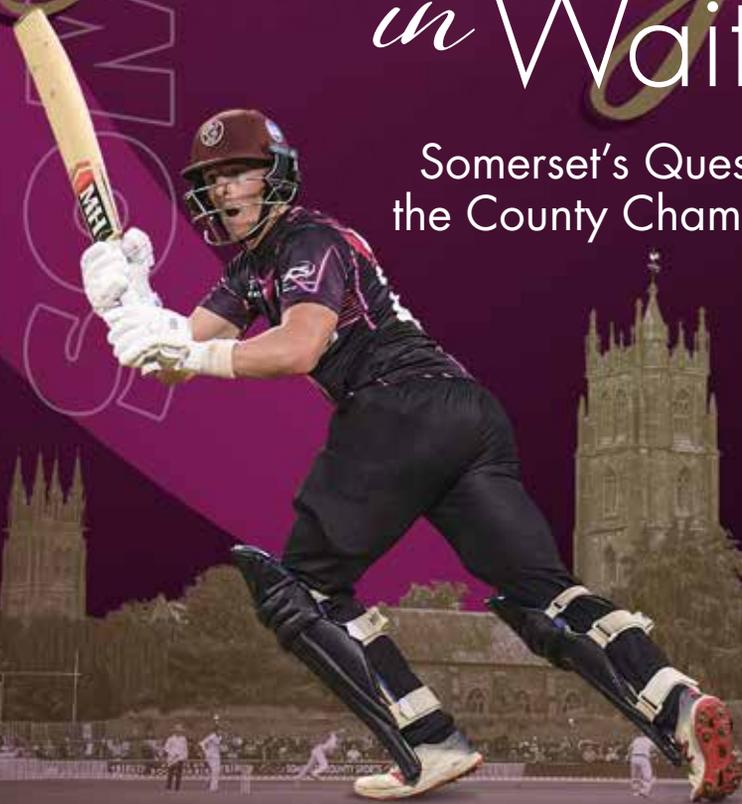


T H O M A S B L O W



Kings in Waiting

Somerset's Quest to Win
the County Championship



SOMERSET	CT	FOR	2
RAMSLEY	14	100	17.1
HILDRETH	24	100	19
FRATTON	4	100	11.1
LAST	10	100	11.1
POWELL	10	100	11.1
WARRER	5	10	11
FRITH	15	10	11
SOMERSET	100	100	11
11-11			

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2010

Never Been Closer

THERE WERE some big changes at Somerset ahead of the 2010 season. Their skipper, Justin Langer, had recently retired. A crucial part of Australia's all-conquering side of the 2000s with 23 Test centuries, Langer was a legend of the game. He joined Somerset in 2006 and became club captain a year later. And he went on to have a wonderful career at Taunton. He scored more than 3,000 first-class runs for the club at an average of 51.23, including a record-breaking knock of 342 against Surrey in July 2006. It remains the highest first-class score by a Somerset player.

Yet Langer was not just about the runs. Alongside director of cricket Brian Rose and head coach Andy Hurry, he transformed the club. Influenced by his time playing in one of cricket's greatest teams, he made Somerset winners, instilling a culture of working tirelessly to become the best you can be. Under his leadership, they rose from the foot of the second tier in 2006 to third in Division One in 2009. The county also became a force in white-ball cricket, finishing as runners-up in the final edition of the Pro 40

League and losing the Twenty20 Cup Final to Sussex in 2009. ‘I love Somerset – it has been an awesome project,’ he said shortly before announcing his retirement in 2009.

Langer’s influence at Taunton was felt by leg-spinner Michael Munday, who, having joined the squad in 2005 before Langer arrived, was able to appreciate what he brought to the job. ‘I think it’s pretty safe to say there was a big change,’ recalled Munday. ‘I think among the committee and leadership at the club it was said, “This isn’t good enough. There needs to be a real change in culture.” And that’s where the appointment of Langer as captain came from. There was definitely a culture shift from the first couple of games I played, where there was a very relaxed atmosphere. Ian Blackwell was my captain in my first match. He’s a terrific player – naturally talented – however, he’s not what you would probably consider the type of player you would want as a role model for younger players, in terms of his general approach to fitness and training. Whereas it was then very much, “Right, Langer’s here” ... An away trip isn’t an excuse for a four-day piss-up and have a few drinks every night, it’s a serious thing where we’re going to prepare professionally to win games of cricket. And if people step out of line, there are going to be consequences.’

Arul Suppiah, who scored 1,201 first-class runs at an average of 48.04 in 2009, also appreciates Langer’s influence. He recognises how Langer had the leadership skills to encourage the squad to follow his high standards. ‘It became more professional in terms of how we trained, what we ate, where we stayed,’ admitted Suppiah. ‘We even took into account how much travelling we were doing. Everything was really detailed. We called it the one-per-

centers, so making sure we took care of the little things and then eventually looking at the bigger picture. That was the difference. We knew the one-per-centers, that was already there, but Langer made sure we did it rather than just pay lip service to it. He was the man to lead by example. Fitness wise, he would go out and do everything first. Then we would go, “Okay, let’s do it – our captain is out there.” His work ethic was second to none. It was amazing.’

The culture Langer had helped instil was immediately recognised by fast bowler Dave Stiff when he joined the club in 2008. Although he was aged just 23, Stiff was experienced. He had been at Yorkshire – the county of his birth – Kent and Leicestershire before joining Somerset. ‘Under the leadership of Justin Langer, it was definitely one of the more forward-thinking clubs, not just physically but tactically,’ said Stiff. ‘The whole outlook was more attacking than a lot of the other counties I’d been at, where it was more traditional ... We had a good balance, leading on from the ethos and cutting-edge that Justin Langer had installed in the team. That really put us in a good place. There were no excuses, an honesty that he brought. Some people who played around him might have thought that he was just needlessly hard, but I found him very fair. As long as he thought everybody was giving 100 per cent, he would back them completely. Once everyone realised that was what he was all about, then it was a really great place to be.’

A key part of Langer’s ideology was his desire to play an attacking brand of cricket. Fortunately, they had the talent to do so. James Hildreth, one of the finest stroke-players in county cricket, epitomised that. After making his Championship debut in 2003, Hildreth was one of the team’s most prolific batsmen, having scored more than

900 first-class runs in each of the previous three summers. He was elegant, talented and exciting – a true gem in the middle order. And so was Peter Trego. The all-rounder had left Somerset in 2003 to join Kent, leaving a year later with just one first-class appearance. He then spent the summer of 2004 playing in Worcestershire’s second team before moving to Middlesex in 2005. He eventually made his way back to Somerset in 2006 and became an integral part of their squad, scoring 836 runs and taking 33 wickets in first-class cricket during the promotion-winning season in 2007.

A huge part of Trego’s success was Langer, who he continues to credit. ‘Because I’m all bravado, tattoos and hair dye, I think people have always felt like putting the boot in is the best way of dealing with me,’ wrote Trego in the December 2019 issue of *The Cricketer*. ‘But JL’s ability as a man manager knew somehow that I was crying out for someone to say “well done” every now and then, and the result was a Pete Trego that would run through the proverbial brick wall for his captain and his team.’

As well as attacking batsmen, Somerset also had attacking bowlers. One of them was Stiff, who was given a licence to strike by Langer. ‘The captaincy of Justin Langer suited me down to the ground,’ he said. ‘In Championship cricket, most of the captains I came across had this feeling of, “Let’s just consolidate, don’t get out and don’t go for runs when you’re bowling.” And that was almost the opposite with Langer. He had the attitude of, “Set attacking fields and just get wickets.” Obviously, he didn’t want to give away runs needlessly, but he came with a mindset of trying to win games.’

