

Mark C. “Ninja’ Ward – The Wholehearted Tryer



Mark Ward set a wonderful example of determination and perseverance to all ‘would-be’ grade cricketers. He tried out for Parramatta for four seasons before he finally ‘cracked it’ and went onto record a glowing career with the club on the playing fields, in coaching, and in administration over a prolonged period of years. His commitment to Parramatta was recognised when he was awarded the honour of **Life Membership** in 2011.

Hailing from the Hills Barbarians club Mark started out in 5th grade in **1987/88** and drew stumps in **2012/13**, with **379 wickets @ 21.18**, **3,399 runs @ 15.66 (H.S. 104)** and **89 catches** (1 x century, 8 x half-centuries and 11x 5 wicket hauls) locked nicely into his kit bag. He took a break from grade cricket between 1989/90 and 1991/92 to overcome a back injury.

Always a competitor, for most of his career fast bowling was his passion, but like a lot of ‘quicks’ the stresses placed upon his light-frame by this robust activity, over many seasons took its toll, and in the latter part of his career he concentrated on middle-order batting and trundling down some part-time off-spinners.

Relatively short and slight for a paceman, he bowled right-arm at a bustling pace and with good accuracy, seaming the ball sharply ‘both ways’ off the track. Mark was always a fitness guru, and this attribute enabled him to bowl long spells in all prevailing conditions, and with ‘ball in hand’ he had a never-give-up attitude and toiled away persistently at the opposing batsmen.

This attribute was well illustrated in an extract from 2nd grade captain Jeff Walker’s comments in the 1999/00 Annual Report – *“Always believing the team can win when things aren’t going too well. He showed this against Northern Districts when they were 2/208 at Tea chasing 332. After Tea Wardy went out and demolished the opposition by taking 7 wickets to win the match”*.

Mark had a taste of **1st grade** in 1997/98 and 1988/89 but couldn’t win a permanent spot in the team due to the strength of the team’s regular new ball attack, his top-grade stats read **11 wickets @ 24.09**.

But it was his exploits in 2nd and 3rd grade and his commitment to training that made him a well-respected cricketer within the Parramatta club.

In 2nd grade he developed into the team’s new ball spearhead and reaped the rewards of **159 wickets @ 25.28** – his best seasons being 1997/98 with 31 wickets @ 20.39 and 1999/00 31 @ 23.94. Mark’s most memorial individual spells in 2nd grade were **7/21** v. Balmain in 1998/99 and **7/65** v. Northern District in 1999/00.

Whilst he proved lethal in 3rd grade in claiming **138 wickets @ 15.18**. In 2001/02 he produced a career best of **8/39** v. North Sydney after finishing his opening spell with 0/22. His most memorial performance occurred in 2002/03 when he grabbed **44 wickets @ 14.11** (best – **7/60** v. Campbelltown, **7/56** v. UNSW, **6/53** & **5/43** v. Easts) and this performance won him the club’s top award the **‘Bill Anderson Memorial Trophy’- Cricketer of the Year Award**.



After that season injuries basically curtailed his pace bowling career, and he turned towards middle-order batting and captaincy, highlighted by his steering of a very young and inexperienced 5th grade team to the **Premiership** in 2004/05. Mark's other captaincy stints were 3rd grade (2003/04 and 2005/06) and 4th grade (2006/07 to 2009/10). He had a frustrating time chasing the elusive century, getting agonisingly close in 5th grade (2004/05) being stranded on 99 not out, and falling for 97 in 4th grade (2006/07); but in 2012/13 he *'finally nailed it'* compiling **104** v. Wests – and had his best season with the bat making **402 runs @ 28.71**.

A rare-breed for a modern-day player Mark was a dedicated clubman off the field – serving extended terms as a Club Selector and as key part of the club's Coaching team (qualifying as a Level 2 coach), holding the post of the club's **Deputy President** (2007 -10) and being a member of the **Management Committee** from 2002/03 to 2012/13.

Parramatta District Cricket Club – NSW Premier Cricket 5th Grade Premiers – 2004/05



Back Row: Ben Embelton, Daniel Jackson, Phil Stefanish, Aaron Govorko, James Parkinson, Nathan Taylor.

Middle Row: Mark Frei, Qais Shamal

Front Row: Nav Chetty, Stephen Kentwell, Mark Ward (Captain), Rafee Hakim, Stuart McKinley.

[By Tom Wood – Parramatta District Cricket Club Historian]