

# Leonard Angus Smith

*~ Only a dozen matches but what an impact ~*

In 1914/15 Ferntree Gully affiliated with the Box Hill Reporter Association for our second season of competition cricket. After being defeated by Surrey Hills in the 1913/14 Semi Final there was a degree of confidence in the team improving under Henry Monk and George Lovell as President and Secretary off the field, and George Williams as the on-field star and Captain. Their hopes would have dived a little when Paddy Gilchrist announced he was returning to his old club; Mitcham, to help them re establish after they had gone into recess at Xmas 1913. (Refer to the profile item for more on Gilchrist's astonishing pre-War cricket & football achievements).

As often happens when a void is created by the loss of a player, it creates 'space' for another to step up and in 1914/15 Len Smith did just this. He had first come to the clubs notice when he moved into the area at Christmas in 1913, to take up occupancy of a farming property located near Sasses Avenue (approx where the old Knox Tech School site was). It didn't take long for Monk to discover that within their midst was an ex Victorian cricketer who was available for matches locally... Smith played for Victoria in 1907/08 after being involved in some of the earliest District Cricket matches for Carlton, where he once took 9/43 against Richmond and at South Melbourne, whom he captained in the 1910/11 season and where he had won the 1906/07 Batting average.

He was invited by Monk to join the club in January 1914 and played out the 1913/14 season in a flurry of success and individual achievement. Smith's debut match took place in **Round 8** after the **Round 7** post Xmas match became a Bye when Gilchrist's old club Mitcham withdrew from the competition at the Christmas break.



Len Smith c 1900's

The **Round 8** match was played at Ferntree Gully on the recently opened Recreation Reserve (the old ground) against Blackburn. He took 3/21 on debut and assisted Gilchrist 4/14, J. McMahon 1/3 & 2 Run Outs, to dismiss them for just 39. We batted with Smith and McMahon opening and the pair remained at the crease at stumps on Day 1, with the team in a commanding position at 0/68.

The partnership continued on Day 2 until McMahon was dismissed for 42. The rest of the team hardly put up a fight as we lost 10 wickets for just 46 more runs to be all out for 128 - Smith top scored with 45 and we led by 89 runs. Blackburn batted again and was never in the hunt as Smith (2/4), Gilchrist (3/11) and Alf Pickett (5/8) combined to dismiss them for just 26 and ensured that Smith's first game was a comfortable outright victory.

He was unavailable for **Round 9** (vs Croydon), when we came from behind to win Outright - FTG 68 & 7/125 Dec. (Fred Carrington 47, Gilchrist 28 & Alf Pickett 23 Ret. Hurt) to Croydon 91 & 38 with Gilchrist the star taking 10 wickets in the match (4/52 & 6/15). **Round 10** was at home against East Burwood and the Smith/Gilchrist combination dominated again when East Burwood were dismissed for 40 (Gilchrist 5/15 & Smith 4/17). Smith then went in at first drop but failed to trouble the scorers, being bowled third ball for a 'duck'. George Williams (62) saw the team reach 130 - safely past the East Burwood score and then the 'combine' did the rest with Gilchrist (5/20) getting consecutive 10 wicket hauls and Smith finishing with 4/23 giving him match figures of 8/40 in support.

With qualification rules of the day being very different to today's standards Smith's next match was the **Semi Final** against opposing A Section leader; Surry Hills. They batted first and were dismissed for 171 with Smith the chief destroyer, taking the great figures of 8/48. At stumps we were 1/97 with Gilchrist, this time starring with the bat. With 75 required for a 1<sup>st</sup> Innings lead and nine wickets in hand, George Williams (Capt.) must have been comfortable with the team's effort in our first final. Despite our strong position the Surrey Hills bowlers clawed their way back into the match on Day 2, when they removed Jack McMahon (23) at 114 and were right on top when Williams was dismissed for 11 and Con Clohesy a duck - both at 133.

Gilchrist was the last man out for a superb 90 when we were dismissed for 155, failing by 17 runs to topple the A Section leaders, in a match they later described as their toughest in years.

Surrey Hills batted again and were 8/228 when stumps were pulled on Day 2 with Smith ending the match with a magnificent haul of 12 wickets for 120 after taking 4/72 on top of his 8/48 in the 1<sup>st</sup> Innings. Surrey Hills went onto win the **1913/14 Reporter Premiership**.

Smith's achievements in the final few matches of the 1913/14 season were a sign of his great cricket abilities, but nobody realised just how good he was or what an impact he would have on the 1914/15 season, when he set bowling records that still stand today amongst the best 1<sup>st</sup> XI achievements in club history.