Having that attitude was crucial to them becoming a force in county cricket. Yet so was Langer’s desire to help

his colleagues improve. ‘I remember he wrote everyone a letter at the end of the season, I think it was 2008,’ recalled Suppiah. ‘Everyone had a personal letter, hand-written in their pigeonholes, about how the season had gone for them, what they can do and how we’re going to move forward as a club, et cetera. And I think that’s his character. He was like a father figure in the dressing-room as well. He’s the one who backed me and gave me that encouragement and support.’

And Langer’s encouragement did not just come off the field. He was not shy in letting people know his feelings during a match. Suppiah remembers what it was like when the captain, batting at No.3, joined him in the middle: ‘He would come down the wicket and tell you, “Come on, you’ve got to do this, you’ve got to switch on. Why have you played and missed?” He was at your face all the time, trying to get you to be disciplined.’

Langer got the best out of the squad and established Somerset as one of the finest teams in England. But it was not all his doing. Others played a huge role in their revival, including Rose. A Somerset legend having led them to their first major honour in 1979, Rose knew exactly what the good times at Taunton were like. And when he was appointed director of cricket in 2005, with the side languishing in Division Two, he was tasked with rebuilding the team. He did this by taking advantage of the Kolpak ruling, which allowed Somerset to sign three quality cricketers from South Africa without them being classed as overseas players.

The first to sign was Charl Willoughby. Having made two Test and three ODI appearances, the left-arm seamer joined them in 2006 once his international career had

finished. ‘I was playing at Leicester,’ recalled Willoughby. ‘The first game I played against Somerset was a TV game in the Cheltenham & Gloucester Trophy in 2005. I got 6-16 and Brian Rose took notice. A few weeks later they had signed Graeme Smith as their captain. Graeme and I were close friends at the time and the first game he played for them I got him out. And suddenly Rosey was like, “Who is this kid?” And Graeme just said to him, “If you want someone to get you 50 wickets a year, sign him.” So he offered me a three-year deal at the end of the season on a Kolpak deal. I was the first Kolpak to go to Somerset.’

It proved to be a great signing. Willoughby picked up 66 first-class wickets in his first season, 62 in his second, and 54 in both his third and fourth. He was one of the most consistent bowlers in county cricket. Willoughby was joined at the County Ground two years later by Alfonso Thomas. The right-arm seamer, who played one Twenty20 for South Africa in 2007, was another excellent signing. He took 65 first-class wickets in his first two seasons and was also a good Twenty20 player, later going on to play in the Indian Premier League, Australia’s Big Bash League and the Bangladesh Premier League. And there was Zander de Bruyn, who had played three Tests for South Africa. He went on to score 997 first-class runs during 2008, his debut season.

If anyone is unsure of just how good Willoughby, Thomas and de Bruyn were, the fact they received international caps during a time when Smith, Jacques Kallis, Hashim Amla, AB de Villiers, Shaun Pollock, Makhaya Ntini, Dale Steyn and Morne Morkel were playing for South Africa tells you everything you need to know. Rose had done well to get these players on board. ‘Brian Rose did a really good job

of finding players who were probably unheard of, certainly in English county cricket, and were good performers in South Africa,' explained Adam Dibble, a seamer who was just making his way into the squad. 'Tommo and Charl, Zander de Bruyn as well. They were really solid players who dabbled with international cricket a little bit and they came over and did really well. Obviously they weren't overseas players, so they were able to stay for a prolonged period of time. There was a bit of a South African backbone.'

Rose had also developed the club's academy. Somerset chairman Giles Clarke, who later became ECB chairman, demanded an emphasis on youth on appointing Rose in 2005. 'We have the whole of the south-west of England to draw upon and the club recognises the first and second team coaches do not have the time to spend working on this,' said Clarke. To achieve this, Hurry was brought back to the County Ground as head coach in 2006. Hurry had initially joined the club's backroom staff in 2001 after spending time as a fitness instructor in the Royal Marines, which is why he is affectionately known as 'Sarge' by his colleagues. He was promoted to coach the second team after a few years but left to coach the United Arab Emirates in 2005. His importance in Somerset's revival cannot be understated. It was he who persuaded Langer to return in 2007, even though he was ready to retire. He knew he needed Langer – a man who shared his hard-working, disciplined and loyal attitude – to be their captain if they were to become successful.

'My first season as head coach was 2006,' explained Hurry. 'It was a great year for me to really absorb, take in and get insight on what the strengths and areas of development were for within the club. There were a number

of areas. The first one was that we needed more competition for places. The players in the second team needed to make sure they were performing to put the players in the first team under pressure. If the players who were established in the first team could feel the young players in the second team putting in performances with the bat and ball, that would grow their standard of performances. And the second thing was we really needed strong leadership on the field – respected leadership. And to help drive all that forward, it was important we identified the right character. So we were lucky in 2006 that JL came across as our Twenty20 overseas player and played a couple of Championship games as well. It became evident to me that he was a really strong candidate for that.’

With Hurry leading the first team, Rose had more time to work with Jason Kerr, the academy director and second-team coach, to produce quality talent. The most notable was Craig Kieswetter, who had emerged as one of English cricket’s brightest talents. He had established himself as Somerset’s number one wicketkeeper by 2010 and had made his England ODI debut. There was also Jos Buttler, who scored 554 runs for his school, King’s College in Taunton, in 2009. For this he was named *Wisden’s* Schools Cricketer of the Year in 2010, following in the footsteps of Yorkshire’s Jonny Bairstow and Leicestershire’s James Taylor. Their rise through the academy was proof the emphasis on youth was beginning to pay off, much to Rose’s credit. ‘Brian was instrumental in setting everything off,’ claimed Steve Kirby, the former Yorkshire and Gloucestershire seamer who joined Somerset in 2011. ‘He galvanised a strong side together over time. He created a fantastic academy that Jason Kerr was a huge part of. In fact, it was him that brought people

like Jos Buttler, Jack Leach, Max Waller and Chris Jones through. And now you're looking at Tom Banton and all those people. They all came through that set-up.'

Rose, Hurry and Langer had all done a great job, but the latter's exit meant they needed a new captain. The obvious choice was Trescothick. The 34-year-old had enjoyed an excellent career. He had more than 200 international caps to his name, scoring 26 centuries, captaining the Test side on two occasions and playing a crucial role in their Ashes victory in 2005. He was still a world-class cricketer when his international retirement meant he became a Somerset regular again in 2007, proven by the abundance of runs he scored. He made more than 1,000 first-class runs that summer and repeated the feat in 2008 and 2009. The latter was the most prolific of his career, scoring eight centuries and 1,817 runs in first-class cricket. Trescothick's return to the first team on a full-time basis was vital to their progression. 'If you look at 2007, where things turned around quite a lot, I think there was a fairly obvious benefit of having Marcus back from England,' said Munday.

With Langer's replacement in place, Rose began recruiting for the season. As well as losing Langer, they were also without Andy Caddick. The former England seamer had been a crucial member of the squad for nearly two decades, picking up 875 first-class wickets at an average of 25.80. Only five bowlers have been more prolific for Somerset. But as one international bowler left, another one arrived. Former India international Murali Kartik, who had previously played for Middlesex and Lancashire, had agreed to become their new overseas player. 'It's a new challenge for a player like me who has been playing first-class cricket in England for the last five seasons,' said Kartik on signing. 'I

know it is not an Old Trafford or Lord's wicket because I've played here before and it is a different challenge to me ... Somerset have been vying for honours for the last two years and I think I probably add a new dimension to their attack.'

And Kartik was not the only man to make the move from Middlesex. Nick Compton, the grandson of the great Denis, had also joined Somerset before the 2010 campaign. He had enjoyed a breakthrough season in 2006, scoring six first-class centuries at an average of 49.96. But he remained a Division Two player and was itching to prove himself in the top flight. Rose was keen to take on the 26-year-old, believing he had what it took to fill Langer's batting shoes. 'Nick is a player we view as having the ability to bat in our top three and be with us for many years,' said Rose as the signing was announced.

