

Frederick James Heather, Canadian Cricket Builder, 1890-1976

Fred Heather's introduction to cricket started in England. He was born in Godalming, Surrey, England on January 27, 1890. As a boy, he put up score tins for the Broadwater Cricket Club. Here he learned to play cricket and eventually captained a team in Cobham, Surrey in 1916. Immigrating to Canada in 1921, he continued to play the game competitively and was a member of the St. George's Cricket Club that won the Toronto & District Championship in 1922. Winning a city championship after only a year and a half in his new country, was a sign of what Heather would accomplish in the next five decades.

In 1926, Heather joined the Bell Telephone Cricket Club, and earned an Ontario Championship. The Bell Telephones narrowly missed the national title to McGill by one wicket in the final John Ross Robertson Cup match. Bell Telephone continued to be a cricket power by winning the Toronto & District Championship in 1927. In the first round of the 1927 John Ross Robertson Cup tournament, Heather was dominant almost hitting for a "century" scoring a massive 85 runs. The Bell Telephone Cricket Club would end their 1927 season in the semi-final round. In 1928, Bell Telephone captured their second Ontario Championship and travelled to Montreal to play McGill in a rematch of the 1926 Canadian final. The match between the Bell Telephone Cricket Club and McGill for the John Ross Robertson Trophy for the Canadian Championship in 1928 would end in controversy due to inclement weather. The final for the national title would not be completed. Despite this, McGill's captain declared victory. With the Bell Telephone Cricket Club boycotting the John Ross Robertson Cup matches for 1929, Heather's focus moved to umpiring.

Upon retiring as a player, Fred Heather's position on the pitch changed. Moving behind the wicket changed his profile from top competitor to top cricket umpire. Heather had started this transition in 1926 as an official scorer in the Toronto and District Cricket Association, and umpired his first match in 1927, also in the Toronto and District Cricket Association. His first international umpiring experience came when the Toronto Cricket Club faced the Bermuda Wanderer's Cricket Club on August 4, 1931, marking Bermuda's first visit to Canada.

In 1932, he umpired for the "Good Will Tour". This was an Australian team that toured North America featuring Sir Don Bradman and many Australian Test level players. Sir Don Bradman is arguably the best player to ever play cricket, and the Australian tour injected life back into the Canadian cricket scene. Heather umpired for the Eastern Canada vs. Australia matches. With an estimated 7 000 to 8 000 fans, this set an attendance record for the sport of cricket in Toronto.

Additional experience includes: Sir Julien Cahn's Touring Team (First class calibre team of all-stars), 1933; Cambridge University Vandals, 1934; Chicago Tour of Canada, 1936; M.C.C. (England) Tour of Canada 1937, 1951, 1959. Held over three days, the 1951 M.C.C. Tour was the inaugural First Class status match ever held on Canadian soil. The 1959 M.C.C. Tour commemorated the centennial anniversary of England's first cricket team to visit Canada.

Beginning in 1931, Heather was appointed to umpire numerous inter-provincial matches for the John Ross Robertson Trophy for the national title. In 1951, he umpired the Lord Atholstan Cup match between Ontario and Quebec. He also had the unique duty of umpiring the match between the Canadian Colts touring team which visited the prestigious Highgate School in London, England in 1967.