With Gilchrist returning to Mitcham for the 1914/15 season and enlistment for World War One taking its toll on the competition, the club entered the Reporter Association for its second competitive season and witnessed Smith's bowling at its best. He missed the first **five rounds** while at War Service training but returned to spearhead the attack in Round 6 and set the club alight in its bid to finish on top of the ladder and play off for the Premiership, which because of the War, would only be played between the respective A and B Section competition leaders.

We batted first in **Round 6** against Croydon and were dismissed for 99 with George batting through the entire innings scoring 63 not out (Still the highest % of runs by a FTGCC batsman in a single innings in club history). Smith scored 4 runs but made amends when he led the attack (5/39) to a first innings lead of 12 runs when Croydon were all out for 87. On Day 2 we were dismissed for 80 in our second innings with George (27) the highest scorer and despite Smith backing up with another 5-wicket haul (5/26 & 10/65 in the match), he was the only bowler to have any success in their second innings and we were defeated by 5 wickets. After Six Rounds, we had won three, lost two and tied one match (the first ever) and were mid field on the ladder – a long way from the pre-season expectations that were predicted by Monk & Lovell – still, eight rounds remained and with Smith back in the team anything could happen.

**Round 7** took us to Doncaster Heights and we returned home with a good score of 196 with Fred Carrington (52), Jack McMahon (47), George Williams (46) and Smith (23) the pick of the batsmen. Carrington and Williams had got us off to a good start of 95 for the opening stand and the remaining batsmen combined to put together a good score. The Reporter (Newspaper) thought it was too many for Doncaster Heights when facing the prospect of an attack led by 'first class bowler – Len Smith'. They were correct as he took 4/16 but was just pipped by Jack McMahon who took 5/11 in a rout of Doncaster Heights who scraped together 30 runs. They were sent in again and Smith made short work of them taking 7/57 to give him match figures of 11/73 as we won by an Innings & 8 runs.

For the third match in succession in **Round 8**, we played away, this time against Blackburn with George again winning the toss and electing to bat. After the loss of Fred Carrington for 8, George and Len Smith combined to put on 141 for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wicket partnership which remained a 1<sup>st</sup> XI record until 1971/72. At 155, Smith was caught for a well made 62 while George went on to dominate the innings with his second century of the season and remained 109 not out at stumps when we had compiled a huge score (for the era) of 4/243 c.c. Returning to Blackburn on the second Day and Smith (6/19) combined with Bob Scott (3/8) to dismiss them for 56. They were sent in again only this time the match spoils went to Smith's partner Scott, who took 7/18 in their innings to give him match figures of 10/26. Smith chimed in with 2/13 for a great match haul of 8/32 and we won outright by an innings & 136 runs.

**Round 9** finally saw a return to our Home ground in a match against Doncaster East and the Len Smith show rolled on. They batted first and were dismissed for 96 with Smith taking a then club record haul of 9/28 from just 8.4 Overs (68 balls). Eight of his victims were clean bowled, proving him to be a direct 'stump to stump' bowler. In reply we were 4/84 overnight with George Williams carrying on from his previous match century and seemingly on his way to another. He duly completed back to back tons on Day 2 and remained 114\* when Les Knight was the last man out and our score was 197 – a lead of 101. As is often the case, East Doncaster batted with more purpose in their second innings and compiled 161 with Smith setting a Club Record taking 5/62 (all 5 were bowled) to go with his first innings effort of 9/28, giving him match figures of 14/90. We chased down the runs required for another outright victory for the loss of 2 wickets; with Smith hitting the outright winning runs and ending on 11 not out.

*Ed's NOTE: Until May 2009, when George McRae's amazing 1922/23 performance against Wantirna was discovered (9/19 & 10/11 – 19/30 in Match), Smith's efforts in this match remained the best bowling effort in our 1<sup>st</sup> XI's history. It now sits an honourable second on the all-time list.*

Travelling to Warrantyte for **Round 10**, George knew he had a match winner in Smith and he continued to perform when it counted. This time he took 5/23 but was again pipped by Jack McMahon who took the bowling honours with 5/16 when Warrantyte were dismissed on a 'sticky wicket' for 51 with Mr. Extras (12) the top scorer. We responded with a better effort and were in front at Stumps on 6/84 with Jack McMahon; backing up, on 27 not out, while Smith scored a handy 26 on a wicket described by the Reporter as 'uncomfortable and disconcerting for proper batsmanship.'

