John Benaud

John Benaud was Randwick's first Test cricketer. Disappointingly his career was brief, spanning just three matches and robbing the cricketing public from one of the more dashing and entertaining batsmen of his time.

John Benaud was born at Auburn on 11 May 1944. And while all of his early cricketing days were played at the Cumberland club, Benaud ventured to Coogee Oval in the spring of 1969. An established State player who became captain of the NSW Sheffield Shield team that season, Benaud's presence in the Randwick 1st XI as captain and punishing batsman did wonders for the spirit and morale of the team. He instilled in the players a purpose for a more aggressive brand of cricket which was a feature of his leadership at the first-class level. It was a classy side John inherited, with young NSW players Geoff Davies and Alan Turner the front-runners along with Ron Crippin just a year short of his first-class debut.

An aggressive right-hand batsman, in four years and 34 matches with Randwick, John Benaud scored 1,161 runs. His top score was a power-packed 92 in 90 minutes against Waverley at Waverley Oval in 1972-73 laced with six fours and five sixes. He and Ron Crippin put on 150 in 74 minutes for the fourth wicket. The next match he belted 69 against St George at Coogee to win in the last over.

Benaud's influence was of greater value to the club than the runs he scored. Young players throughout the club, not just those in the 1st Grade side, prospered under his leadership. The Benaud effect was extended when big brother Richie took over the reins for two matches in 1969-70 when John was on State duty.

Season 1969-70 was one which catapulted John and NSW Cricket into the headlines when he was suspended by the NSW Cricket Association for two first-class matches after he and members of the Sheffield Shield team disobeyed an instruction not to wear the new adidas ripple-soled cricket boots. The furore from the public and the media soon caused the NSW Executive to reverse its decision. That season also saw Benaud record his best Sheffield Shield score of 134 against Victoria at the MCG.

In 1972-73 John made his Test debut when selected to play against Pakistan at the Adelaide Oval where he scored 24 in Australia's only innings. His selection caused great excitement at Coogee Oval as it was the first time a Randwick player had participated in a Test match in the club's 51 years in 1st Grade. He also played in the 2nd Test at the MCG over the 1973 New Year period and scored a mammoth 142 off 207 balls in the second dig hitting 18 fours and two sixes. He also featured in a 233 runs partnership for the second wicket with Paul Sheahan. Amazingly, he put together that innings in the knowledge that he had been dropped from the 3rd Test which was to be played a few days later at the SCG.

The following March, John was part of the 1973 Australian team's tour of the West Indies. He played in the 5th Test at Port-of-Spain, Trinidad which Australia won to achieve the only result in the series. Unfortunately, that was the last occasion he got to wear the baggy green of Australia as on his return, he announced his retirement from first-class cricket at just 29 years of age to concentrate on his fast developing newspaper career. His three Test matches had brought him 223 runs at 44.60 while his 34 matches for NSW returned 2,042 runs at 36.46 including three centuries.

Season 1972-73 was also John Benaud's last for Randwick. Living in the mountains he decided to throw his lot in with the new Grade club Nepean (now Penrith). It was a double-whammy for Randwick as Geoff Davies, who had already moved into the Blue Mountains area, joined John in the new club. In later years, John became a Life Member of the Penrith club. After his playing days he became a State and Australian selector. Benaud played 19 times for NSW while playing with Randwick.

John Benaud enjoyed his time with Randwick and to this day maintains a close link with its successor Randwick Petersham, through his membership with the club's supporter group, the Randwick Petersham Legends Society. In the 20 years of Randwick Petersham to 2020-21, John has been a generous donor of an annual award for the leading A W Green Shield under 16 years player.