And the chance to succeed the Australian appealed to Compton. 'Ironically I took over from him if you could say that – I don't think anyone could fill his shoes,' he said. 'I had a relationship with him in the years before that. He's very much a character that I'd admired, particularly his philosophy on cricket. But also the fact that he opened the batting and was determined and gritty. Everything he said really resonated with me. There was a very human aspect to him, which just made me feel very normal. I read his books and really identified with his Buddhist philosophy. That was an area of self-discovery that really helped me in terms of visualising and trying to create my own aura.'

Rose was also important in getting him to sign on the dotted line. 'Brian Rose was probably one of the better cricket thinkers I've come across,' added Compton. 'He inspired me and was a man that I wanted to play cricket for. When he asked me and suggested coming down to

Somerset, he was very clear in his thinking. He wanted me to bat at No.3; he wanted a player that could occupy the crease and hold things together in the understanding that he had a lot of stroke-players and guys who could push the game on. And that's what I did well, I felt it was a position that I was made for. When I met him properly for the first time and sat down with him, it took about five minutes before I was like, "Where do I sign?"

"There was his attention to detail in terms of the make-up of the team. He went through each player, "Marcus Trescothick has scored this many runs in the last two years, but he's going to become captain now because Langer is leaving, so I expect a 30 per cent drop off. That means I need to make up this many runs. So and so is going to bat here, he's going to bat here." I'd never had a conversation like that with any cricketing director or coach. It'd been fairly relaxed in terms of, you know, you just played. Good players will excel. There hadn't been anything besides that until then. So when I sat down with him, I just bought into his vision completely. For me, I was always searching for that. I never lacked the drive, passion and ambition, but I wanted someone to measure up to that and when I met Brian, I couldn't have found somebody whose ambitions ran in line with mine as much.'

But above all else, Compton wanted to join Somerset because of their quality. 'When you consider that Somerset were one of the best teams in the country, it was a bit of a no-brainer,' he admitted. 'It was a great opportunity for me to go from Division Two and challenge myself in Division One at a great club with some great players. The chance to play with the likes of Trescothick, Charl Willoughby, Alfonso Thomas, James Hildreth, Kieswetter – there was a fantastic

line-up of players. And their philosophy on performance, which was underpinned by Justin Langer. Somerset are a small club; you can't get away from that. And I don't mean a small club to be disrespectful to their history and legacy, but because of their location. They're stuck down in the south-west. So to get the club to a level of performance was no mean feat. It meant that a lot of changes had to be brought about and that comes only through real leadership and drive. In Langer and Andy Hurry, you had two people who drove that kind of ambition.'

While at this point in his career, Compton was only a big name thanks to his illustrious grandfather, the fact that he believed Somerset were going places and they could match his lofty ambitions says everything you need to know about what they had become under Rose, Hurry and Langer. They were now a force in English cricket and had an abundance of talent, experience and desire. For the first time in a long time, they were a team that could realistically win the Championship and other trophies. Going into the 2010 season, anything was possible.

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Somerset's first Championship game of the summer was against Yorkshire at Headingley, a team that had narrowly survived relegation in both 2008 and 2009. As such, the visitors were the favourites. But after winning the toss and electing to bat, they made a meal of their innings. Notwithstanding Trescothick's defiant 117, Suppiah, de Bruyn and new boy Compton all failed to reach double figures. A useful 45 from Trego dragged them up to 272, giving himself and the rest of the attack something to bowl at. Yet they struggled as Joe Sayers, Tim Bresnan,

Adil Rashid and Andrew Gale all passed 50, with the latter going on to score a century. Despite Trego finishing with four wickets, Yorkshire posted a domineering 419. It was a particularly tough innings for Willoughby. He had bowled more overs than anyone, 29, and conceded 105 runs for his two wickets. And it had started so well for him after dismissing Adam Lyth with just his second ball.

For many seamers, bowling that many overs would be exhausting. But Willoughby would put a shift in for Somerset week in, week out. How he managed to keep himself fit had a lot to do with his professional development in South Africa. ‘I’ve never been the most athletic sort of character,’ admitted Willoughby. ‘Bowling 80 to 82 miles per hour is not as stressful as bowling 90 miles per hour, but my whole make-up was based on a consistent action, which was not very stressful on the body. When I came into the professional game at a team called Boland, we didn’t have any net bowlers. So the bowlers were just sort of ingrained into bowling for hours in the heat. And eventually I got to a stage where I might not have been the most athletic in all the bleep tests and that sort of stuff, but I was bowling-fit. And as long as I was bowling, I got fitter. Some of the bowlers would say, “How come you’re always loose in the morning?” But I was just always loose and they were always stiff. I was very fortunate.’

And Willoughby was not the only Somerset bowler who could keep going. Thomas was also very fit and consistently performed in all formats. ‘Tommo was very similar to me,’ added Willoughby. ‘He was like a little rubber man, he just kept going. But he came out of the same sort of make-up where there were no net bowlers in South Africa and we just had to bowl and bowl and bowl. And ultimately, our bodies

just got used to it. Playing with Caddy was very similar. He couldn't run very well, but he would just bowl. And he would tell the captain when he was tired.'

Their stamina was not all down to their backgrounds, however. They were able to keep fit thanks to the work of Somerset's backroom staff, particularly Darren Veness, who was head of strength and conditioning. 'We had these bowlers who were just constantly playing and never broke down,' continued Willoughby. 'Nowadays, if you look at the team-sheets, the bowlers snap quite often. I don't know whether that's an element of bowling fitness or gym fitness or over-working certain things – I'm not an expert on it – but I did have a lot of mutual respect with our fitness guy, Darren Veness. He knew that if I was bowling-fit, he didn't have to worry about me. And if he wanted to try things with me and I didn't respond well to what it was doing to my body, he would just say, "Okay, we're not doing that – you tell me what you need to do to keep you on the park." And he had a lot of influence on keeping the guys on the park with that mutual respect.'

Kirby also highlights Veness's influence. 'When I moved to them, it was a surprise to me that they were so professional,' he said. 'Almost on another level, really. The fitness of the side was just remarkable. I thought I was a relatively fit bloke at that point, but they took my fitness to a whole new level. And that really came from a bloke called Darren Veness and the head physio there, a guy called Ian Brewer. They were absolutely excellent.'

The reason why fitness was so important was because Somerset wanted their players to be physically capable of challenging in all formats. 'Sarge and I worked together previously from the 2001 to the 2004 season,' explained

Veness. ‘By the time Sarge came back in 2006, both of us knew the club and the players very well. We knew what we had to do there. Somerset hasn’t changed, it’s a small club that has every intention of punching way above its weight. So, the logic with that was always, “How are we going to maximise everything?” And again, we always had aspirations of pulling off all three trophies. There was never a mindset of targeting white-ball cricket, as some clubs clearly did in that era. The rationale was, “Let’s get to the point physically that it’s actually a sustainable option.” Because it’s all very well saying, “We’re looking to compete.” But if you’re not physically able to cope with one format, you can’t look to dominate three. It becomes a pointless statement. And it becomes less believable with the more injuries you get.

‘The one thing that we know about cricket is it’s a hard game, a tough game, and it takes its toll on the body. The logic was if we could get the lads strong, explosive and fast – with a good cardio base as well – the one thing we could look to reduce is the soft-tissue injuries. If we could reduce soft-tissue injuries significantly, then we’ve got a much better chance of Sarge being able to pick the same team every Monday. If everyone were able, you’re in with a sniff because team consistency – we all know, we’ve seen the stats, we’ve seen the science behind it – would be one of the factors in doing well. A big factor was not having too many England selections, as well. Where I am now, at Surrey, we see lots of disruption through higher-level selection. We completely controlled the environment because there were no externals dipping in and picking our best players at the time.’

