medlock who conducted the fines, said: "I am sure we will look forward to entertaining a touring team from Japan when a tour can be arranged."