

## IAN BALL – THE MAN WITH THE MIDAS TOUCH

By Dominic Kureen

As a journalist you're always told not to use the word 'great', apparently it isn't fancy or clever enough and it doesn't hide behind a web of unpronounceable pretension. With Ian Ball there is no escaping the fact that he was truly a great man, a detail which doesn't need dressing up.



This is a man who wasn't simply 'great' in the modern sense, where the word is banded about all too frequently and as a result mediocrity becomes synonymous with excellence. Ian Ball did everything for Copley; he gave his life to the cricket club. This is a man who spent an entire pre-season helping to rebuild the foundations of Copley Lane, often working in the cascading rain. Clever adjectives could never do him justice, he was simply great.

Ian's love affair with Copley CC began almost as soon as he was old enough to walk. With a father who played for the first team and a mother who worked at the club, it was clear that he would be spending a lot of time at the ground. "When I went down to the field with my parents, Ian came down as well and over the years he became more involved with different aspects of the club," his sister Judith recalls.

At the age of just ten, Ian had worked his way into the Under-14 side and by the age of 14, with a season of Under-18 cricket under his belt and dozens of dispirited bowlers left in his wake, he began to look a certainty for an imminent call-up into the first-team squad. By the age of 16 Ian had become an indispensable member of Copley's first team and the batsman that Halifax League bowlers feared the most. Ian's brother-in-law, Tom Thorpe, remembers one particular innings: "I remember watching Ian coming in to open the batting and hitting a brilliant 60, all in boundaries; when he got out the score was 60 for one!"

Ian went on to become almost ever present in the Halifax League Select XI during the 1960s and 70s, in fact he was usually the first name on the teamsheet. Most would agree that Ian was the most exciting player that Copley have ever had, an hour of Ball with the bat would demoralise the bowling side to such an extent that they often felt like throwing in the towel rather than have their averages destroyed further!

Perhaps even more impressive was Ian's performance as an emergency wicketkeeper. Tom Thorpe remembers: "One season Copley didn't have a wicketkeeper and so Ian stepped into the role. He did such a good job that he won the Halifax League wicketkeeping prize that year!"

There is no doubt that Ian could have played at a higher level, yet such was his passion and love for Copley that he remained a Copley player until his career came to an end in the late 1970s, captaining a league championship-winning side along the way. It would have been easy for such a star to walk around with an inflated ego and delusions of grandeur, but Ian never let success go to his head.

Indeed, his sister Judith says: "He used to cook food and do the teas at the club and was the first man at the club to do things like that. He and Tom (Thorpe) used to come down every weekend and fix up the ground as well; Ian was a very hard worker for the club." Ian went on to become Copley's secretary and continued to help out in any way possible until 2005 when he decided that it was time to leave the club he loved.

Although there will probably be many fantastic players who come through the Copley youth system in years to come, it is doubtful that any of them will gain undivided respect and affection in the same way that Ian Ball did. Simple words sometimes have the most impact; this is one of those cases.

#### **KEY MOMENT AT CLUB: CAPTAINING THE 1973 HALIFAX LEAGUE CHAMPIONS**