Despite Willoughby’s frustration against Yorkshire, Somerset did fight back. Suppiah’s 71 and de Bruyn’s 83

allowed them to set a target of 198. But Lyth, who would go on to play for England, confirmed his class with a crucial 90 as Yorkshire reached their target with six wickets in hand. Somerset's season had started with a defeat, but they did not have time to sulk with a trip to Trent Bridge just around the corner. Nottinghamshire were one of the favourites for the title, having finished second for two consecutive years. And the visitors soon found out why after being sent in to bat. They slipped to 78/5 before Trego rescued the innings with a half-century. Knocks of 40-odd from Compton, Thomas and Damien Wright, an Australian all-rounder who had previously spent time at Northamptonshire, Glamorgan and Sussex, also helped as they posted a score of 272.

Wright and Thomas then started Somerset's revival with the ball. They took two wickets each and Willoughby claimed a four-for as he again bowled the most overs. Nottinghamshire were dismissed for 250 to give the visitors a slight advantage heading into the second innings. But they could not make it count as Stuart Broad proved irresistible. The England seamer picked up a five-for as Hildreth, de Bruyn and Kieswetter all failed to score. To make matters worse, Broad was not even supposed to be playing. He had asked to play as Nottinghamshire's other centrally contracted players, Graeme Swann and Ryan Sidebottom, missed out. 'Stuart feels that he needs a game and wants to play against Somerset,' said Nottinghamshire's director of cricket Mick Newell before the match. Broad, however, was no match for Trescothick. Aided by Wright's 78, he made 98 to get them from a worrying 43/6 to 216/8.

Somerset were eventually all out for 227, meaning the hosts had to repeat their first-innings score of 250 to win the match. And their chase started well. Bilal Shafayat made

49 and Mark Wagh 70. A collapse came as they had slipped from 127/2 to 198/6. But Amla, their star overseas player, was still at the crease. He remained unbeaten to guide Nottinghamshire to a two-wicket victory. It was a horrible start for Somerset, who had played two and lost two. They had not been hammered in either match, however, and it could have been a different story if Broad had chosen not to play. 'In fairness to that start, I was 12th man at a game at Trent Bridge where, effectively, Stuart Broad beat us in a spell,' remembered Munday.

Although it was only April, a crucial moment in the season had occurred. It would prove telling five months later. Yet Somerset could not think about that as they returned to Taunton. They were hosting Essex, the six-times Championship winners who had just been promoted from the second tier. And if they were going to beat them, they would have to do it without Kieswetter, who had been selected to play for England at the World Twenty20. As England went on to win the tournament – with Kieswetter being named player of the match in the final against Australia after scoring 63 – Somerset would be without their first-choice wicketkeeper until May. The man to fill his shoes was Buttler, who had made just one first-class appearance previously. Yet he was not fazed, scoring a rapid 36.

It was a joy for Phil Lewis to see Buttler succeed as a professional. Lewis is director of sport at King's College in Taunton, where Buttler spent his formative years. 'He was incredibly talented,' said Lewis. 'But that talent can only make 70 or 80 per cent of a player. The hard work that he put in made him the player he is. He was a real grafter; he loved spending time in the nets trying things out, always

experimenting; he never stood back with what he was trying to learn and develop. Also, he's got all the shots, but I think people forget how good he is at the basics – things like his foot movement and how quick his hands work. That really set him apart from players of the same age as him.'

Half centuries from Compton, de Bruyn, Hildreth and Trego had got Somerset up to 387, putting them in control of the match. But a maiden first-class century from Billy Godleman allowed Essex to close the second day only five wickets down. Rain then descended upon Taunton, washing out the third day. 'We'll have a chat in the morning with Somerset captain Marcus Trescothick and see if we can set a game up,' said Essex coach Paul Grayson, hoping they could force a result. But the game faded into a draw. It was now three games without a win for Somerset, who faced a difficult trip to Old Trafford in their next match.

Lancashire were the Championship's form team having won two of their opening three matches. Yet it was the visitors who started well as Wright took three early wickets to reduce them to 27/3. And if it was not for Luke Sutton's century, Lancashire might have been in serious trouble. His 118, alongside Sajid Mahmood's 64, helped them post 292. After letting a strong position slip away, things got worse for Somerset as Suppiah and Compton fell cheaply. Thankfully for them, Trescothick's half-century steadied the ship before bad weather hit Old Trafford. Once the rain had disappeared on the third day, an excellent sixth-wicket partnership between Hildreth and Trego began. Trego scored a blistering ton off 83 balls and Hildreth, to the frustration of himself and statisticians everywhere, fell on 99. Nevertheless, they posted 383 and had something to

bowl at. Lancashire, however, did not falter under pressure. They batted out the final day and Somerset remained winless. It was not the start to the season they had been hoping for.

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Despite enduring a winless run in first-class cricket, Somerset got off to a flyer in the ECB 40 – county cricket's only one-day competition following the amalgamation of the One-Day Trophy, the 50-over competition, and the Pro 40 League. It was 40 overs per side, leaving England without a professional 50-over competition. They started their campaign with a comprehensive win against Glamorgan. A solid 73 from Compton and an unbeaten 68 from Hildreth helped them post a decent total of 224/5 before a quality bowling performance restricted Glamorgan to 186. In their next match against Lancashire, they posted a similar score of 235 when batting first, Suppiah top scoring with 80. And, as they had against Glamorgan, the attack bowled out their opponents for a below par score of 193. The star of the show was Thomas, who took four wickets to add to the three he picked up at Sophia Gardens.

Somerset then made it three wins from three against Unicorns, a new team, established during the previous winter to play specifically in the competition. On this occasion, Trescothick's team showed what they could do with the bat. With former Somerset all-rounder Keith Parsons, who appeared in 114 Championship matches for them between 1993 and 2006, scoring 53 to help Unicorns post 233, they required a solid effort from their top order. An unbeaten century from de Bruyn followed as they chased down their target within 37 overs. After a tough

start to their Championship campaign, Somerset's one-day results were a welcome relief.

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Somerset were back on the road for the fifth Championship match of the summer, travelling to the Rose Bowl in Southampton to face Hampshire. Although they had enjoyed cup success in recent years, winning the One-Day Trophy in 2005 and 2009, Hampshire had failed to win the Championship since 1973. Like Somerset, they were looking to end a long wait for red-ball success. The match started well for the visitors. Willoughby again proved his worth as he dismissed Michael Carberry and Jimmy Adams early on to leave Hampshire 18/2. Somerset then began to strengthen their grip on the contest. Neil McKenzie's 48 helped Hampshire recover, but with them on 123/5, Trescothick's side remained firmly in control. The arrival of Sean Ervine, however, changed everything. He hit an unbeaten 237 to lead Hampshire to 512.

With a win all but impossible, Somerset began clawing back the deficit. And they would have been in serious trouble had it not been for two excellent innings. The first came from Hildreth, who made amends for falling one short of a ton against Lancashire with an excellent 106. He was quickly reaffirming his position as one of county cricket's best middle-order batters and impressing Compton, his new colleague, in the process. 'A player whose talent amazed me was Hildreth,' said Compton. 'I think he's probably the most talented cricketer I've played with, along with Ian Bell. I just found him to be a very gifted individual. And I think even looking at the little subtleties – the way he fields or the way he catches – it was incredibly natural.'

Another supremely talented individual was Buttler, who scored his maiden first-class century to show why he was so highly rated at Taunton. His 144 helped Somerset secure a draw, a timely innings as Kieswetter was due to return home from the Caribbean with the World Twenty20 trophy just a few days later. With Kieswetter being the undisputed first-choice wicketkeeper at Somerset, Buttler's innings had proven that he could be trusted as a specialist batsman. It was the start of what Munday described as 'his breakthrough year'. Although he and Hildreth both had a reason to be cheerful, Trescothick did not. It was now five Championship games without a win. Their title hopes were dwindling.