On day two we progressed our innings to 103 with McMahon carrying on to top score on 38 and we led by 52 runs. Once again, our opponents applied themselves better in their second innings with Smith taking the final wicket and yet another 10 wicket match haul – 5/42 and 10/65 in the match, while McMahon finished with 4/27 and 9/43 in another dominant outright victory.

This win also elevated the team into second place on the 'B Section' Ladder, but courtesy of the Round 2 Tied Match against east Doncaster and the two losses suffered '*pre-Smith*'; we would need to rely on beating Croydon (Round 13) as well as someone else doing the same if we were to make the final play off.

We returned to Ferntree Gully in **Round 11** against Vermont, who batted first and were also put through the ringer by Len Smith who excelled taking 7/27 from his 12.2 overs as they were dismissed for 87. We had passed them by stumps on Day 1 for the loss of McMahon for 3 and were 2/133 with Williams (48) and Carrington (71\*) starring.

On Day 2 the score progressed with the main interest as to whether Fred Carrington could continue onto his second century of the season – he fell on Australian crickets 'devil number' – 87, but not before he had seen us on the way to a good score of 197 for the second time in three matches. Smith's first innings exploits weren't repeated in the second as he played second fiddle to the skipper. Len finished with 1/68 but George Williams took charge and reaped an amazing 9/52 as they were dismissed for 182. With the trip back to Vermont beckoning, the two Captains agreed to call time and we didn't bat again but had still won the match by 110 runs on the first innings.

The **Round 12** clash was played away after the long trip to Wonga Park was negotiated. (*Ed's NOTE: Modern players repeatedly got lost on the way to Wonga Park in the 1990's, imagine having to travel there in 1915!*) We batted first and were all out for just 57 which included 'ducks' to Carrington, McMahon, Pat Staig and Harry Pickett. It was going to take an extraordinary performance to recover and have a chance of winning this match and Len Smith was the just the player to deliver it. On cue he stepped up and decimated the Wonga Park batting line up for just 42, taking an astonishing 9/18 from 12 Overs (8 Ball). Once again, he bowled straight at the stumps with each of his victims either bowled or LBW. Jack McMahon collected the only other wicket to fall in the innings, but the spotlight rightly fell on Smith's achievement, who had single handedly created a first innings lead of 15 runs – ironically the same amount he scored as top scorer in our 57 run batting debacle.

Our batting improved in the second innings with Fred Carrington 49\*, Sam Johnstone 28\* and George Williams 20 until George felt he was safe and declared the innings closed at 5/148, providing us with a lead of 163 runs. Wonga Park was never in the hunt as this time, without Smith bowling a ball, Fred Carrington took the honours with 7/27 from 10.2 overs and George took the other three wickets for 32, dismissing Wonga Park for 63 and winning Outright by 100 runs. Such was Smith's consistency with the ball since his return, you would have to assume that another 10 wicket match haul went begging, especially considering he only had to take one second Innings wicket to give him 10 for the match!

**Round 13** saw us still second on the ladder behind Croydon, so we had to defeat them and still rely on them losing the final Round if we were to make the playoff for the Premiership. They won the toss and elected to bat but faced a rampant Smith, who for the third time in the season took 9 wickets in an Innings when he collected 9/40 and they were dismissed for 100. The big problem was not Smith's excellent spell but the time the Croydon innings had taken (38 Overs) almost certainly prevented the Gully from establishing a large enough lead to gain an outright victory and the much needed extra match points if we were to challenge for top spot.

George opened and threw down the gauntlet to the Croydon bowling with a quick fire 65 and by stumps on Day 1 we were 5/120 with our noses in front and another day's cricket to come. He batted on in overcast conditions and declared at 9/185 with a couple of showers having already caused disruptions in play and taken up valuable time. Croydon batted again and were 1/53 when the showers finally became too consistent and play was stopped for the remainder of the day, but not before Smith with 1/16 collected another 10 wicket match haul.

The first innings victory by 85 runs over Croydon virtually snuffed out any hope we had of securing the play off birth as Croydon were too many points in the clear, even with a resounding victory in the last Home & Away round for the 1914/15 season.

**Round 14** was played at home against Doncaster Heights and we elected to bat, after George won the toss. Smith and George Williams opened, but when George went for 34, Smith continued, forming a partnership with Fred Carrington. It had realised 88 when Carrington was dismissed, and the score stood at 2/134, with Smith continuing to build his own score. His was the final wicket taken by the opposition teams in the 1914/15 season when the score stood at 7/186 but by then he had compiled a magnificent 108 to prove it was not just as a bowler he was a dominant force but that he could also perform with the bat. A short time later George declared the innings closed at 7/197 as stumps was looming and all and sundry celebrated Smith's achievement.

