Sid Barnes
1916-1973

Sid Barnes has been described in many ways. Bizarre, colourful, eccentric, bombastic and possessing an ability second only to Bradman are just a few of the references used in attempting to label a man whose life was anything but standard fare.

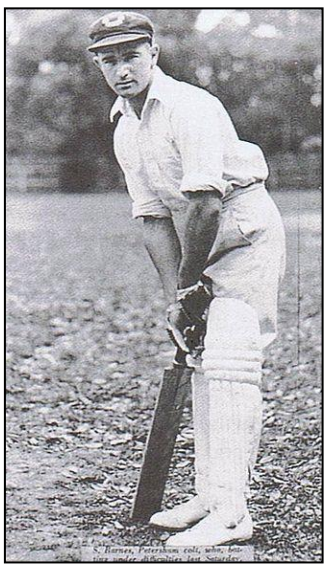
Sidney George Barnes was born at Annandale on 5 June 1916 and educated at Stanmore Public School. Aged 18 he joined Petersham starting the 1934-35 season in 3rd Grade and finishing in 2s. While his run scoring was a highlight, his wicket-keeping received rave reviews. The following season after scoring 115* against Randwick in 2nds and averaging 103.50, he was promoted to 1sts where he celebrated with a fine 113 playing Manly.

In 1935-36 the right-hander won the 1st Grade batting aggregate for Petersham with 513 runs but it was the following season, 1936-37, where he stamped his mark as one of the most gifted and outstanding cricketers in Sydney Grade cricket totalling 723 at an average of 72.30. Having hit two centuries (148 v Marrickville and 116 v Manly) he scored 190* against North Sydney taking 40 runs (four sixes and four fours) off one eight ball over from State fast bowler "Ginty" Lush. By season's end he had made his Sheffield Shield debut for New South Wales against South Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground scoring 31 and 44. At just 20 years of age, this was the start of a career filled with great exploits and controversy.

The following season, after just eight first-class games and 492 runs, Barnes was chosen for the 1938 Australian tour of England. This was a wonderful come-back as he had been side-lined at the start of the season following an operation to remove his tonsils. This health problem reduced his appearances for Petersham to just three innings. This was not the end of his health issues as on the voyage to England with the Australian team he broke his wrist playing deck games, an injury which forced him to develop his off-side play to such an extent that he became one of the greatest off-side players of all time.

On that tour, he made his Test debut in the Fifth Test at The Oval scoring 41 and 33 batting at no. 5. This was the match Len Hutton scored 364. Interestingly, Sid bowled 38 overs of leg-spin returning 1-84 which was quite impressive for someone who only three years earlier was keeping wickets for Petersham 3rds!

The intervention of World War II meant that Barnes didn't play another Test match for almost eight years. In that period the Sheffield Shield was also suspended although in 1940-41 interstate matches were played with Barnes the leading scorer totalling 1,050 runs at 75.00 in eight games. He hit six centuries with 185 against Victoria at the MCG his best. Amazingly, each of his six centuries were scored in the first innings and were in successive matches. The only games he missed hitting three figures were the first match of the season at the 'Gabba against Queensland when he was caught by Bill Brown off John Ellis for a duck and the last against South Australia when he made 51.



Grade matches played during the war years were almost all one-day games. Over the four seasons from 1938-39, Sid's highest 1st Grade scores for Petersham were 160 against Gordon, 187 playing Marrickville, 165 v University and 228 against Glebe. In 1942-43 he hit a Sydney Grade cricket record 1,333 which included unconquered centuries against North Sydney (125*), Paddington (123*), Randwick (108*) and Marrickville (112*). He also hit nine half-centuries and held 17 catches. Surprisingly, this record was broken by his team mate Bill Alley the following summer. The next season Sid played for Waverley before switching to North Sydney then Gordon. He scored 4,487 1st Grade runs in nine seasons with Petersham and 6,582 in his career.

When Test cricket resumed after the war, Barnes switched to opener at the age of 30. In 1946-47, Barnes' highest score against England was one of the most controversial Test innings of all time. He batted for almost 11 hours at the Sydney Cricket Ground to score 234, the same score as Bradman with whom he shared the world record fifth wicket partnership of 405. It was argued that he purposely gave up his wicket when he had equalled Bradman's score so he would be "better remembered".

(Photo: Sid Barnes aged 16)

Amid all his expertise, Barnes couldn't resist clowning and often clashed with officialdom. He batted with a toy bat on one occasion, signed his autograph with a rubber stamp, regularly jumped the turnstiles at cricket grounds after giving away his pass to more "unfortunates" and would give his cap to umpires pretending he was coming on to bowl. On the 1948 England tour, Barnes picked up a stray dog and handed it to the umpire claiming that "every blind man should have one". Towards the end of his career, he acted as twelfth man for New South Wales taking drinks onto the field dressed as a waiter in a double breasted suit while sporting a red carnation.

In 1949-50 Barnes declared himself unavailable for Australia's South Africa tour because of the low pay on offer. Two years later in 1951-52, Barnes was selected to play his "comeback" match in the Third Test against the West Indies in Adelaide but the Board of Control over-rode the selector's decision and did not allow him to play. That was virtually the end of his first-class career. He then became a cricket columnist with a Sydney newspaper where he sniped away at all and sundry until his death at his home in Collaroy on 16 December 1973 at age 57 from an overdose of sleeping pills. His 13 Tests produced 1,072 runs with three centuries and five half-centuries. In his 110 first-class matches he scored 8,333 runs at an average of 54.11.

Barnes the NSW 12th man delivers the drinks!

Barnes the jester using a miniature bat