

John Benaud – A Swashbuckler at the Crease

John Benaud was born at Auburn, NSW on 11th April 1944, and it was probably preordained that he would grow up to become a cricket player of significance.



His childhood home was steeped in the love of cricket, with Father Lou an outstanding First grade leg-spinner for Cumberland and his thirteen years older brother Richie on the path to becoming an Australian cricketing legend.

At his cricketing peak John was a tall right-hander who batted in a swashbuckling, easy-on-the-eye mode and was a handy medium-paced bowler (after abandoning his boyhood preference for leg-spin).

Standing upright at the wicket, when in full flight he could be imperious, producing thunderous off and straight drives, combined with thumping back-foot cover drives – matched with a fondness for hitting huge sixes, the mind boggles as to how far he'd hit the ball with the modern cricket bats.

First-Class Career Statistics:

- **Tests** – debut 1972 v. Pakistan, 3 matches, **223 runs @ 44.60** (H.S. **142**), 2 wickets @ 6.00 (B.B. 2/12).
- **First-class** – 47 matches, **2,888 runs @ 36.55** (H.S. **142**), 5 wickets @ 35.20 (B.B. 2/12).

John made his initial steps into representative cricket via the New South Wales Colts (1963-4-5-6) and captained the NSW 2nd Eleven in 1966/67 and in the process, he set himself up for Sheffield Shield selection after making a dashing **129** runs against Victoria's 2nds in Melbourne.

He went onto play first-class cricket for NSW for six years (**1966/67** to **1972/73**). A strong determined cricketer he became the NSW State captain, winning a reputation as a tactically astute leader – although during his captaincy tenure he was once suspended for one month by the NSWCA for refusing to obey a ban on Adidas Grass-sports ripple healed cricket shoes.

*The Age, Melbourne, 21st November 1970 provided a guide to Benaud's cricketing approach when reporting on a Sheffield Shield match at the M.C.G. – "John Benaud crowned a memorable day for NSW when he lashed the Victorian bowlers for an unbeaten **130**. Benaud, the cricketing cavalier who was banished from the team last season, was everybody's hero yesterday. Seventeen hammer-hit boundaries told the story of his feat. And he achieved it all in the ripple-heeled boots that caused the fuss last summer."*



With his star on the rise John Benaud represented Australia in the '**Unofficial Test Series**' against the Garry Sobers led **Rest of the World** team in 1971/72. He played 3 matches, highlighted by a fighting 99 in the final match.

In **1972/73** he graduated to the **Test** ranks playing two Tests against Pakistan – in the Second Test at the M.C.G he top-scored, compiling a brilliant century (**142**) in the second innings despite knowing that he had been dropped for the next match.

John was then picked for the **1973 West Indian tour**, captained by Ian Chappell, and made his last Test appearance in the Fifth match of a tightly contested series.

He was another of the Parramatta High School production line that fed many fine cricketers into the Parramatta Club's ranks, he was a genuine local product, born and raised in the district.

His career with Central Cumberland began in **1956/57** when he made the club's **A.W. Green Shield** team at the tender age

of twelve years – in all he played in this team for four years to 1959/60, captained the side in the last two seasons – AWG stats: 508 runs @ 19.54 (H.S. 91) and 51 wickets @ 8.16.

John also represented Cumberland for 6 seasons in **Poidevin-Gray Shield** (1959/60 to 1964/65) and captained this side for his final three seasons – 714 runs @ 24.82 (H.S. 78) and 40 wickets @ 23.35.

Benaud's grade career began to accelerate in 1959/60 when he displayed outstanding potential as a leg-spinner by snaring **53 wickets @ 13.32** to assist Cumberland to win the 3rd grade competition. His competitive nature was evident when the team captain Alan Cramond *out of the blue* asked John to open the batting for the first time in the nerve tingling Final v. Gordon. Gordon had batted first and piled up a massive 449 total on a placid Merrylands Oval pitch, as minor premiers Cumberland needed to hold out for a draw to claim the premiership, and under great pressure the 15-year-old Benaud held out for five hours to make 73 runs and ensure the all-important draw was duly achieved.

He made his **1st grade** debut in **1960/61**, aged 16 against Randwick at Coogee Oval and went onto to become one of the best and most entertaining batsmen to have played for the Parramatta club. His 1st grade career unfolded in two phases - **1960/61** to **1967/68** and **1981/82** to **1982/83** when he returned as a veteran to captain the club.

In all grades for the club 'J.B.' compiled **4,043 runs @ 25.92** (H.S. 173*) and claimed **170 wickets @ 18.70** – his 1st grade statistics read – **3,567 runs @ 27.52** (H.S. 173*) including **4** centuries and 14 half-centuries and captured **80 wickets @ 21.91**.

John's golden First grade years for Cumberland were:

- **1965/66** – he compiled **570 runs @ 38.00** and started to emerge as a first-class batting prospect, bagging his initial 1st grade century **111** v. Waverley and following-up next match v. Sydney with he struck an imposing **137***.

- **1966/67** – He broke the club’s long standing 1st grade batting aggregate record previously held by the mighty ‘Mudgee’ Cranney since 1911/12, John made **835 runs @ 41.70 (173*, 81, 80, 71, 68)**. Against Bankstown in Cumberland’s 2nd innings, he joined Doug Walters in a blistering **260 runs 2nd wicket partnership** that blew the Bankstown boys off the paddock (In 2016/17 Nick Bertus eclipsed the record scoring 838 runs).

John Benaud was a key member of Cumberland’s 1964/65 1st grade Premiership winning team, and after departing the club he turned out for other Sydney grade clubs Randwick and Penrith – captaining Penrith to a 1st grade premier’s flag (1978/79).

Off the playing fields John Benaud enjoyed a wonderful career as a journalist with the Fairfax Sydney Sun Newspaper. By the time the Sun closed in 1988 he had risen through the ranks to Editor-in-Chief. He has also won acclaim as the author of a range of cricket books, and as a columnist for Australian, British and Indian magazines.

He also spent several years on the Australian and New South Wales selection panels, and he continued to be involved in grade cricket with the Penrith club for many seasons. In 2013/14 John commenced funding a ‘Player of the Round’ award to encourage Parramatta players and continues to show interest in the welfare of his old club.



Central Cumberland District Cricket Club

First Grade – Season 1981/82

Back Row: Greg Matthews, Darren Tucker, Wes Gould (Scorer), Ian Monaghan, Bernie Reeve, Greg Monaghan.

Front Row: Tom Wood, Matthew Bugg, Doug Walters, Ron Carroll (President), John Benaud (**capt**), Bob Aitken, Allen Turrell, Ron Wright (Secretary).

{By Tom Wood – Parramatta District Cricket Club Historian}