

Percy Holmes (1886-1971)

by Peter Redding

Teams: Paddock CC, Yorkshire CCC, MCC & England

Yorkshire are well renowned for their opening batsmen, Herbert Sutcliffe, Len Hutton and Geoffrey Boycott to name a few, and Percy Holmes was right up there with the best of them. The opening combination of Holmes and Sutcliffe was one of the most prolific in the history of English domestic cricket and was a significant contributor to Yorkshire's dominance in the 1920s and 30s.

Holmes first learnt his trade at Oakes Council School before going on to play for Paddock in the Huddersfield League. He won the League batting prize in 1911, averaging 32.26 that season.

Holmes was a late developer into the First-Class game and had to wait until the age of 26 to make his debut for Yorkshire. He batted predominantly in the lower middle-order during his first two seasons in 1913 and 1914. It wasn't until 1919, the first season after the First World War, that he cemented his place as an opener in the side and in the process formed a formidable opening partnership with Herbert Sutcliffe, who was playing in his first season for Yorkshire. Holmes' performances in 1919 resulted in him being named as one of Wisden's Cricketer's of the Year in 1920.

It took 56 matches for Holmes to register his maiden First-Class century but once he did he never looked back, 66 more centuries followed. He wasn't one to stop there either, twelve of his hundreds were doubles and two were triples. While he was a consistent accumulator he was also capable of rapid scoring, remarkably his highest score of 315 not out against Middlesex at Lord's in 1925 was achieved in less than seven hours.

Despite scoring over 30,000 First-Class runs, Holmes was limited to just seven Test caps, largely due to the fact that he played in the same era as the great Sir Jack Hobbs, who is widely regarded as the greatest batsman that England has ever produced. Had it not been for Hobbs Holmes and Sutcliffe would surely have opened together regularly for England just as they had for Yorkshire. As it was the only tour in which Holmes really made an impact at Test level was the 1927/28 tour to South Africa, where he made all four of his Test fifties. Frustratingly he failed to make a hundred and finished off the tour with a pair in the Fifth Test at Kingsmead, Durban. He made only more Test appearance against India in 1932.

The runs continued to flow for Yorkshire though and with Sutcliffe, Rhodes and Leyland also in the side they won twelve County Championships in twenty one seasons between the First and Second World Wars', Holmes was a member of the side for eight of those triumphs. The opening combination of Holmes and Sutcliffe laid the foundations for much of the success, they put on 100 plus sixty nine times and in 1932 they set a new world record for the highest opening partnership in

First-Class cricket, amassing a remarkable stand of 555 against Essex at Leyton. Sutcliffe made 313 and Holmes an unbeaten 224, which would turn out to be his final First-Class century. The following season, 1933, was his last as he scored 929 runs at an average of just 19.25.

The comparison between Holmes and Sutcliffe is an intriguing one. Wisden Cricketers' Almanack (which many people consider to be the bible of the game) hints that Holmes was the more naturally talented batsman with a wider array of shots but was perhaps more intent on enjoyment when greater restraint was required. Sutcliffe on the other hand, is portrayed as more determined and mentally stronger, he was less likely to get over exuberant and give his wicket away.

Holmes' Test career was unfulfilled while Sutcliffe possesses the highest Test average of any Englishman. The comparison at First-Class level is a much closer one, for Holmes' achievements in domestic cricket speak for themselves. He passed 2,000 runs in a season seven times between 1920 and 1930 and even more remarkably scored over 1,000 runs in a single month in June 1925 at an average of 102. There is little doubt that Percy Holmes is one of the great batsman in the history of English domestic cricket and had he have played in a different era he may well have proved to be one of the great batsman in the history of Test cricket.



Herbert Sutcliffe (left) and Percy Holmes (right)

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Source: www.cricketchive.com

Career Record

Batting and fielding averages

	Mat	Inns	NO	Runs	HS	Ave	100	50	6s	Ct	St
Tests	7	14	1	357	88	27.46	0	4	0	3	0
First-class	555	810	84	30573	315*	42.11	67	141		342	0

Bowling averages

	Mat	Inns	Balls	Runs	Wkts	BBI	BBM	Ave	Econ	SR	4w	5w	10
Tests	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
First-class	555		252	185	2	1/5		92.50	4.40	126.0		0	0

Career Span 1913-1933

Source: www.cricinfo.com