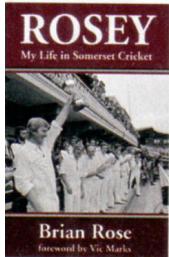
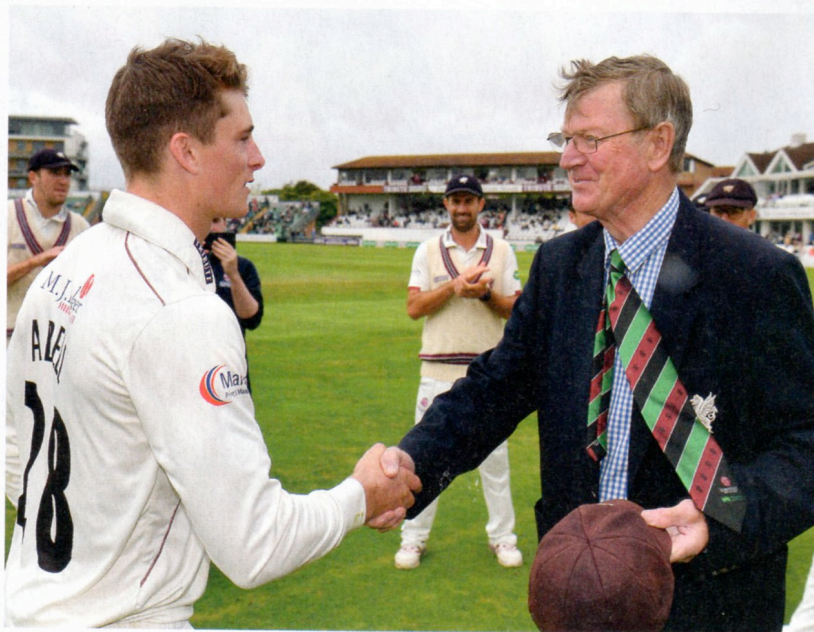


Reviews



Rosey: My life in Somerset cricket
By Brian Rose
Fairfield Books,
HB, 216pp, £16



Detached and decisive

Ivo Tennant on the story of one of Somerset's greatest captains and a coach who saw plenty of near-misses



The most salient observation to be made of Brian Rose is that he is a very likeable person. His decency is written in his face. Allied to this is a certain detachment, an ability as a batsman which gains him respect, a tactical decisiveness and, not least, a skill in being able to handle some of the best players in the world. It was perhaps no surprise that he became the most successful captain in Somerset's history.

And he was lucky in his timing. Brian Close, his predecessor, knocked players into shape – literally – and Rose had under him Viv Richards, Ian Botham and Joel Garner performing at their very best. Vic Marks was an England allrounder, Peter Roebuck was in a phase of his career when he was scoring runs and getting on with the stars and the local boys, Peter Denning and Colin Dredge, were solid county pros.

Rose gave up the captaincy shortly before rifts in the dressing room widened inexorably and was on the other side of the world in the autumn of 1986 when the highly charged Shepton Mallet meeting,

the most seismic event in the club's history, took place. Richards and Garner had been sacked; Botham had stormed out; and Roebuck, bravely if foolhardily, took a stance against all three which ensured there would be no winners. Somerset's golden years, 1978 to 1984, were indeed over.

The captain has written his autobiography, published out of Stephen Chalke's Fairfield Books stable, in conjunction with Anthony Gibson, a west countryman who, had he opted for a career in broadcasting, would have followed his distinguished father on to *Test Match Special*. He is a better commentator, part-time at Taunton and entering his eighth decade, than some who are now regularly on that programme. Much of this collaboration with Rose appears to have been done in a hotel bar. Alan Gibson would heartily have approved.

Detailing his own county and Test career – Rose was a fine player of fast bowling but less assured against spin – is, of course, of interest, but the most fascinating part of this book concerns how he handled the big names and the complex characters. Rosey, as inevitably he was known, is true to himself here in that he retains a certain reserve, well

aware the dressing room is a sanctum and that both Roebuck and Denning are dead, but the character sketches are perceptive nonetheless. One of Botham's tricks was to hide Roebuck's bat just as he was about to go in. Another was to wind him up politically.

Only one story in Somerset's rise to prominence is questionable. Rose (Kent-born) mentions that Kent's batsmen were scared to face Garner and intimidated by the crowd in a one-day match at Taunton in 1979: "You could see the fear in the eyes of each incoming batsman." It is true that Kent were bowled out for just 60, yet three of the first four members of their batting order were Bob Woolmer, Chris Tavaré and Asif Iqbal, all of whom were high-class and resolute players of pace who took pride in their performances.

There were yet more disparate individuals for Rose to deal with when, after a spell in the paper trade, he returned to Somerset as director of cricket. Andy Caddick was one. Phil Frost, a groundsman set in his ways, was another. His chairman was a third. Only Rose could have got away with telling Giles Clarke that he did not care for his expensive Armagnac, which he desired during a dinner at Bath, and that he would prefer another glass of wine instead. Alas, that story is not in the book.

Rose was highly successful in this role, which was brought to an end unnecessarily after Andy Nash had succeeded Clarke as chairman and, concerned that Somerset were finishing perennial runners-up, told the director of cricket he thought it was time for him to leave. Rose, surprisingly, acquiesced. The subsequent appointment of Dave Nosworthy was not a success.

Poor decision making in committee is another theme. The handling of the winding down of the careers of Richards and Garner, albeit a tricky task, was insensitive. Roebuck was left to deal with the media on his own. The appointment as secretary of Tony Brown, a Gloucestershire man, was not ideal, and Marks appears to have been disregarded as Rose's successor because of his self-deprecating demeanour.

Still, Rosey now has gates at the County Ground named in his honour, he has had a lasting marriage, he is club president and he has written an engaging memoir.

BOVE
Brian Rose presents the current captain, Tom Abell, with his Somerset cap