Somerset's next match was against Yorkshire, the side who beat them in their opening fixture. If they wanted to make an impact on the title race, they needed to start winning. But it was Yorkshire that made a good start at the County Ground. Lyth scored a career-best 142 to help the visitors post 405. It was not all bad news for Somerset. Kartik's time in the Indian Premier League with Kolkata Knight Riders had come to an end and he was now available for selection. He marked his arrival at Taunton with three wickets. It was also a good innings for experienced seamer Ben Phillips, who had joined Somerset in 2007 after spending several seasons at Kent and Northamptonshire. The 35-year-old claimed four wickets to prove he was more than just a squad player.

Somerset's response started well. By the end of the third day, they were 226/4 with Suppiah well set on 78 not out. Unfortunately for him he was dismissed on 99 the next morning. Buttler, Suppiah's overnight partner, made 52 and a bit of wagging from the tail got them up to 377. They

were back in the match, but not for long. Yorkshire ended the third day in control again as Lyth, a man Trescothick was glad to see the back of, made 93. The visitors continued to increase their lead the following morning as Anthony McGrath hit 83, before declaring on 333/4. Yorkshire had set Somerset 362 to win. With only 68 overs left to play, it was a tough – but gettable – target. And their chase started well. Trescothick made 53 and Compton hit 65.

The hosts needed to be more attacking, however. Coming in at No.4, de Bruyn picked up the tempo with 93 off 103 deliveries. But it was not until he was joined at the crease by Hildreth that things really got going. Hildreth, later aided by an unbeaten 31 from Buttler, hit an unbeaten 102 off just 70 balls to lead Somerset to their first win of the season. They did it with just 32 balls to spare. ‘I scored a couple of hundreds last year, but this year I was looking for more consistency and trying to develop that through a more positive mindset,’ said Hildreth after the match. ‘It’s brilliant batting with Jos as he scores freely and he’s quite an attacking player. He doesn’t build any pressure up for me at the other end. We had to pick our shots carefully and we got a lot of runs just by running hard between the wickets and picking up a few boundaries through the gaps.’

Somerset’s victory against Yorkshire was a massive result – and just what they needed to kick-start their campaign. Next up was the visit of Warwickshire. After winning the toss and electing to field, an onslaught came from Somerset’s attack. Thomas, taking a five-for, was the standout performer as the visitors were skittled out for 127. Warwickshire did reply with a few wickets before the end of the first day, but with Suppiah and Hildreth unbeaten on 61 and 35 respectively, the hosts were firmly in control.

Warwickshire responded well on the second day. Phillips, Kartik and Willoughby were all dismissed without scoring and if it had not been for another Hildreth century, the visitors would have been right back in the game. Hildreth's knock helped Somerset post 290 and take a lead of 163 into the second innings.

If Warwickshire were going to give themselves a chance, they needed to score big at the second attempt. But Kartik was simply irresistible on the spinning Taunton deck, taking six wickets as they were dismissed for 207. The result was a formality from there and Somerset knocked off the 40-odd runs required with nine wickets in hand to make it two wins on the bounce. Nine days later, they travelled to Edgbaston for the return. It was the team's last Championship match until 20 July, a gap of nearly seven weeks. With such a break, it was important they made it three wins from three if they wished to keep their good red-ball form going. On this occasion, they were batting first and managed to post a steady score of 268. Half-centuries from Trescothick and Hildreth, who was quickly becoming the team's standout performer, put them in a solid position.

It is an innings fondly remembered by Suppiah, but not for the reasons you may think. 'I got out around five minutes before lunch and I only managed two runs,' he remembered. 'It was funny and sort of unreal because I just couldn't lay a bat on anything! The wicket was very difficult and dry and the seamers were not particularly easy to play because it was an up-and-down wicket. I just stuck in; played and missed quite a few; got struck on the head, I remember Boyd Rankin hitting me. You would have thought you'd have nicked one past slip for four, but it just didn't happen and I just got stuck on two runs for

nearly two hours. Tres was there on 40-odd before lunch. And I remember getting out five minutes before lunch. I came back into the dressing-room and just started laughing, everyone burst out laughing ... The moral of the story is that the partnership was vital because I'd done my job for the lower order to come in and get their runs. I'd tired out the bowlers and the new ball.'

In reply, Warwickshire again struggled to handle Kartik as he took five wickets to restrict them to 140. They did fight back in the second innings, reducing Somerset to 183. And their target would have been even smaller if it were not for Phillips, who scored 55 to take the lead past 300. In the end, Somerset did not need those runs as the hosts, with Kartik picking up another six wickets, were bowled out for 130. The spinner's efforts had ensured a third consecutive victory for Somerset and they were now up to third in the table. Compton already knew how good Kartik was having played with him at Middlesex, describing him as 'the best left-arm spinner I've played with'. Now his new team-mates were also beginning to appreciate his value. 'He's a very, very good spinner,' said Suppiah. 'His knowledge of cricket was very good. He would come up and suggest things and all that. It would give us a different perspective of cricket.'

One player who benefited from Kartik's time at Somerset was George Dockrell, a promising young slow left-armer. He was able to spend time with Kartik in the nets and learn more about the art of spin, enjoying priceless lessons that helped him develop into a fine international cricketer for Ireland. 'Murali Kartik was probably on his own level in terms of the control he had,' admitted Dockrell. 'When I spoke to him about what he would try and do during nets or during games, the level he was working at was remarkable.'

He'd talk me through a net, ball by ball, and exactly what he was going to do for every ball and exactly what the batter was going to do because he wanted them to do it. Shane Warne is one of the spinners they talk about when every single ball is part of a plan and I think Murali Kartik had that level of control, plus the skill and the game theory to actually do that. Getting to see him play and watching him do what he used to do was, for me, a highlight and I probably still haven't talked to another spinner like that since who operated at that level.'

Kartik's quality was helping Somerset recover from their difficult start to the season. He was the final piece in the puzzle. They had excellent batsmen in Suppiah, Trescothick, Hildreth and Compton, two quality wicketkeepers in Kieswetter and Buttler, two superb all-rounders in Trego and de Bruyn and great seamers in Willoughby and Thomas. And now they had a mesmerising spinner in Kartik. Although Langer had departed, Somerset were better than ever. One of the things that made them such a top side, in Suppiah's eyes, was that each player knew exactly what their job was. 'As individuals, we knew our roles, which gave us a lot of clarity,' he said. 'For example, if we were in a certain situation and we needed X amount of runs in so many overs, everyone knew who the man would be to do the job.'

Compton agrees. 'I could just feel that every player was focused, focused on doing their job and making sure they played their role,' he added. 'And it was just a great atmosphere and a great team to be a part of when you had such consistent professionals, guys at the top of their game. Alfonso Thomas was a serious wicket-taking bowler, Zander de Bruyn was a world-class all-rounder at times.

We had all bases covered and just a great team to be a part of. Everyone was kind of at the peak of their performance. I don't think any of them were going to get much better, apart from myself, Hildreth, Kieswetter and Buttler, those who were slightly younger. With every good team, you need a core group of senior players. To have the experience and durability of Zander de Bruyn, Alfonso Thomas, Charl Willoughby, Marcus Trescothick – you're not going to get many better senior players than that.'

Willoughby also believes the team's strong core was their greatest strength. 'The key was the fact we had a lot of very experienced players and some young, up-and-coming players like Craig Kieswetter, Jos Buttler and Lewis Gregory,' he said. 'The core of our side was made up of very well-established cricketers such as Langer, Trescothick, Hildreth, Peter Trego, Zander de Bruyn, Nick Compton, me and Alfonso Thomas. You had a lot of cricketers who knew their game inside out. They were able to handle pressure situations through their experience as well as their ability. It gave us that sort of real fight within the team. Any situation we got ourselves into, we knew how to get out of.'

