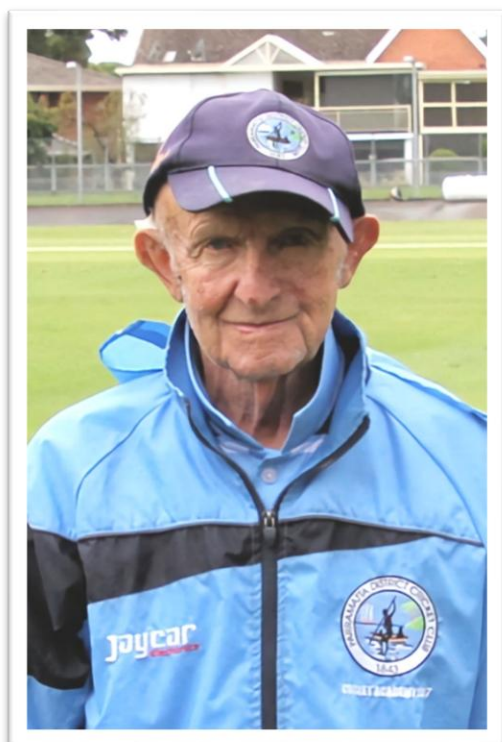


John 'JA' Aitken – A Grade Cricket Doyen



On Tuesday 7th November 2023 former Parramatta District Cricket Club 1st grade player and Life Member John Aitken passed away.

The old phrase *'cricket is life'*, was most apt when applied to 'JA', he conducted a life-long love affair with the game. The remarkable duration of his personal playing career would undoubtedly place him amongst Australia's longest-ever continuous players. Up to the close of the 2012/13 season he was still captaining and playing in the Auburn Shire Club's 4th grade team. Still maintaining his enthusiasm after an astonishing seven decades playing the grand old game.

John was physically a diminutive, slight man whose cricket could be best summed up as *'gritty and determined'*. Not blessed with the natural ability of his younger sibling Bobby, he practiced assiduously and utilised sheer hard work to extract 'every

ounce' of skill he owned to forge his marathon career.

As an allrounder he fitted into the 'working-class man' category, rather than the dashing cavalier type player. He trundled his left-arm orthodox spinner with a quickish arm action and a bustling pace when in his prime, replying upon persistency and accuracy to claim his wickets. In the field he was always sharp and alert especially close-to-the-wicket, and as a right-handed batsman he had a limited stroke range, but his determination and tight defence enabled him to value his wicket and etch out a supply of runs (nudges and tucks combined with the chop behind point were his main source of runs).

The sheer length of JA's career with the bumble-bees attests to his fortitude and keenness – **1958/59** to **1999/00** (42 seasons). He holds place as Parramatta's longest serving player. Over all those summers he played in every grade **5th to 1st**, compiling a mountain of weighty stats: **8,377** runs @ 22.00 (H.S. – **127** in 3rd grade) – including 3 centuries, 223 catches, and 626 wickets @ 19.30 (B.B. – **8/24** in 3rd grade).

After joining the club in 1958/59 he made an immediate impression and debuted in 1st grade the following season. During the 1960s he cemented a place in the top grade proving to be a very successful and a stubborn lower-order bat. His bowling played a notable role in the fortunes of the 1964/65 1st grade **Premiership** winning team (26 wickets @ 25.35) and 1965/66 runners-up (a career best **49 wickets @ 15.73** – including 6/50, 6/56, 6/90, 5/41). These teams included Test stars Richie and John Benaud, and Doug Walters. After his 1st grade

bowling career wound down, typical of his dedication JA went back to the lower grades only to, like Phoenix 'rise from the ashes' reinvented as an opening batsman and he played a couple more seasons in 1st grade in that role.

But it was his lower grade activities that engraved JA's name as a club legend. The mentoring of the multitude of youngsters who 'cut their grade cricket teeth' under him during his ten-year 5th grade (1989/00 – 1999/00) and four-year 4th grade (1986/87 – 1988/89 + 1990/91) captaincy stints was invaluable to the club and many fine players emerged from under his wing. John also captained 2nd and 3rd grade during his tenure with the club.

But perhaps his keen interest in grassroots local junior cricket development is what he is best known for around the Parramatta district and the wider Sydney cricketing communities. He directed his vast cricketing knowledge towards assisting a range of Parramatta A.W. Green Shield coaches (such as Dave Ferguson, Harold Goodwin, Mike Wood, Tony Monaghan, Mick Bergin, and Alex Murphy) to prepare the club's teams for this coveted competition. Many rising youngsters who profited from John's encouragement will hold fond memories of his lively fielding drills. Too late in his life he also worked with the P.D.C.A.'s junior rep sides and he remained a key volunteer at the Parramatta District Cricket Club's Academy.

A fond memory I have of my association with JA was from my late teens when I used to practice with John and Bobby in their backyard pitch at Regents Park – a real education for a youngster in playing spin bowling and how to keep your concentration whilst constantly the subject of continuous commentary on your ability.

John's long-playing career and service on the Management Committee (1968/69 to 1984/85) saw him honoured with **Life Memberships** of the Parramatta District Cricket Club and the Sydney Cricket Association, and in 2006 he received a **Lifetime in Cricket Award** from the SCA.

Hi family have shared his playing connection with the club, younger brother Bobby is Parramatta's highest 1st grade wicket-taker, whilst nephews Robbie, James and Glenn all played 1st grade for Parra and then went on to outstanding careers with the North Sydney club.

Parramatta Statistics:

Grade	Runs	H.S.	Ave	Catches	Wickets	Ave	B.B.
1st	2,000	72	21.98	47	229	19.11	6/28
2nd	3,081	104	22.17	83	234	19.88	6/25
3rd	1,421	127	26.31	35	89	13.04	8/24
4th/5th	1,875	87	19.54	31	74	24.92	5/29
Total	8,377	127	22.14	196	626	19.29	8/24



CENTRAL CUMBERLAND D.C.C. 1ST XI PREMIERS - 1964 / 65

Back Row: H. Goodwin, D. Timmins, R. Shepherd, B. Woolmer, J. Benaud, D. Hartman, J. Dwyer, K.D. Walters.

Front Row: R. Flindt, R. Aitken, J. Aitken, M. Godfrey, D. Smith.

Absent: R. Benaud (Captain) - In West Indies, J. Chadban, J. Parkinson, S. Teale, W. Brisby, D. Good, W.E. Gould.



[By Tom Wood – Parramatta District Cricket Club Historian]