

Peter Lever

Born in 1942, Peter Lever was 'gently pushed into cricket' as a 'reluctant seven-year-old' when his parents made him a member of Todmorden Cricket Club, advising 'You'll be better off there than loafing around street corners'. Peter recalls: 'There used to be a fight to get into the 'rag net' with sometimes over 30 wanting to get a bat. As my interest in the game grew, the next fight was to get in [Todmorden professional] Eric Denison's coaching net and try and get noticed.'

Todmorden's professional in 1955 and 56 was South Australian Neil Dansie. He ran nets from 4pm till 8 and recalls: 'One lad was always first to arrive and last to leave – Peter Lever. I said with that dedication and enthusiasm this boy is destined to go far in the game. Fifteen years later, there he was, getting off the plane to represent England in Australia.'

Peter's first team debut at Todmorden, playing alongside Dansie, came about in unusual circumstances. The second eleven had already set off for Colne when opening bowler and fireman Colin Sunderland was called to a fire. 13-years-old Peter, the only player left on the ground, was sent home for his kit. He made seven, including a boundary off Colne's Australian professional, Jack Manning.

Peter's development as a cricketer benefited from friendly rivalry with his talented older brother, Colin, who also began playing his career at Todmorden before signing as a club professional for Heywood and playing in the Minor Counties for Buckinghamshire.

Peter began to emerge from Colin's shadow after two full seasons in Todmorden's first team in 1958 and 59. At first he was selected as a batsman, but a decent all round season (222 runs and 30 wickets) in 1959 saw his bowling coming to the fore and it was this which caught the eye during trials for Lancashire at Old Trafford.

He joined the county in 1960 aged 19 and learned about fast bowling by watching two of England's best bowlers, Brian Statham and Ken Higgs. Peter patiently waited his chance, steadily gaining experience and developing supreme levels of fitness – his winter time cross-country runs were legendary.

Peter's opportunity came with the retirement of Statham in 1968 and Higgs in 1969. Now Lancashire's main bowler, he rose to the challenge and by the end of the following season he had earned international recognition. Peter was selected to play for England in the fifth 'Test Match' against the magnificent Rest of the World team, last minute replacements for the South Africans who were beginning their long isolation from test cricket.

And what a debut he made! Peter took seven wickets against one of the best teams of all time. National magazine *Cricket Monthly* reported: 'Lever bowled with heart and fire on an unresponsive pitch and quite astonishing success ... his 7 for 83 ... included some of the finest batsmen currently to be found on the global circuit.' Peter's seven victims were Eddie Barlow, Graham Pollock,

Mushtaq Mohammed, Gary Sobers, Clive Lloyd, Mike Procter and Intikhab Alam. Has there ever been a finer haul in a single innings?

Suddenly in the national spotlight, Peter experienced all the drama and romance of fame suddenly thrust upon him. 'More has happened to me in a fortnight than in ten years ... I feel scared and delighted at the same time ... '

Peter had earned a place on the 1970-71 tour of Australia, where he took 13 wickets, despite having several catches dropped and often bowling at the least favourable end. He provided consistent support for spearhead John Snow as England beat the Australians and regained the Ashes.

The great writer John Arlott described Peter as: '... an honest and respected performer at the highest level of cricket. He bowls at full effort. His stamina and application are such that he can, and does, bowl long spells without loss of control or enthusiasm.'

In 1971 Peter enjoyed an outstanding match against India at Old Trafford, hitting 88 runs and taking 5 wickets to set up a victory chance which was only denied by rain. His best England performance (6 wickets for 38 at Melbourne) helped secure a consolation victory in the final test of the 1974-75 series which Australia won by four matches to one. Peter missed most of this series after picking up an injury in the first test match.

The tour party moved on to New Zealand where Peter experienced the most sickening moment of his career. These were the days before batsmen wore helmets and Peter struck New Zealand bowler Ewan Chatfield on the temple with a bouncer. Chatfield was declared clinically dead before England physiotherapist Bernie Thomas resuscitated him. Peter was very upset and visited Chatfield in hospital. The New Zealander did not blame Peter and recovered to play many times for his country.

Alongside his 17 test match England career, Peter played in the very first one day international at Melbourne in January 1971 and bowled effectively in the first World Cup tournament of 1975. He was also a key member of the outstanding Lancashire team of this period, famed for winning many one day competitions. Lancashire's captain, Jackie Bond, admired Peter's 'hard work, concentration, determination and faith in his own ability'.

Although still one of England's leading bowlers in 1975, Peter retired just one year later, a troublesome back injury ending his career earlier than expected. Since retiring, Peter has coached at Lancashire in the mid-1980s and was England's bowling coach in the mid-1990s.

Peter has retained his contacts with Todmorden. He brought a Lancashire team to play a special match in 1967 during his father's term as Mayor of the town, played in benefit matches in 1978 and 1980 and continues to support the cricket club and local schools when asked to attend special functions.