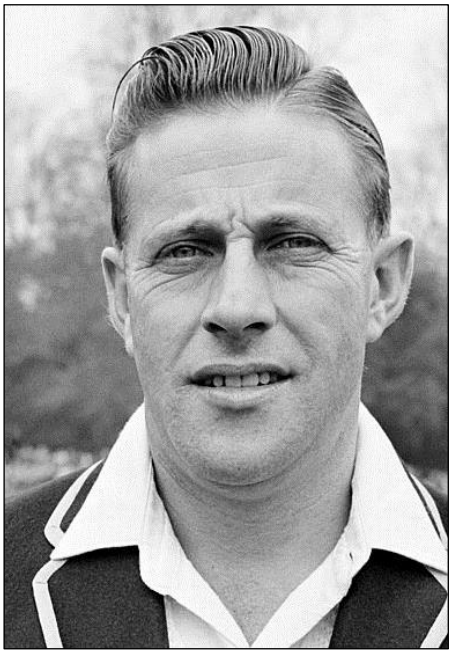
Johnny Martin
1931-92



There have been few greater entertainers on the cricket field than John Wesley Martin. "Little Fav" as he was known, was a wily left-hand unorthodox spin bowler, an aggressive six-hitting batsman and enthusiastic fieldsman whose smiling and chirpy demeanour made him a huge favourite with cricket crowds around the world.

A product of the thriving metropolis of Burrell Creek near Wingham where he was born on 28 July 1931, Martin was 22 years old when he ventured to Sydney to take up an invitation to play with the Petersham-Marrickville club in the 1953-54 season. Interestingly, he had been approached to play rugby league with Newtown and cricket with Randwick two years earlier, but decided he wasn't ready at that time to leave the family Burrell Creek Post Office business, or his parents Sam and Elsie as well as his three brothers and six sisters.

In making the return train trip from Taree to Sydney each weekend, Martin was attempting to fulfil an ambition to become a Test cricketer having had the urge since seeing Bradman and Barnes each make 234 against England at the Sydney Cricket Ground when he made his first trip to Sydney at age 15. The train trip itself was only for the dedicated as young Johnny would leave Taree at 9.40 pm on a Friday night arriving at Central at 6 am the following Saturday morning. After playing for Petersham-Marrickville he would begin the return trip catching the 7.45 pm train from Central Saturday night arriving in Taree Sunday morning around 3 am.

In his first season in 1953-54 he showed his worth with two centuries as part of his 437 runs while he took 24 wickets with 7-41 against NDs his best. He also missed four games with a broken thumb. He and Bobby Simpson (516 runs) put together a number of good partnerships.

In 1956-57 his all-round abilities were recognised by State selectors and he made his first-class debut in the 100th first-class match playing against Queensland at the 'Gabba in Brisbane. He did well, taking 3-68 and 2-50 with the ball, scored 47 with the bat and held on to five catches. That was the first of 78 matches Martin would play for NSW over the following 12 seasons scoring 2,582 runs and taking 293 wickets while holding 83 catches. He took five wickets or more in an innings 12 times.