For Hurry, much of their success was down to young players breaking into the first team and challenging the likes of Willoughby for their shirt. 'Let's not forget Marcus came out of international cricket and he became available for us,' said Hurry. 'That made a big difference. We had a great combination of some experienced players and some very high-potential young players coming through: Hildreth, Kieswetter, [Neil] Edwards, Suppiah. If you dovetail that in with Langer, Trescothick, Caddick, Willoughby ... We also made a couple of key signings. We got Peter Trego back to the club. We also identified and recruited Ben Phillips

from Northants. Combine that, with some really hungry players in the second team, we had a really good formula to be really competitive.’

Yet all this would have been irrelevant if they had not maintained their hard-working attitude. ‘We had the guys who were flair players – Kieswetter, Buttler, Trego – but we also had a lot of consistent players, guys who just did their job and did not get much glory for what they did,’ added Willoughby. ‘Zander de Bruyn; Compo to a degree. People like me, who just chipped away with wickets all the time. Murali Kartik, who was a bit of a flair player, but would also guarantee you 50 wickets. Peter Trego, who never got much credit for what he did. Even though he was a flair player, he would literally turn up every single game in every single format and put in the hard yards.’

Dibble shares Willoughby’s view. ‘The approach was a lot different to what it had been previously,’ he said. ‘The whole professional and international influence that Langer brought. And having Tres for the whole time after he’d finished with England, obviously he was still good enough to play for England. There was that core – an international heartbeat. And then there were these guys who had dabbled with international cricket from South Africa. Having those players in their mid-30s, with a lot of experience and being high-performing players, buying into what Langer brought in terms of being professional and hard-working. Langer and Andy Hurry got on really well because they are very similar people, in terms of fighting hard and team spirit.’

Somerset were now the finished article. They were one of the best teams in England; perhaps the best considering how they competed in all formats. Even in the days of Garner, Botham and Richards, they were not as strong

as this in first-class cricket. When they were promoted in 2007, honours had become a possibility again. Now, they were a probability. Never had they had a better chance to win their maiden Championship title.

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Before their Twenty20 campaign began, Somerset had two 40-over matches to play. The first was against Sussex, a game remembered for another wonderful Hildreth innings. Having been reduced to 109/4 in pursuit of 292, their chances looked slim. But then came Hildreth's knock. With the help of an excellent half-century from Buttler, he hit an unbeaten 100 off just 66 deliveries to lead them to victory with nine balls remaining. In their next match against Worcestershire at Bath, however, Hildreth was dismissed for a second-ball duck as Somerset set their guests 235 to win. Half-centuries from Kieswetter, de Bruyn and Phillips did the business for them on this occasion. In response Worcestershire struggled with the right-arm pace of Mark Turner. The 25-year-old, who joined Somerset from Durham in 2006, picked up career-best one-day figures of 4-36 as Worcestershire were dismissed for 164. The result made it five wins from five for Somerset.

Then came the start of the Twenty20 Cup. The competition, which began in 2003 as a replacement for the Benson and Hedges Cup, was quickly becoming the pinnacle of the English summer as demand for Twenty20 cricket grew. Somerset's opening fixture was a horrible away tie to Sussex, where they were dismissed for 103 after the hosts had scored 155/7. Kieswetter top scored with 47. They were set a target of 156 in their next match against Middlesex at Lord's, but they had no trouble with the bat

on this occasion. West Indies international Kieron Pollard, a white-ball specialist signed exclusively to play in the tournament, hit a 45-ball 89 to see them home with more than two overs to spare.

Pollard went on to finish the tournament with 354 runs, struck at a rate of 175.24. He also dismissed 29 batsmen at an average of 15.10, a tally bettered by only two players. 'Kieron showed himself to be the sort of player who can change a game in a very short period of time,' said Rose on signing him. Although Pollard did well, Thomas, the leading wicket-taker in the tournament with 33, was Somerset's best Twenty20 player. For Compton, what made him such an excellent performer across all formats was his character. 'Alfonso Thomas's competitiveness was something that shone out,' claimed Compton. 'If I look at key players and players who carried the competitiveness and backbone of that team, it was players like Alfonso with his personality.'

Yet it was not just sheer desire that made Thomas special. He conceded just 6.31 runs per over during that season's Twenty20 Cup. In comparison to others who bowled a minimum of 300 deliveries, only Glamorgan's Robert Croft was more economical at 5.93. 'He was probably one of the best death bowlers in the country at that point, if not the best,' said Kirby. 'It was great to have an opportunity to learn from him. He was always really helpful to me.'

When Kirby arrived at Somerset, he was immediately struck by the quality of the white-ball team. 'They were a fantastic group of players and a fantastic group to be involved with,' explained Kirby. 'We had all bases covered. It was such a dangerous side with our top four, top five batting line-up. We had Trescothick, Kieswetter, Pollard,

Hildreth. And then obviously coming in at No.6 was Jos Buttler! So very rarely did we bat past that point. When we played a Twenty20 game, it was always either Pollard or Buttler going in around the 11th over. At Taunton we were always very dangerous in the powerplay, blasting people all over the place. It wasn't a good place to come and bowl, I can tell you that! Bowlers got quite scared really. You could see they didn't know where to bowl on a flat pitch against such a devastating batting line-up. We were smashing 190s, 200s out regularly.'

Somerset's win against Middlesex kick-started their Twenty20 campaign. They went on to win 11 of their 16 matches to finish top of the table and qualify for the quarter-finals. Only Warwickshire secured as many victories during the group stage. And there were some big performances during that time. Kent were bowled out for 105, Trescothick scored a 27-ball 78 against Hampshire and they hit 204 against Middlesex at Taunton. Having reached the final in 2009, Somerset were well on their way to getting there again.

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Somerset returned to Championship action in late July. They started well against Kent at Taunton, reaching 101/1. But then came a dramatic collapse as they slipped to 118/7. They were only saved when rain halted play shortly after the seventh wicket fell. Despite collapsing, Somerset did fight back. They clawed their way to 205 and then dismissed Kent for 172, with Kartik taking another five-for. But just as things were looking up, the rain returned. There was no play on the third day and by the time the hosts declared on 301/7, they had little more than two sessions

left to bowl Kent out. And it was not long enough as they resisted Somerset's attack. Although Kartik finished with ten wickets in the match, they came up three wickets short as former England wicketkeeper Geraint Jones survived 150 deliveries. It may not have been a defeat, but it was a blow to Somerset's title hopes.

Their next opponents were Nottinghamshire at the County Ground, who were right in the mix for the title having won four consecutive matches at the start of the season. Despite Trescothick being bowled first ball of the match by Darren Pattinson, they posted 517 thanks to another Hildreth century and fifties from Butler, Kieswetter and Trego. In response, the visitors reached 339 before Willoughby finished the innings with a six-for. That was not enough to avoid the follow-on and Nottinghamshire were made to bat again, labouring to 190. This time it was Thomas who took the spoils, picking up a five-for to all but win the match. Trescothick and Compton knocked off the 13 needed with ease. Somerset were back to winning ways in emphatic fashion.

After two home games, Somerset were back on the road for a trip to Canterbury. The first day was another run-fest as Suppiah and Hildreth both scored centuries to help them reach 363/7. They shared an important partnership as the visitors had slipped to 59/3, one which brought back many happy memories for Suppiah. He grew up batting alongside Hildreth at Millfield, an independent school in the heart of Somerset. The school was founded by first-class cricketer Jack Meyer in the 1930s and has since established a reputation for developing talented cricketers such as Kieswetter and Simon Jones, a member of England's 2005 Ashes-winning squad. 'We went through a difficult period,

but Hildy and I managed to put a partnership together and brought back some school-day memories, which was great,' recalled Suppiah.

