

FERNTREE GULLY CRICKET CLUB

Affiliated with Reporter District Cricket Association 1913/14 – 1914/15

A short but eventful stay...

After a number of previous failed attempts, dating back to September 1899, the Ferntree Gully Cricket Club (Est. 1882/83) was finally accepted into the Reporter District Cricket Association for the 1913/14 season. This occurred on the back of the opening of the new Ferntree Gully Recreation Reserve (Now Wally Tew Reserve), on the 25th May, 1912. The Reporter Football Association, keen to expand its competition, included Ferntree Gully and Warrandyte as new teams in the 1912 season and a short time later, after the Football team had won the 1912 & 1913 Premierships, the Reporter DCA accepted the Ferntree Gully Cricket Club into the competition.



Ferntree Gully Shire Council Recreation Reserve opening photograph (circa July 1912)

The club had already been a powerhouse cricket team east of Melbourne and featured in its history before competition affiliation, players who could claim cricket representation against W.G. Grace and the might of the English tourists on the 1891/92 Lord Sheffield tour (when he donated £150 towards the purchase of the Sheffield Shield for an Interstate competition). Additionally members were also selected for a match against 'the odds' played at Dandenong in 1895, when the next English touring team, led by Andrew Stoddart, arrived.

The club had among its members a number of players who not only played in these matches but were involved in the earliest days of District, now Premier Cricket and also represented the Victorian Junior's – then the tier of representation immediately below the Victorian Intercolonial team.

From these beginnings a strong team affiliated with the RDCA in 1913/14 'C Division' grade. The three divisions (A, B & C) were geographically based with a complicated formula deciding the 1913/14 Semi Finalists and eventual Grand Finalists. In the two seasons before the club went into recess in 1915/16, after the deprivations of World War I impacted the country town the club featured among the strength of the competition.

In the two seasons it affiliated with the Reporter DCA, the FTGCC played 24 matches, winning 19, losing 4 with the remaining match ending in the first outright tie (vs East Doncaster CC) in RDCA history. The team was led by an outstanding all rounder of the era in George Williams who record in the outer eastern suburbs is among the best of any player prior to World War 1.

Williams led a team that included in 1913/14, ex Mitcham and Reporter DCA star player Patrick (Paddy) Gilchrist, who turned out for the FTGCC after being recruited in a local coup to the FTGFC and played in their back to back 1912 and 1913 Reporter Football Association Premiership victories. He returned to Mitcham in 1914/15, but the locals had a readymade replacement in their ranks with ex South Melbourne CC captain and state player; Len Smith joining the club, after moving onto a farming property near the present corner of Scoresby Road & Boronia Road in early 1914.

They reached the Semi Final in 1913/14 and were defeated by eventual premier Surrey Hills in a match they should have won. The score at stumps on Day 1 saw Surrey Hills dismissed for 171 and Ferntree Gully 1/97 overnight. Day 2 started with the needless run out of Jack McMahon for 23, which was followed by two more including star players George Williams (11) & Len Smith (3). The rest, except Gilchrist (who was last man out for 90), didn't contribute much and the team was dismissed for 155, losing by 16 runs. Surrey Hills batted out Day 3 for 8/228 to win their way to the Grand Final.



George Williams (East Melb Ground c1905)



Paddy Gilchrist (c1912)



Len Smith (c1906)

The new boys had made an impression in the first season of affiliated cricket by defeating all comers in 'C Division' outright. Their opponents included Blackburn, Croydon, East Burwood, Glen Waverley, Ringwood & Vermont, with Mitcham withdrawing from the competition at Christmas. George Williams led the batting with 414 runs (H.S. 69), while Paddy Gilchrist had a fine double of 271 runs (including the S/F 90) and 74 wickets at 7.66 with a best of 8/18 and 6 five wicket hauls. They were supported by Fred Carrington 209 runs and 27 wickets at 9.11 and Len Smith 25 wickets at 7.40 (inc. 12/120 in the S/F) from just three matches in a portent to come.

With Smith's addition the 1914/15 season became one of the clubs greatest ever with records set by the players that remain in place today. All was not about cricket; however, as World War One had begun and the RDCA determined as the 1914/15 season began, that no finals would be played. Instead the Premiership would be awarded to the competition ladder leaders of the reduced two grade (A & B Division) competition, after a 14 round Home & Away season.

At the end of the season the team had won 11 (seven by outright margin), lost 2 (to Vermont & Croydon) and tied their round two match against East Doncaster – the first outright tie in Reporter DCA history. Ultimately with only 1 point awarded for the tie and 3 points on offer for victory, and given Croydon won the Premiership by 1 point, the margin for Ferntree Gully missing out on this 1914/15 premiership was just a single run!

George Williams and Len Smith were the Club and association stars of the season with Williams winning the RDCA Grade Batting Average and Smith the Grade Bowling Average. Williams scored 910 runs at 60.67 (including three centuries and three half centuries) and was involved in three century partnerships including a 1st Wicket stand of 257 with Fred Carrington which still stands as a 1st XI opening partnership record today.

Smith's efforts were astonishing and still remain one of the greatest individual bowling seasons in BHRDCA history today. Called up for War Training, he wasn't available until Round 6, but in the remaining 9 matches he took an incredible **87 wickets at 5.77!** This included individual hauls of **5/39 & 5/26 (10/65** in the match vs Croydon), **7/57 (11/73** in the match vs Doncaster Heights), **6/19** (vs Blackburn), **9/28 (14/90** in the match vs Doncaster East), **5/23 & 5/42 (10/65** in the match vs Warrandyte), **7/27** vs Vermont, **9/18** vs Wonga Park, **9/40 (10/56** in the match vs Croydon) and **7/8** vs Doncaster Heights in the final round in a match in which he also scored **108**.

Incredibly there were other great performances apart from the star batting of Williams and bowling of Smith. Throughout the season two other centuries were scored, four hat tricks were taken, while another 9/for innings haul (9/52 by George Williams vs Vermont in the 2nd innings – Smith didn't bowl), making 4 all together and three other 7/for innings hauls, making 10 all together occurred.

And that was it! Two seasons, no silverware, but a legacy of first XI achievement that is very much still alive at the Club one hundred or so seasons since. The Ferntree Gully Cricket Club will always have the Box Hill Reporter District Cricket Association at its core, with the commencement in competition cricket now tying the two institutions together for a century – a significant chunk of the Associations 125 year history.