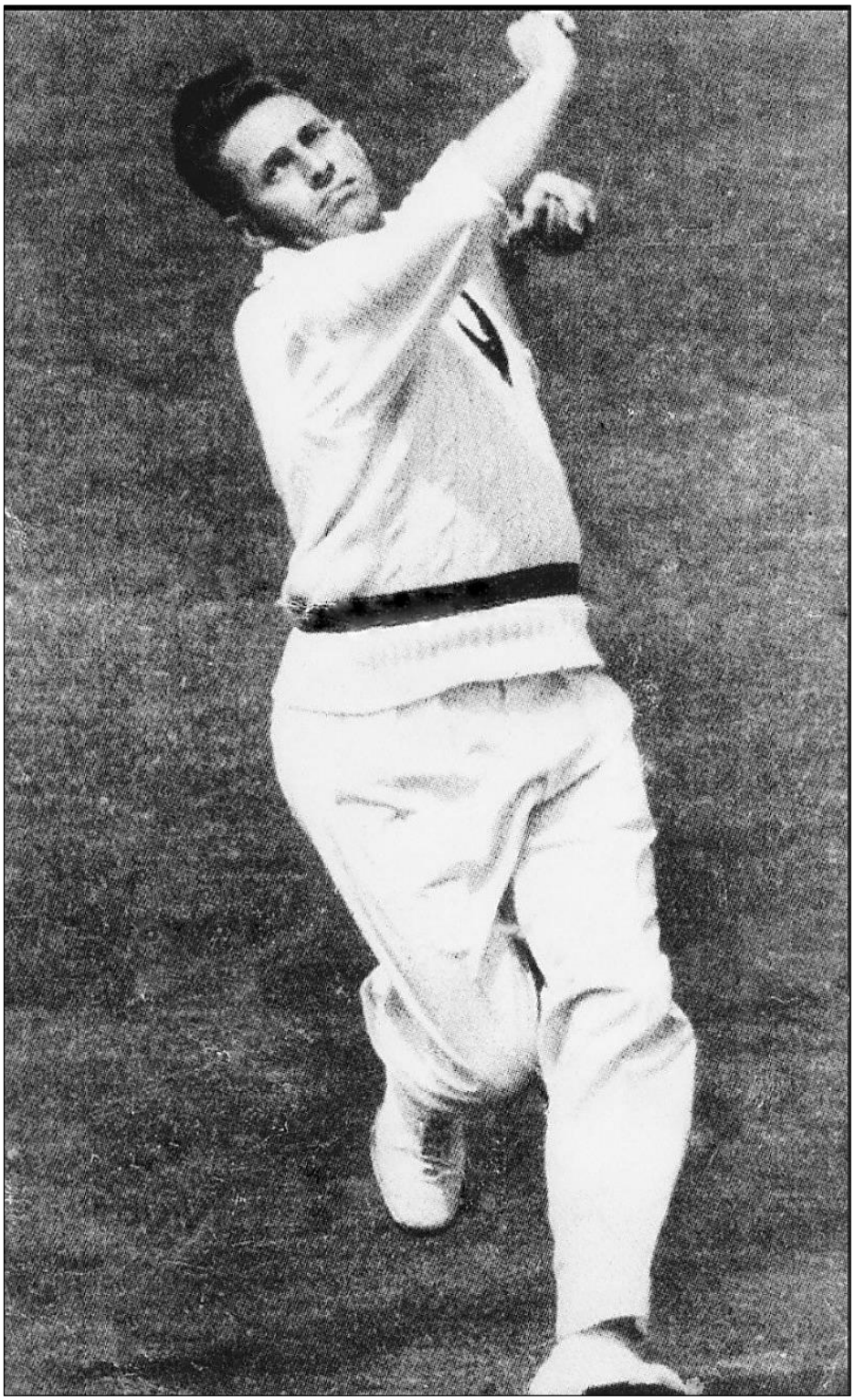
The following season he set a new club 1st Grade wicket-taking record when he finished with 47 wickets at just 14.4. He took an amazing 8-59 against University but surpassed that performance two seasons later with a return of 8-49 off 25 overs against Balmain at the Sydney Cricket Ground. He did not play with Petersham in 1958-59 as he had a season with South Australia, but returned in time for 1959-60. He only played seven matches that summer being a member of the Australian tour of New Zealand but still managed a score of 105 as well as taking the 8-49 mentioned above.

The 1960-61 season brought with it one of the greatest-ever Test series when the West Indies played five matches in Australia. In what was a dream come true, Johnny played in three of those matches taking an amazing three wickets in four balls in his first Test Match in Melbourne. And what wickets they were! The brilliant Rohan Kanhai, the great Garfield Sobers (caught at slip first ball) and the captain Frank Worrell. It was not the first time Martin had taken a wicket haul in just a few balls. In the Grade competition in 1962-63 he took four wickets in five balls against Randwick at Coogee Oval as part of a 7-52 performance while he made his highest score of 114 against Mosman at Mosman Oval.

The following season 1968-69 Martin recorded one of the greatest all-round performances in the history of Sydney Grade Cricket when he scored 108 and took 6-49 against University. He had achieved a similar return some years earlier in 1963-64 when he scored 106* against Western Suburbs before spinning a web to return 5-70.

Over the following six years Martin took 188 wickets and scored 1,386 runs. In 1968-69 at 37 years of age he took 68 wickets for the season which stood as a record until broken by Dave Chardon in 1983-84 with 69. It was that same season he had his best summer with the bat notching up 658 runs with a highest score of 108. Probably his most interesting Grade Cricket statistic is the 166 sixes he hit. He was a prolific six hitter and had publicly declared that he wanted to hit at least one ball over the fence every time he batted! He won the club bowling aggregate six times and the average an amazing 10 times.

John made the trek from Burrell Creek to play with Petersham-Marrickville for 15 seasons, finally calling it a day after the 1968-69 season. In his time with Petes he scored 3,073 runs and took 409 wickets in 1st Grade. He hit six centuries and took five wickets or more in an innings on 36 occasions. He was made a Life Member of the club in 1972.

In first-class cricket he played eight Tests among his 135 matches. His best Test score was 55 in his first Test against West Indies in 1960-61 while he hit 101 against Western Australia in Sheffield Shield. His 8-97 against Victoria in 1962-63 at the Sydney Cricket Ground remained his best bowling performance. Overall his first-class career wickets totalled 445 while he scored 3,970 runs and took 114 catches.

Johnny Martin died from a heart attack in 1992 aged 60 having survived another 20 years earlier.