



LETTER TO THE STAR NEWSPAPER

For a South African living and working in London, nothing warms the day (albeit only figuratively!) more than news of a South African victory over Australia.

The recent success over Australia must surely be a moment to savour for the young debutante, Graeme Smith. I have an interesting anecdote to share with readers of The Star.

It was Sunday November 2 1996. I was making my debut as an umpire in the (then) Transvaal premier league, in a match between Wits Tech and Old Eds at AW Muller Stadium.

That morning Old Eds won the toss and elected to bat.

Two young school boys from King Edward School came into bat, as I nervously prepared to officiate my first over in competitive cricket.

At the other end of the pitch a young man took off his cap, and asked politely. “Good morning, sir. May I have two legs?”

That was my first encounter with Graeme Smith, then only 15 years old. I remember two things about that day. Firstly, I did not know what “two leg” was and secondly – that young left hander could play some decent cricket.

As I found to my disappointment in later years of umpiring, the humble player is a rare person indeed.

I had the pleasure of umpiring Smith again in October 1999 when the formidable RAU took on an Old Eds side captained by Richard Snell in the Gauteng Premier league.,

I was delighted to have the opportunity to umpire the amiable former SA Test bowler. When the day was done, I realized that I had witnessed another Test player of the future.

Chasing a seemingly impossible 274 in the afternoon, Smith led the fight back against the fancied RAU side with an array of glorious shots. The weary RAU bowlers were on the wrong end of many a scorching cover drive. Old Eds won that day, thanks to Smith and his perennial club partner, Andrew Locke.

That night I proclaimed to my family, “Remember the name Graeme Smith. He’ll play Test cricket for South Africa one day.”

More’s the pity that by the time he was selected for SA, the short sightedness of certain cricket administrators saw him playing his provincial cricket for Western Province.

He was a great loss to Gauteng cricket, but I will always remember those early glimpses, not only for the rare talent but of a sense of humility all too often absent from professional sports players to day.

Greg Sherman, London.