Somerset were dismissed for 380 the next morning before Kent, aided by a rain-affected second day, hit 372 to take the game away from them. And it was Geraint Jones who made the difference again, hitting 178 to frustrate Somerset's attack. 'Towards the end of my innings I felt at ease and still and almost able to hit the ball where I wanted,' said Jones at the end of the third day, knowing he had all but secured a draw. As victory was no longer an option, Trescothick decided to take his frustration out on Kent's attack during the final day. He smashed an unbeaten 188 as Rob Key, Kent's skipper, dismissed Trego and Phillips. Key would finish his career in 2015 with just three first-class wickets to his name.

Hampshire were Somerset's next opponents at Taunton. After winning the toss and deciding to field, rain and England batsman Michael Carberry frustrated them. He scored 71 as rain washed out most of the first two days. The hosts did not get a chance to bat until the end of the second day, when Hildreth hammered another century. He was eventually dismissed for 130 as Somerset, knowing victory was no longer possible, were dismissed for 412. Hampshire went on to score 224/4 before the match finished as a draw. 'There just was not enough time left in the game,' said Trescothick, who could take solace in Somerset's position in the table. They were now second in the Championship, having gone ten matches unbeaten. Heading into the business end of the season, they were in with a chance of winning all three trophies. Everything was to play for ...

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Before their next Championship match, Somerset travelled to the Rose Bowl for Twenty20 Finals Day alongside Nottinghamshire, Hampshire and Essex. Since the competition's inception in 2003, the semi-finals and final have always been played at the same ground on the same day, giving fans the chance to enjoy a festival of Twenty20 cricket. Somerset had reached the last four after hammering Northamptonshire at Taunton. They had surpassed Northamptonshire's below-par total of 112/6 in 17 overs. Most of the squad already knew what Finals Day was all about having lost to Sussex 12 months previously. But for Pollard, it was a whole new experience – and one he could not wait for. 'Saturday will be one of the biggest games for me, getting the opportunity to play a final in the county arena,' said Pollard, aged 23 at the time. 'Hopefully we can go there and go one step further.'

Yet he was wary of their opponents. Nottinghamshire had arguably the best Twenty20 bowling attack in the country as Sidebottom, Swann and Broad were part of the England team that conceded fewer than 150 runs in each match during their victorious World Twenty20 campaign three months earlier. They also had Samit Patel, who finished the Twenty20 Cup with an excellent economy rate of 6.50, and Dirk Nannes, a key member of Australia's Twenty20 attack. But Pollard, a confident young man, was up for the challenge. 'They have a very good bowling attack,' he said. 'A lot of their guys have played for England. The five of them are top-class bowlers. It'll be a tough challenge for us, but I think we're up for that challenge. You can play for England, for the West Indies or for South Africa but you've still got to go out there and put bat on ball.'

After winning the toss, Nottinghamshire captain David Hussey, a member of the Australia side that lost to England in the World Twenty20 Final, decided to put their attack to good use and send Somerset in to bat. Yet it proved to be a poor decision. Trescothick carried on his good form by hitting 60, Pollard made an unbeaten 23 and Buttler hit 55 to post a very good score of 182/5. Considering the quality of Nottinghamshire's attack, it was an innings that demonstrated just how good Somerset were. In response, their opponents struggled. Swann, opening the batting, made only 11, as did Alex Hales, coming in at No.3. But then they started scoring at a rate of knots. Patel hit 39 off 26 balls and Hussey made an unbeaten 27 before rain intervened. The Duckworth/Lewis method judged Somerset to be the winners by a mere three runs. They had scraped through.

In the final they faced Hampshire, who had narrowly beaten Essex at the beginning of the day. Trescothick's side would have been confident of finishing the job after beating them home and away during the group stage. Kieswetter led the charge with 71 off 59 balls. His efforts, along with a quickfire 22 from Pollard, helped them post a good score of 173/6. It had come at a cost, however. Pollard was forced to retire after he was struck on the helmet by a bouncer. Not only had Somerset missed his power towards the end of their innings, but he was unable to bowl in the final. It was a huge loss. Their attack was now a man down and they struggled to stop the flow of runs as McKenzie made a half-century to keep Hampshire in the match.

In the end, it went down to the final ball. Hampshire, on 172/5, needed a single to win by virtue of having lost fewer wickets. Dan Christian, the man on strike, had pulled

his hamstring and had Adams running for him at square leg, just to add to the chaos. As de Bruyn delivered the all-important ball, it crashed into Christian's pads and skewed away. It looked as if it was hitting leg stump, but the umpire disagreed and during the appeal, the field froze as Christian limped through for a single. Confusion ensued, but Trescothick soon realised they had lost. 'I've never seen a last over like that,' said the winning skipper Dominic Cork. 'It had everything – changes of ball, runners, wickets, the lot. It was a chaotic last two overs but I'm proud of all the guys for taking us over that winning line.'

It was, and remains, the most dramatic conclusion to a Twenty20 match in English domestic history – and an important moment in the history of the format. Twenty20 cricket is often described by those who dislike it as forgettable. Some claim that because of its duration, it fails to leave a lasting impression. Yet the 2010 Twenty20 Cup Final was one of the first to disprove that theory. Although they were losers, this Somerset team had become part of cricketing history. A man that was due to sign for them shortly after the final was Kirby, who was at the Rose Bowl to witness the dramatic conclusion. 'Looking back on it, I didn't even know what the rules were with the runner and all,' he recalled. 'It was one of those difficult things to watch.'

While it may have been hard for Kirby, it was much more difficult for Michael Bates, Hampshire's wicketkeeper, to endure. 'It was an amazing game,' remembered Bates. 'We were all so young. In our Hampshire team we had a handful of pretty experienced players, but we also had a handful of us young lads who were about 19, 20 years old and had grown up playing together. To be honest, looking back on

it, it was all just a massive blur. With all the confusion at the end as well, no one was quite sure whether we'd won it. I know the Somerset lads were in a huge confusion out in the middle as to what to do. You had Dan Christian limping around at the non-striker's end having wrongly taken a single when he should have just stood there. And I think when it all boiled down to it, with hindsight, had one of the Somerset players taken the bails off to effectively run Dan Christian out then we would have lost.'

As Bates and his team-mates rejoiced, Somerset sobbed. The controversy had not gone in their favour and they had suffered heartbreak in Hampshire. It is a match that still haunts Trescothick. In an interview in 2018 he said, 'There was suddenly this presence, this air of, "The game is not finished? What's going on? What have I missed?" ... The umpire came to me at the end and said, "You do realise that if you would have thrown the ball in and taken the stumps out and appealed, you would have won the game?" Then that horrible, sinking feeling comes in and you walk off thinking, "Oh my God, we've just thrown it away." And that was it, done and dusted. We're eight years on ... and it still lives with me to this day.'

And that is no surprise considering how unlucky Somerset were. History remembers the confusion at the end, but if Pollard had not been injured, he would have probably added more runs and made an impact with the ball. That could have made it a comfortable victory. And there was the lbw appeal at the end. In fairness to the umpire, it was a very close call and could have been missing leg stump. The benefit of the doubt must be given to the batsman, especially with the Decision Review System not in use. Yet that decision could have so easily gone the other

way. Ultimately, Somerset just had to accept that it was not meant to be their day. Their season was still very much alive, however, as they had a realistic chance of winning both the Championship and the one-day tournament. They could not grieve about their loss. They had to pick themselves up and go again.

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Just days after Finals Day, Somerset travelled to Essex to get their season back on track. The Championship match was held at Castle Park in Colchester, a ground no longer used for first-class cricket. After winning the toss, Trescothick endured a nightmare start, dismissed by David Masters for a third-ball duck, which set the tone for the innings. The visitors failed to build on good starts and if it were not for Hildreth's 84, they would have been in real trouble. They were bowled out for 215. Thanks to their attack, though, they were able to take a lead into the second innings. Willoughby and Thomas took four wickets each as Essex were dismissed for 151. Then came an onslaught from Trescothick. He hit an unbeaten 228 off just 230 deliveries before declaring with the score on 367/8. It was a very impressive innings, especially when you consider that Suppiah, Kieswetter, Phillips and Thomas were all sent back to the shed without scoring.

