

## XL tour of China and Hong Kong



**2006** - IT WAS NOT so long ago that you could not get a drink after hours in Shanghai let alone arrange a game of cricket. Not so any longer, that's history now what with the government turning the place into a Big Rock Candy Mountain for hyperactive property developers allowing space for just one cricket ground to remain at Dulwich College, the venue for both our matches in Shanghai.

Whilst the Chinese Sports Minister has announced they have an objective to play international cricket in the foreseeable future it has to be said it's a long way off with expats, predominantly Aussies and a few Brits, trying to market the game. Our two match tour, the second by a UK club, was played just three weeks after the MCC also played two games against the Shanghai CC, rather disappointingly. The opening match against Shanghai Select XI, a 35 over encounter, saw the Forty Club posting 146-6 with Ian Rippingal, on his first tour, making top score of 38. The hosts had little difficulty in reaching the target with nine overs to spare. Norman Gray, with 4-40, was the pick of our bowlers.

After a day sightseeing and deciding which thickets of Martian skyscrapers we should visit – and there's real competition with the pink Oriental Pearl Tower at 1535 ft the world's tallest syringe and the equally bonkers 'sightseeing tunnel' - we were pleased to have resisted the purchase of the Rolex other than Andy Meads who has enough for a car boot sale.

Our final match in Shanghai against a strong young Shanghai Dragons XI was again a 45 overs game with the hosts taking first knock and posting a challenging target of 289-9 with the club's all time leading wicket taker Mike Wicks taking 3-51. With an opening partnership of 130 by Ian Rippingal (65) and Andy Meads (60) providing a glimmer of hope we still finished second 35 runs adrift. Victory celebrations no but we still managed to enjoy the wonderful hospitality provided by our hosts arranged for the entire tour party of 42 at a local fish restaurant.

Hong Kong, last visited by the Forty Club in 1994, provided equally superb hospitality and cricket, with 5 matches crammed into our 8 day stay. We will long remember our opening match against the Combined Lam and University XI if only for the 10 sixes sent flying up the mountain slope by the number 9 batsman. He faced 27 balls, scoring 82 and it was a nightmare for all the bowlers. A target of 336 was out of reach but again the batting honours went to Ian Rippingal with a magnificent 89 out of 240-7.

Hong Kong Casuals XI provided an XI almost equal to our age group and batting first in a 35 over match posted a modest 185 on an excellent grass wicket. Our response, even allowing for the early dismissal of the run machine Ian Rippingal, was pedestrian, finishing 8 runs short for the loss of four wickets. Still awaiting our first victory, we were hoping our match against the HK U19 XI being played at Kowloon CC might just result in our favour. It was not to be. After 18 overs we were 42-6 but with Norman Gray joining Andy Meads (91) they took the target to a respectable 146 for 7. Defending this low target was going to take some exceptional bowling and fielding by a now deflated Forty Club.

The response was truly first class with all the bowlers making the talented Under 19s XI work hard for every single run. Duncan Innes, our star performer, had 1-18 off nine overs. The boys eventually secured victory with 7 overs to spare.

Victory was finally achieved against Kowloon CC who were given a disappointing target of 155 set by the XL Club. Andy Meads was dismissed first ball and the home side made only 122 and had no answer to the fine spell of bowling by Mike Wicks, 4-23, which included his 550th wicket for the club.

The last match against an ageing Hong Kong CC was possibly the most exciting match of the tour. We totalled a respectable 180, thanks to a hurricane innings of 47 which included 5 sixes by captain Ron Hart. Against some very tight bowling, especially Duncan Innes, the hosts found runs difficult to score and not until the newly arrived pro G.Snell (53\*) from Worcestershire CC came to the wicket did we look like coming second but with the help of our own Ian Rippingal (33\*) they eased to victory with 5 overs to spare.

In wonderful surroundings at the Hong Kong CC we were entertained with an excellent after match meal and considerable after match banter. The tour party spent the final two days either taking advantage of the many street traders' bargains on offer or visiting the mountain heights of Hong Kong via the fantastic newly built cable car. On reflection it was a wonderful experience to tour mainland China and to be part of the promoting of the game of cricket in this remarkable, fast developing country.

### **Ron Hart (Tour Manager and Captain)**



Our bus (XL2720), in club colours awaits our tourists in Buenos Aires in February.



The Dulwich College Cricket Ground, not in South London, but Shanghai