

Player Profile: Chris Balderstone (1940-2000)

Teams: Paddock, Yorkshire, Leicestershire, England



Chris Balderstone - Leicestershire cricketer and Doncaster footballer on the same day, September 1975 - as published in the Cricketer International Magazine - source: www.cricinfo.com

He began in Chesterfield with the County Championship match between Leicestershire and Derbyshire and having scored 51 not out by the close of play, rushed up the motorway to Doncaster to play against Brentford in the League Cup before returning to Chesterfield the next day to complete his century. For many this would be a dream but for Chris Balderstone this was reality. Many sportsmen have enjoyed dual sporting careers, Denis Compton being the most famous example, but on 15th September 1975 Chris Balderstone made history, competing in two sporting events simultaneously.

Balderstone began as a promising schoolboy cricketer at Paddock CC, working his way through the junior sides. He played for the senior side in the Huddersfield League before turning 15, but it was football that gave him his first break. In May 1958 he signed for his hometown club Huddersfield whose manager was the little known, at the time, Bill Shankly. His first season was a frustrating one as first team opportunities failed to come his way, largely due to the presence of Denis Law. It was also back in the days when substitutions could only be made in the event of injuries rather than for tactical reasons so players that didn't make the starting eleven had little chance of appearing.

Balderstone had to wait almost a year for his debut but made an immediate impact, scoring against Cardiff City.

His cricket career began in similar circumstances. Like many who played in his era he experienced the tough school that was Yorkshire County Cricket Club. Having made his First-Class debut in 1961, he went on to make just 68 appearances in 10 years with the White Rose County. The lack of appearances could largely be put down to the fact that he had failed to register a First-Class century.

In the mid 1960s his football career began to take off. In 1965 he moved to Carlisle United for £7,000 and went on to score 68 goals in 369 games in one of the most successful spells of the club's history. Balderstone became a fan favourite at Brunton Park after scoring the penalty that briefly took the club to the top of the First Division in 1974/75. His time at Carlisle wasn't without its problems however as football and cricket were at loggerheads in the early 1970s. In 1973 Balderstone was suspended and stripped of the captaincy after deciding to finish the County cricket season rather than reporting back for pre-season training with Carlisle.

It soon became clear that he had a decision to make, football or cricket? It was becoming increasingly difficult to play both. It was a decision that was almost made for him by his success on the cricket field. Now with Leicestershire, who he joined in 1971, Balderstone had established himself as one of the most consistent batsmen in the country, and a key part of a successful Foxes side. In 1972 he produced a Man of the Match winning performance in the Benson and Hedges Cup Final scoring 41 not out in a low scoring run chase, which was all the more sweet given that it was against his former county Yorkshire.

The success continued in 1975 when Leicestershire won their first County Championship title. Balderstone amassed 1,222 runs at 37 including 5 centuries that season and was rewarded with a call up to the England Test side the following summer. The 1976 touring West Indian team was no side to make your debut against however and motivated by Tony Greig's infamous "we want to make them grovel" speech they went on to hammer England 3-0. Balderstone made two appearances in the series, the first of which was at his old stomping ground Headingley where he made 35 and 4 in a narrow West Indian win.

His second Test appearance was a memorable one, for Vivian Richards and Michael Holding who both produced career best performances. Balderstone found himself on the receiving end of both, first in the field when he spilled a chance to remove Richards on 151 off the bowling of Derek Underwood, a moment he recalls well, "I don't think deadly (Underwood) ever forgave me!" Richards went on to make 291. He then recorded a pair, bowled both times by Holding who picked up 14 wickets on the most docile of pitches.

While his International career was short and unfulfilled, his County career was anything but. Balderstone went onto play for 10 more years after his two Test

caps writing his name firmly into the echelons of Grace Road's cricketing history. He finished on 19,034 First-Class runs at an average of 34 including 32 centuries. His career best score, an unbeaten 181, came against Gloucestershire at Grace Road in 1984. He also shares the second-wicket partnership record for Leicestershire having put on an unbroken 289 with David Gower against Essex at Grace Road in 1981. He will always be best remembered at the club for being a member of the first Championship winning Leicestershire side in 1975.

Balderstone could also be impressive with the ball, his left-arm spin claimed 310 First-Class wickets with career best figures of 6 for 25 against Hampshire at Southampton in 1978 and a hat-trick against Sussex at Eastbourne in 1976. Despite the high profile missed chance off Richards he was also a more than competent fielder, holding 210 First-Class catches.

After retiring in 1986 at the age of 45, Balderstone moved into umpiring, becoming a member of the First-Class umpires list in 1988. He would again get a brief taste of International cricket, standing in two One Day Internationals both featuring England and the touring South Africans of 1994 and 1998. He would surely have umpired in more International matches had it not been for his premature death in 2000 from cancer aged just 59.

Batting and fielding averages

	Mat	Inns	NO	Runs	HS	Ave	BF	SR	100	50	4s	6s	Ct	St
Tests	2	4	0	39	35	9.75	198	19.69	0	0	3	0	1	0
First-class	390	619	61	19034	181*	34.11			32	103			210	0
List A	238	217	37	5664	119*	31.46			5	32			77	0

Bowling averages

	Mat	Inns	Balls	Runs	Wkts	BBI	BBM	Ave	Econ	SR	4w	5w	10
Tests	2	1	96	80	1	1/80	1/80	80.00	5.00	96.0	0	0	0
First-class	390		19224	8160	310	6/25		26.32	2.54	62.0	5	0	0
List A	238		819	575	28	4/33	4/33	20.53	4.21	29.2	1	0	0

Source: www.cricinfo.com