

Spine-tingling return of Bond

10 January 2005

By JOHN COFFEY

Former Canterbury opening batsman Robbie Frew has no doubts that Shane Bond is on the road to recovery from the back injuries that have threatened to wreck his international cricket career.

Frew was playing for Canterbury Country against Old Boys-Collegians at Hagley Oval on Saturday and faced the first 18 deliveries from Bond in his comeback match after undergoing reconstruction surgery.

"His short ones seemed pretty quick, though he probably only bent his back four or five times. He is certainly looking pretty fit, and he had a very consistent line," said Frew.

"Obviously, you could tell on some of the fuller ones he was just trying to work into his rhythm. But he let a couple go which certainly hit the (wicketkeeper's) gloves hard at the other end."

National selector Sir Richard Hadlee also gave Bond's two spells of five overs each a nod of approval, observing "from side-on he looks fluent enough".

Bond conceded only five runs from the bat in his 10 overs, his figures being inflated to 10-1-13-1 by eight no-balls. He had Canterbury batsman Peter Fulton caught by young 'keeper Ben Rae.

The spate of no-balls were a carry-over from indoor training, when not too much attention was paid to them, and did not concern Bond, who was fully satisfied with his effort.

"The things I've been working on went really well, I think. I was really happy," he said.

A naturally positive person, Bond was confident he was ready after supplementing his gradual return to bowling in the nets with strenuous fitness sessions under boxing trainer Kevin Barry senior at his Belfast gymnasium.

"With the work I've done, I knew I couldn't have done anything else to get where I am now," he said, looking ahead to regular appearances for Old Boys-Collegians before stepping up to representative cricket.

He was more excited than nervous on Saturday, though conscious of observing the changes made to his bowling action in consultation with Dayle Hadlee and Ashley Ross at New Zealand Cricket's high performance centre.

"I think I was running in really straight and the ball seemed to be going down the one channel. If I can just drill it, drill it, drill it over the next few weeks, and be really hard on myself at practice, then I'm sure it will come together.



CAUGHT IT: Shane Bond catches Robbie Frew out in Old Boys-Collegians against Canterbury Country at Hagley Oval.
DON SCOTT/The Press

"I need to learn not to bowl at 100 per cent all the time, but to bowl more within myself. But I needed, just to see for my own peace of mind, that I could get it up head high on this wicket," he grinned.

He felt most of his deliveries were at about 80 per cent pace, and will assess his progress on a weekly basis. Old Boys-Collegians has a double header next weekend.

Bond is conscious of not looking too far ahead, but is aware the State Shield one-dayers resume in three weeks, and that the State Championship four-day competition extends to late March.

"If I thought about the Australians at all, it would be the one-dayers, not test cricket. The stress on me to play test cricket is probably going to be too much.

"If at the end of the summer I've played a couple of four-day games for Canterbury, got through them and feel fit, then I'll be really pleased," he said.

The omens were good on Saturday. The wet weather which has plagued the cricket season stayed away just long enough for Bond to complete his 10 overs.

But Frew, having survived Bond and the new ball, fell victim to a running, sprawling catch by Bond at deep fine leg from the bowling of medium-pacer Tom Johnston.