The following week he etched his name further into the club record books by taking 7/8 from 7.2 overs including 4 wickets in 5 balls from one over, just missing a hat Trick. Six of his seven victims were out for 'ducks' as Doncaster Heights responded to our score of 7/197 declared by being dismissed for just 48.

The realisation that despite our dominance, that the early two losses and the tied match against east Doncaster had cost us a chance in our first Grand Final Match dawned on the players and they decided to call the match off, with victory being awarded to Ferntree Gully by 149 runs. This decision again deprived Smith of a chance at another 10 wicket haul, but most cricketers could understand the disappointment the team felt when they realised the Grand final berth was beyond their reach no matter what the outcome of this match.

We had played 14 games, lost two and tied one, with all three of these results occurring before Round 6 when, after missing the first five rounds, Len Smith returned to the bowling crease and came into his own.

In the nine remaining matches of the season he bowled 174.5 Overs and took an astonishing 87 wickets for 502 runs at an amazing average of 5.77 from the 16 Innings he bowled in, to easily take out the Reporter Association 'Section B' Bowling Average (Pat Gilchrist won the 'Section A' Bowling Award for Mitcham). Smith's figures for the season were astonishing and are recorded below chronologically as it progressed...

<b>Round 6</b> vs Croydon	5/39 & 5/26	<b>10/65</b> in Match
<b>Round 7</b> vs Doncaster Heights	4/16 & <b>7/57</b>	<b>11/73</b> in Match
<b>Round 8</b> vs Blackburn	6/19 & 2/13	8/32 in Match, Bob Scott took 3/8 & 7/18 - 10/26 in Match
<b>Round 9</b> vs Doncaster East	<b>9/28</b> & 5/62	<b>14/90</b> in Match
<b>Round 10</b> vs Warrandyte	5/23 & 5/42	<b>10/65</b> in Match
<b>Round 11</b> vs Vermont	<b>7/27</b> & 1/68	8/95 in Match, George Williams took 9/52 in the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Inn's
<b>Round 12</b> vs Wonga Park	<b>9/18</b> & DNB	Fred Carrington 7/27 & George Williams 3/32 in the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Inn's
<b>Round 13</b> vs Croydon	<b>9/40</b> & 1/16	<b>10/56</b> in Match
<b>Round 14</b> vs Doncaster Heights	<b>7/8</b> & DNB	No 2 <sup>nd</sup> Inn of Doncaster Heights though he scored 108

His bowling performances in the 1914/15 season were astonishing by any standards and included individual 'bags' of **7/57**, **9/28**, **7/27**, **9/18**, **9/40** and **7/8** while he took 5 or 6 wicket hauls on a further six occasions all in a season in which he played only 9 matches! Most bowlers would play an entire career without recording a nine wicket innings haul - Smith took three in one season!

From 1913/14 his efforts were...

<b>Round 8</b> vs Blackburn	3/21 & 2/4	Pat Gilchrist took 7/25 and Alf Pickett 5/8 in the same match
<b>Round 9</b> vs Croydon	Did Not Play	Pat Gilchrist took 10/67 in the match
<b>Round 10</b> vs East Burwood	4/17 & 4/23	8/40 in Match, Pat Gilchrist took 10/37 in the match
<b>Semi Final</b> vs Surrey Hills	<b>8/48</b> & 4/72	<b>12/120</b> in Match

His career at the club was brought to an abrupt halt by the commencement of World War 1 which saw the club go into recess. We returned to cricket post war, playing arranged matches in 1920/21 before joining the Ringwood District Cricket Association in 1921/22.

Len Smith had left a bowling record unrivalled by anyone since and probably one that would be among the best recorded at a local cricket club anywhere in Australia. In just 12 matches (3 in 1913/14 and 9 in 1914/15), he had taken **112 Wickets for 687 runs @ 6.13** including 5 wickets in an innings six times, 7 wickets in an innings seven times and 10 wickets in a match six times as well as having a top score of 108.

Len Smith was born in 1882 and served his country with the 1<sup>st</sup> A.I.F. Division in World War One embarking for overseas service in October 1917 and returning to Australia in May 1919, suffering from the after effects of mustard gas ingested on the Western front, which put paid to furthering his post war cricket career at Ferntree Gully.

After returning from the War, he moved from the area to Brighton to get 'sea air into his lungs' to aid his recovery. He enlisted again as a Staff Sergeant for World War Two in February 1941. A short time later he contracted another illness and died, aged 60 in Heidelberg Military Hospital (now the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital) in July 1943.