



**BRIAN STATHAM (PRESIDENT OF LANCASHIRE IN HIS 70TH YEAR)  
A TRIBUTE  
BY COLIN COWDREY**

*Lord Cowdrey of Tonbridge CBE, a great batsman, provides a warm appreciation of a great bowler: Brian Statham, President of Lancashire, in his 70th Year.*

Brian Statham was a magnificent bowler, and one of the best-natured cricketers that I have played with and against. He was a real competitor, always giving everything he had to his captain and the team, and extremely patient when catches were dropped off his bowling.

He was an outstanding fielder, fast over the ground, with a strong accurate throw into the wicket-keeper's gloves. Amazingly, he very rarely missed a catch himself.

Fielding practice was a non-event as far as he was concerned. He would have to participate so as to keep everyone happy. I used to hit the balls at the fielders - he picked up the ball so cleanly every time and there was no way that he would drop one, however high or awkward it was.

Sitting next to him at dinner recently, I reminded him of the only catch that I saw him drop, and that was at Cape Town, a high but straightforward skier off Jim Laker. We couldn't believe it. Jim Laker wasn't very happy, and Brian was mortified, but there were relieved smiles on all our faces that even he was human. Replying to my comment - he did say that he thought it was the only bad one that he missed, except for one astonishing caught and bowled' which mysteriously went astray. But isn't that an extraordinary commendation. I played with a number of great catchers, but no one with safer hands than Brian.

**Speed, Movement, Accuracy**

But what a bowler he was. His strength lay in his accuracy, aiming to pitch the ball just outside the off stump and to flick the off bail. You would have to play all the time, and you find yourself coming in too often on the inside of the ball with the bat slightly open faced, so giving him a chance behind the wicket. Because of his genuine pace, you had to move fast to square the bat on the ball and play back down its line. Having done so, you had to watch the ball very carefully because it could move just enough off the seam to cause destruction.

He varied his pace cleverly, and would throw in a nasty 'yorker', especially at the tail-enders. He had one speciality. He would go wide at the crease and bowl a very fast break back off cutter. Your first glimpse of the ball led you to believe that it would go by harmlessly wide of the off stump. Then, as it pitched, the yellow light went up to shout out to you to move, but so often it would be too late - the ball would come back and take the off stump. Your only hope was that through his beautiful rhythm he would get a lot of bounce and the ball might just go over the top. I have seen so many people being bowled out by this ball, the batsmen letting it go - I was a victim of it myself in the match I played against him at Oxford in 1953.

Although I was to play against him a few times for Kent against Lancashire, it was not until I was picked for Len Hutton's MCC team to Australia in 1954 that I really came to know him, and appreciate his skills.

On that tour it was his support of Frank Tyson, the two of them bowling in harness, that provided the foundation of our winning The Ashes. So often, he was bowling from the more difficult end, up a slope or into the breeze, Frank Tyson being given every advantage - and quite rightly. Yet, such was the character of the man, that he never complained or showed any disappointment.

#### **A Bowler of Maturity**

The fast bowling fraternity are known to be volatile, and not surprisingly, for they are always having to burst themselves and show aggression. Brian showed his aggression only through the way the ball kept whistling by the batsmen at great pace.

He was a man of integrity. He did not enjoy bowling short; he bowled very few bouncers. Just occasionally a batsman would overdo the 'confidence bit' and put on an act that he was not the least concerned or scared of Brian. The fielders would pick up the signs of increasing aggravation and the batsman would come under fire, but only for a few balls.

There were many occasions when his own batsmen would try and rouse him into sorting one of the opposition bowlers out, because they had given us a hard time, but Brian would be difficult to persuade. He had hit one or two tail-enders, or even some inexperienced batsmen up the order in his earlier years, and he took no pleasure from seeing them quite badly hurt. He was the fairest bowler, in this regard, that I have ever played with.

From my point of view, I found him a real handful. If he was running in well with a new ball on a grassy pitch with a little moisture on the top some overhead cloud cover, survival was all I could hope for as he pursued the top of my off stump mercilessly and relentlessly. He was a wonderful opponent in that he would beat you all ends up time and time again, and just give a faint smile - and occasionally 'jammy'. Not for him, a torrent of abuse and a loss of his rag - for he had so much in reserve.

#### **A Player - and a Gentleman**

He was highly intelligent in the way that he looked after himself and prepared himself for the big matches. He might do a little running by way of training prior to the season, but once the season had started he would take every opportunity to rest and let nature heal the strains. He would start a campaign of a season more than a stone up in weight. Gradually he would bowl himself off to fit the peak of the season and his worry was not to lose too much weight for the last part of the season.

Surprisingly, he was very nervous on big match days, finding it hard to eat anything and he would remain in quite a twitch prior to the start of play. But strong man that he was, there was a delightful charm and caring sensitivity about his approach to life and to the people around him. He was one of the nicest cricketers I have been privileged to know.