In addition to umpiring, Fred Heather contributed to the future success of cricket in numerous roles. He was both Secretary-Treasurer and player for the St. Georges Cricket Club and the Yorkshire Cricket Club in 1922 and 1925 respectively. He became a founding member and first Secretary-Treasurer for the Toronto and District Cricket Umpire's Association in 1931. In 1935, he became the first Secretary of the newly formed Umpire's Control Board, responsible for 125 scheduled games and 250 umpire appointments that year. This innovation was a huge step towards the modernisation of high calibre cricket in Canada. The Umpire's Control Board's appointments replaced the practice of each team choosing an umpire. During a 1938 Umpire's Control Board meeting, Heather voiced concern for the image of cricket stating it was deplorable to light a cigarette during the fall of a wicket. Caring about cricket's future, Heather started a school for cricket umpires, attended by umpires and players. As principal and professor of the Cricket Umpire's School, Heather set the curriculum to ensure a high standard of officials for future Canadian cricket matches. Heather trained new umpiring recruits by giving them initial experience in juvenile and midget games. Complementing the Umpire's School, Heather gave instruction on the Laws of Cricket to students at Trinity College. He was instrumental in starting a junior cricket league in Toronto, serving as a founding member of the Toronto Junior Cricket Board, resulting in the formation of 18 junior cricket clubs in 1931. Heather was the first Secretary for the new Toronto Junior Cricket League. This league provided cricket for 300 junior players each season. In 1933, two junior teams from this league were the first to play cricket at the Canadian National Exhibition. Furthermore, Heather was the Vice-President of the Dentonia Park Cricket Club in Toronto, which won the Godin Cup in 1937 and the Continental Life Trophy in 1938 as City Champions. Dentonia Park competed for the 1939 John Ross Robertson Cup but the final rounds were not completed due to Canada's declaration of war. Heather became the Public Relations Officer for Dentonia Park Cricket in 1941. Financial support for cricket resulted from Heather's fundraising skills which included a donation from Charles Aubrey Smith of the Hollywood Cricket Club. Finally, Heather authored newspaper and magazine articles, increasing awareness and support for Canadian cricket.

As of August 12, 1961, Fred Heather had umpired in 1 002 consecutive matches without missing a game. He was a Canadian cricket umpire of high caliber for 40 years until his retirement in 1967, making him the longest serving umpire in Canada. Recognizing Fred Heather's achievements, the High Commissioner for Canada requested the honour of his company to attend the ceremony in Westminster Abbey to commemorate Canada's Centennial Year. As one of the first Canadians to be a member of the Association of Cricket Umpires (ACU) of England, he earned "Full Member Status" on June 7, 1968. This association is recognized worldwide and members must pass a written examination with 80% or higher and perform two years of field experience at a level acceptable to the ACU Passing Committee. As the highest level awarded by the ACU, it is equivalent to a Level 5 umpire recognized by Cricket Canada's Umpiring Certification Committee (highest level for Canadian umpires). Furthermore, he was made the first Life Member of the Toronto Cricket Umpire's Association on January 12, 1970. This motion was passed unanimously. The cricket community lost a legend of cricket when Frederick James Heather died February 22, 1976, in Toronto. Fred Heather **transformed** Canadian cricket by giving youth a league to play in, a school for umpires to learn in, and holding cricket to a higher standard through his consistent actions to serve the sport.

In 2009, Sport Ontario recognized Heather with the Syl Apps Special Achievement Award in grateful recognition of a distinguished contribution to the field of amateur sport in Ontario. In 2010, Frederick Heather became only the ninth person to be awarded the Jack Kyle Development Award from Cricket Canada for Outstanding Achievement in fostering the growth and development of cricket in Canada. Internationally, the U.S. Cricket Hall of Fame inducted Heather in 2010, honouring him for meritorious and generous contributions to the sustained growth of cricket in Canada. Heather was the first recipient of the Golden Age Award for pioneers of cricket. Heather was also the first cricketer to be included in the Canadian Encyclopedia in 2012. Cricket Canada recognized Heather a second time by inducting him in the inaugural Hall of Fame Class in 2014. Heather was one of only two officials to be honoured by Cricket Canada. Heather's contributions are recognized overseas on Godalming Museum's Wall of Faces, and at home in the Pier 21 Canadian Museum of Immigration in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Pier 21 has international importance as it acknowledges the significance of immigration to the building of Canada as a nation. In 2015, Heather's cricket bat and four game balls presented to him during his umpiring career will be on display at the Pier 21 museum. Frederick James Heather contributed to the building of Canada through cricket and his story is one to be celebrated and remembered.