

SYDNEY CRICKET & SPORTS GROUND TRUST

ITEM FOR CONSIDERATION / APPROVAL

ITEM NUMBER: 12.7
Reference Number: Trust 05/08

Division: Administration

Subject: Naming of SCG Hill Stand

Prepared by: Rodney Cavalier **Meeting Date:** 29 May 2008

RECOMMENDATION

The Trust name the new stand on the former Hill the "Victor Trumper Stand".

BACKGROUND

The case for Victor Trumper can be made in a sentence. He is the finest Test cricketer Australia has produced.

His peers did not have a bad word to say of him in life or death. In all the years since, several biographies later, in an age given to debunking, not a story has emerged to suggest that Vic was other than modest, generous and true to all his friends. His deeds on the field of play electrified contemporaries in Australia, New Zealand and England. His team mates, his opponents and those who saw him in full cry wrote of what they saw and told their children and grandchildren.

None who saw Victor Trumper conceded they ever saw his equal, however many years and players subsequently they saw. So good was Trumper that cricket writers, attempting to make an assessment of just how good was the Bradman boy from Bowral, dared to compare Don Bradman to Vic Trumper. No other superlative worked, not while the memory of Vic had living witnesses.

A matter of context in the Trumper-Bradman continuum. Sir Donald Bradman attributed his ambition to play Test cricket after a visit to the Sydney Cricket Ground in 1920-21 in the company of his father. What inspired him was the batting of Charlie Macartney, an all-time great, known as the Governor-General for his imperious batting. Macartney himself, hearing of a comparison to Trumper after he had scored a triple century during the 1921 Ashes tour, put matters right of the instant: "It says here that my innings was reminiscent of Trumper. What rot! I wasn't fit to tie up Vic's laces as a batsman".

In naming the new stand at the Cricket Ground, I suggested four criteria to our members. Those criteria were as follows.

The evidence of your own eyes is not the end of the matter. Instead, the Trust will be attempting to make a selection based on the esteem of a player by his contemporaries, his standing in the annals of the game, his contribution to the game beyond the field of play, his wider contribution to sport and society. The Trust will seek to balance these factors one against the other.

If Trumper had only ever played cricket, his deeds on the field of play alone qualify him for the name ahead of all others. Consider then that Vic played representative games of rugby union and Australian football on our ground. He was good enough at Australian football that he could well have played for the Swans if that possibility had existed.

Vic Trumper is equally celebrated in the annals of rugby league as one of the founders of the game in Australia. Vic placed his considerable prestige behind the breakaway game because he believed that working men injured on the field of play were entitled to a living wage from the game while they recovered. Vic was one of three who visited Dally Messenger to persuade the greatest rugby player of his age to switch codes. Present at every public rally and all the early games, Trumper was the first Treasurer of the Rugby League. In its centenary year, rugby league will regard a stand named after Trumper as honouring a founder of their sport.

This man was so generous that he placed little regard on what today we regard as memorabilia. Too frequent are the stories of this man handing over bats to young lads who expressed admiration for the innings he had just scored. Trumper ran a sports store – sacred in the history of rugby league for on its premises the resolution to establish the rugby league was passed. His business acumen was tempered by his desire to help young players get a start.

Trumper lacked run hunger. The ethos of innings accumulations began in the 1920s when the character of cricket changed fundamentally, mirroring the society cricket existed inside. Trumper scored what was necessary for the purposes of the side and the context of the game. Scores did not matter at all to him, just so long as he had contributed his best. His average reflects the sacrifice of his wicket to give others a go on a hospitable wicket. Although Bradman has eclipsed every other batsmen before him and since, devotees of cricket history will exempt the Don when it comes to a wicket the weather has made deadly to batting. On bad wickets, Vic Trumper remains the greatest of all time.

Cricket literature abounds in descriptions of Trumper at the crease, Trumper's generosity, his standing with his peers. Sir Ron Brierley has forwarded a labour of love by a man who has brought together some of the best writings on Trumper. Trumper nominations by our members reflect a deep knowledge of the history of the game or stories of Trumper handed down lovingly by fathers and grandfathers (or both). Rather than give the last word to Cardus or Fingleton or Arthur Mailey or Ashley Mallett, all of whom have written beautifully of Vic, I will quote from a member unknown to me – Robert Willcocks who offers by way of identification that he is aged 59. My age too.

Everything I have heard and read about Trumper suggests that his personal qualities were of a kind that had great appeal to all who had anything to do with him and the public at large. My assessment is that he had a certain nobility of character: it is said that he was kind; his generosity has been written about over and over. His reported lack of ego, side or pretension was of a kind the "average Aussie punter" relates to, admires and loves. I understand he had a Doug Walters type casualness but even more so. The publicity around his death in the dark days of WW1 and his funeral reflect this public sentiment. Though he was a founder of the professional Rugby League he eschewed money and the trappings of wealth. We read (and can believe) that his motives for helping establish League flowed from his desire to see that injured players got fair compensation for the time they had to take off work. This at a time the Rugby Union's profits must have been enormous with large attendances in particular at internationals. In short, his values were quintessentially "Australian": he wanted to see players given a fair go.

But it was not only for these reasons that Trumper was closer to a God than any other sportsman including Bradman and WG Grace. There may have been other well known sportsmen before and since who may have had some of the qualities I mention. I do not believe though that any had the athletic talent, the pure otherworldly ability of Trumper. This was expressed, not by the application of physical strength (although he apparently he was a powerful hitter), but through grace and beauty. There used to be a saying "There is only one Vic" or "There will only be one Vic". Anyone who saw Trumper play would not hear of anyone else being put in the same bracket. My father (born in 1891) never eulogised but he did about Trumper.

The invocation of God happens frequently with Trumper. I know not of such references with any other Australian sportsman. His death at age 37 from Bright's Disease stopped a nation. The outpouring of grief is all the more remarkable for reason that by June 1915 Australia was not a nation lacking in cause for grief. His funeral procession is the largest in the history of Sydney: crowds lined the procession route from Chatswood to Waverley. Every living first class cricketer fit and able formed a guard of honour for the final journey from Fort Macquarie (now Bennelong Point) to the cemetery at Waverley.

Cricket and rugby league have not produced a finer person than Victor Trumper. Australia has not known a better sportsman in the full sense of that honourable word. His name on the perimeters of our Ground will repair an omission. Being a Trustee in 2008 who is part of this decision confers great honour on us all.