

CLAY, JOHN CHARLES (1898-1973), cricketer

Name: John Charles Clay
Date of birth: 1898
Date of death: 1973
Spouse: Gwenllian Mary Clay (née Homfray)
Parent: Margaret Amelia Clay (née Press)
Parent: Charles Leigh Clay
Gender: Male
Occupation: cricketer
Area of activity: Sports and Leisure Pursuits
Author: D. Huw Owen

Johnnie Clay was born at Bonvilston, Glamorgan, on 18 March 1898, the son of Charles L. Clay and his wife Margaret (née Press). A member of a prominent sporting family in the Chepstow area, his father's shipping business was based on Cardiff Docks. He was educated at Winchester School and married Gwenllian Mary, the daughter of Colonel Homfray of Penlline castle.

A fast bowler in his youth, he was a member of the Monmouthshire team before playing his first match for Glamorgan in 1921. The following season he was the county's leading wicket-taker with 83 wickets at an average of 22.01 runs. He replaced 'Tal' Whittington as the captain in 1924, and, experiencing a series of injuries, experimented with both leg-breaks and off-spin. He contributed significantly to the improvement in the county's performances as the club moved up from the bottom of the Championship table to 13th place. Early in the 1926 season the county headed the County Championship table for the first time in its history. The following season he scored an unbeaten 115 against New Zealand, the highest score of his career. At the end of the 1927 season he resigned the captaincy because of business commitments.

He continued to play in the succeeding seasons. In 1929 he recorded his maiden Championship hundred against Worcestershire at Swansea. Batting at number 10, his stand of 203 with Joe Hills for the ninth wicket continues to be the club record. However, he was primarily an off-spin bowler, and was regarded as one of the leading spin bowlers in the Championship in the years leading up to, and immediately after the Second World War. He played for England in the Fifth Test Match against South Africa in 1935, and declined further invitations: he would probably have obtained further honours if he had agreed to be available for overseas tours. He captured more than 100 wickets in a season on three occasions, and his best match performance was 17 wickets for 212 runs (9 for 66 and 8 for 146) against Worcestershire at Swansea in 1937.

Johnnie Clay has been described as 'the father of Glamorgan cricket' on the basis of his strenuous efforts which were largely responsible for the survival of the Glamorgan Cricket Club in the extremely difficult financial climate of the 1930s. He served as Treasurer of the club between 1933 and 1938 and he and his friend **Maurice Turnbull**, the club secretary, succeeded in raising funds in various functions organised by them. A Cardiff-based business man, he skilfully used his contacts in the commercial world to ensure the survival of the club.

Following the death of **Maurice Turnbull**, Clay agreed to captain the county again in 1946. He handed over the captaincy the following year to **Wilf Wooller** but continued to play occasionally. In 1947 he captured 54 wickets at an average of 15.83 runs and in the following year he had match figures of ten for 65 against Surrey and nine for 79 in the match against Hampshire at Bournemouth when Glamorgan won the County Championship for the first time. It was most appropriate that Clay, at the age of 50, took the final wicket to fall in this match. He captured a total of 1,315 wickets at an average of 19.77 runs during his career.

He served as a Test selector in 1947 and 1948, and continued to be involved with the county side, serving as a trustee and as the club's President from 1960 until his death in 1973. His other sporting interests included hunting and horse-racing, and was the owner of several long-distance steeplechasers. He served as Secretary of the Glamorgan Hunt, and Steward and Director of Chepstow Racecourse, which had been laid out in the grounds of his family home at Piercefield Park in the 1920s. A long-distance steeplechase is held there annually in his memory.

John Charles Clay died at St. Hilary on 11 August 1973.

Author

D. Huw Owen

Sources

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Published date: 2015-02-20

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Owen, D. H., (2015). CLAY, JOHN CHARLES (1898-1973), cricketer. *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. Retrieved 11 Nov 2024, from <https://biography.wales/article/s10-CLAY-CHA-1898>

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