

Jack Herbert Fitzpatrick – A Rock-Solid Opener

Jack Fitzpatrick was a much-venerated figure in the Central Cumberland club, born and bred in the Bankstown district when it was part of the Cumberland catchment area, he had a happy disposition and a strong fighting spirit that always 'sat well' with his teammates. In his book 'Anything but An Autobiography' Richie Benaud stated that as a young schoolboy Jack Fitzpatrick was his Cumberland hero.

Of slight stature standing at 175cm and weighing 70kg, the right-handed opening batsman and right-arm off-spin bowler was a prodigious scorer for Cumberland in a career that commenced in **1929/30**, as an 18-year-old, and concluded in **1947/48** - excluding military service in World War 2 – he sits amongst the club's batting elites as one of only six batsmen to have scored over **7,000** runs in 1st grade for the club.



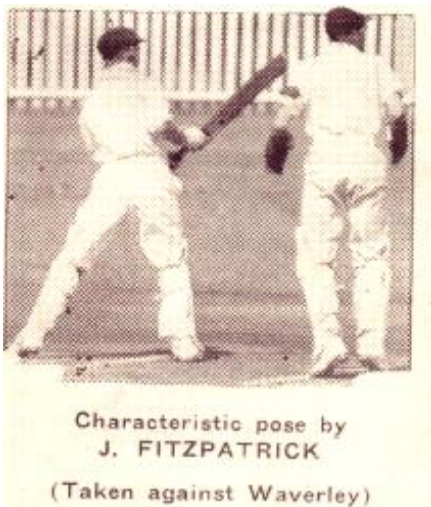
As an opener Jack possessed the ability to consistently occupy the crease and became the anchor of his team's batting – a compact and well organised rather than a stylish bat, he was known as a determined fighter who watched the ball closely and eliminated careless risks.

His golden days as a batsman with the Parramatta club were between the 1931/32 and 1942/43 seasons – and for much of that time he and Ray Rowe were the 'Aces in the club's batting deck' – productivity and dependability were his trademarks. *Not Out* in The Referee, 21/1/1937 remarked – "Can you beat this for consistency? J. Fitzpatrick, opening batsman for Central Cumberland, has made the following scores for the club in the premiership since the opening of last season: 148, 122, 109, 89, 61, 57*, 51, 49, 45, 45, 40, 36, 33, 33, 32, 25, 25, 15, 15, 11, and a few single figure scores."

Despite playing on uncovered wickets 'Fitzy's' worth to his team can be garnered by reference to his most prolific run plundering seasons - **533** (1932/33) when he was a key factor in the 1st grade Premiership victory, **735** (1935/36), **542** (1936/37), **605** (1937/38), **528** (1939/40), **665** (1940/41) and **796** (1941/42).

Amongst his many batting achievements three deeds are worth highlighting, fortunately they were well covered by the sporting newspapers of the period and serve as a testimony to his ability – all articles were penned by the journalist known as "Not Out" in the Referee:

- **10/2/1932 – 273 2nd wicket partnership** v. Petersham - "Saturday provided batsmen's wickets and, in some cases, runs were piled up as of old. Cumberland, through the example of L. Leabeater, 175 not out (22 fours), and J. Fitzpatrick, 113 (15 fours), recalled days when Parramatta men made centuries often and brilliantly, with B.W. Farquhar, Frank Iredale, and L.W. Pye breezy performers."



- 13/2/1936 v. Randwick – "Fitzpatrick, hitting the ball a little harder than usual, completed his third century, **109**, and Crossan, who always smites them, rattled up 162. This pair put on **251** for the **first wicket**, reminder of Cumberland days in the sun."
- 13/10/1938 v. Marrickville – "Central Cumberland had eight wickets down for 143 in reply to Marrickville's 193, when W. Howell joined J. Fitzpatrick, who had opened the innings. Fitzpatrick, a determined fighter, takes few risks, yet scores at a tolerable pace. This time things went for Howell, and the ninth wicket stand won the match. It put on 53, Howell getting 24. Fitzpatrick, who went through the innings for **128** not out, made in three hours 10 minutes, put in a Fingletonian effort."

Jack Fitzpatrick represented New South Wales in five Sheffield Shield matches and was 12th man on five other occasions between 1937/38 and 1938/39. He also captained Central Cumberland in 1st grade in 1938/39, 1939/40 and filled in at various stages of 1941 – 43.

The coveted feat of ‘*carrying your bat through the innings*’ is an opening batsman’s ultimate aspiration, and Jack managed to achieve this deed on five occasions for the club – four times in 1st grade and once in Poidevin-Gray Shield.

Whilst his primary claim to fame was his batting, Fitzpatrick was also a very useful off-spin bowler and in this capacity claimed **136 wickets @ 26.16** in 1st grade for Cumberland. His most plentiful seasons being 1940/41 and 1942/43 when he snared 30 wickets @ 16.90 and 26 wickets @ 18.80 respectively – he possessed the ability to turn the ball from the off with a bit of fizz and was relatively accurate.

Highlights of his bowling career were **7/56** v. Northern Districts, **5/14** v. Balmain & **6/22** v. Gordon – 1940/41; **5/49** v. Mosman and **5/40** v. Waverley – 1942/43.

After finishing his long career with Cumberland, he worked tirelessly to get the Bankstown District Cricket Club into NSWCA’s 1st Grade competition.

Jack died at Bankstown on 23rd January 1999 – aged 88 years.

His total career statistics with Parramatta were:

Grade	Runs	Highest Score	Average	Wickets	Average
1st	7,334	148	33.03	136	26.16
2nd	163	28	16.30	4	27.25
3rd	184	82	92.00	5	20.00
Shires	92	73*	92.00	11	11.00
Total Club	7,773	148	33.08	156	24.93

During his outstanding 1st Grade career with Parramatta (Central Cumberland) Jack churned out **12 centuries**.

[By Tom Wood – Parramatta District Cricket Club Historian]