With Somerset in such a dominant position and the sun shining bright, the result was a formality. Essex were dismissed for 212, with de Bruyn taking four wickets, to complete a 219-run victory. Trescothick then continued his impressive form in the next match as champions Durham visited Taunton. Batting first, he and Suppiah put on 119 for the first wicket. It was one of many great partnerships

shared between the two during Suppiah's time at the top of the order. 'I was pretty much sandwiched between two cricket greats in Trescothick and Langer at three,' laughed Suppiah. 'Opening with Tres was amazing. I still remember our partnerships over the five years.'

'We actually had a lot of things in common, not in terms of how we played – obviously he was easier on the eye and had more talent – but in terms of watching the ball, what the bowlers were trying to do. We worked as a partnership in that sense. So while I was at the non-striker's end, I would look out for where the shine was and how the bowler was holding it. I would then convey that message and vice versa. We were very much into that, being very detailed. When we were playing, he would just play his game and I would play my game. There were days when Tres would be on 100 and I was still stuck on 20. But that was fine; that was the partnership; that was what was important. Sometimes I would be ahead of him. We worked as a partnership really well.'

When Suppiah departed for 54, Compton joined Trescothick in the middle and the duo built another big partnership, worth 113 runs. As someone who wanted to play international cricket, it was a joy for Compton to learn from his esteemed colleague. 'Trescothick was a serious player,' said Compton. 'Marcus wasn't a man of many words, if I'm to be honest, in terms of helping me with my batting. And I don't mean that he wasn't a help. But I think he helped more by the way he went about his own game. Out of the side of your eye, it was hard not to watch him and how he conducted himself ... There was kind of a culture that you couldn't help but follow. Being a top-order player, most of my batting was done with Trescothick. I

think we scored quite a lot of runs together. There was just a maturity and a way that he went about things that had a huge impact on me. And it was probably only in the years afterwards when I realised how much he rubbed off on me.'

It was a pleasant return to the side for Compton, who made 45 before departing. He had endured a tricky start to his Somerset career, making just one Championship appearance between late May and late August. He had been dropped during the home match against Warwickshire having made just four in the first innings. With Suppiah, Trescothick, de Bruyn, Hildreth and Kieswetter all established in the team, Somerset were forced to choose between Compton and Buttler. Unfortunately for Compton, they chose the latter. 'I was very lucky when I came that I hit it at their top point,' said Compton, remembering his first season at Somerset. 'Langer had been there for the three years before that, made a lot of changes and I hit the up-curve of that. I had some success at Middlesex and had been on an England A tour. And that year, 2009, I actually had a great year in all forms of the game. I averaged 72 in one-day cricket, which wasn't something I was particularly associated with. I also had a pretty good year in Championship cricket – I scored nearly 900 runs.

'When I arrived, I remember being quite overwhelmed by the level of professionalism and performance as well as the talent and expertise in the group. I'd probably not been at that level before, notwithstanding Middlesex had some outstanding players. I played in a couple of very good teams. When I came to Somerset, it was a real jump in terms of attitude and expectation. There was an expectation that we would win. Going into the first few games, there was less hope and more of, "How are we going to win this game?"

And if we didn't win that game, it was almost an anomaly. Something had gone wrong, but it would go right in the next game. You almost jumped up 50 per cent in terms of the belief walking on to the field, "This is what we expect from us as a group." If you didn't fit into that or live up to that, you were out of the team.

'When I first arrived, I wouldn't say I was intimidated. I was very keen to impress and to be successful. And the way I tried to go about was to try and impress those players around me by my stroke-play, which I knew I had. But I think when I went towards that I became less consistent. I got a couple of scores here and there, but I was only averaging late 20s and not really fulfilling the role they wanted. And I think Jos Buttler scored a hundred at No.6 and they put him in at No.3 and dropped me for a few games. That was after being at the club for around three months. And, of course, the change in culture was very different. You can imagine being in London to coming down to Somerset. I would say I felt a little bit alone down there. It's a place that's quiet, parochial and people do stick to themselves. So the first three months I was kind of in a flat, in the middle of Taunton and trying to find my feet. So I found that, initially, quite difficult.'

The turning point in Compton's Somerset career was a conversation he had with Rose during his stint in the second team. 'Brian Rose came up to me,' he recalled. 'He wasn't a man of many words. He had a cricketing experience that you respected. He had a look in his eye that you knew he meant business. Obviously, I wasn't as happy as I should've been and he just said, "I got you down here to bat and bat all day. Just don't get out." I went out there in that second-team game and I remember just feeling like it was easy.'

There was only one thought in my mind, “Don’t get out.” If the ball was outside off stump, I left it; if it was straight, I defended it; if it was on my legs, I probably got some runs; if it was a poor ball, I hit it. I just wasn’t getting out – and I did that for hours. I ended up with a hundred in a second-team game and it wasn’t anything special. But I’d got a hundred. And I think I scored three hundreds in a row for the second team and got back into the first team, averaging 45 for the remaining games in 2010.

‘That was very much the becoming of the player I became. There were strokes there, there were hundreds and I could hit the ball. But the message I got was just so clear. And whenever things got a little bit cloudy, I just thought, “I’m not going to get out.” I knew that Hildreth and Kieswetter and all these guys, if I could stay there at the crease, the team was just going to be a much better team. I broke the game down and made it very simple. If I’m there at the crease, then we’re not going to get bowled out before the end of the day. And if we don’t get bowled out before the end of the day – with this batting line-up – we’ll have a score that’s competitive. But if I get out early, then there might be vulnerability in our team. So it was a very simple logic for me. I just batted. Even if I got nought off 100 balls, the team was still doing very well. And I just grew in confidence, in terms of my role and the specifics of what I did.’

Compton had not just turned a corner in his Somerset career, but in his professional career. He had overcome a dark time in his cricketing life and there were some great times on the way. But first, he had to help Somerset beat Durham. Trescothick’s innings eventually came to an end on 128 as they reached 287/4. They were in a solid

position, but then rain intervened. The second and third days were washed out leaving Somerset to bat on in a bid to gain as many bonus points as possible. They declared on 400/6 before Durham openers Michael Di Venuto and Mark Stoneman saw out the final 15 overs. The result had hampered Somerset's title bid, leaving them 16 points adrift of leaders Nottinghamshire having played a game more. They could not worry about their rivals, however, as they had a home fixture against Lancashire to focus on.

The match at Taunton started well, with Willoughby taking four wickets to restrict Lancashire to 259. Somerset were frustrated by rain, losing much of the second day, but they still managed to build a big lead. When their innings came to an end during the third morning, they had scored 382 as Kieswetter, Trego and Kartik all made half-centuries. At this point, their title bid hung in the balance. Although they had a lead of 123, time was not on their side. But showing fighting spirit, they dismissed Lancashire for 170. They then pushed to get the game finished. With an unbeaten 26 from Compton they knocked off the 48 runs required and, with Nottinghamshire losing consecutive matches against Durham and Yorkshire, Somerset were just two points behind the leaders heading into the final match of the season. It was all to play for.

The Championship title was not the only thing up for grabs. Despite losing the Twenty20 Final, Somerset were still going well in the ECB 40. Before the Twenty20 break, they had won five out of five in the tournament. And they picked up where they left off when play resumed in late July. A huge 94-run win over Surrey at the Oval was followed up with convincing victories against Unicorns and Lancashire, making it eight straight wins in one-day cricket. Although

they suffered defeats to Sussex and Worcestershire, their imperious form continued. They inflicted a mammoth defeat on Glamorgan at Taunton, hitting 368/4 – with Trego scoring 147 and Buttler, at his destructive best, hitting an unbeaten 90 off just 33 balls – before bowling them out for 119.

Somerset's reward for finishing top of their group was a home semi-final against Essex. Unsurprisingly, it was another brutal display from the hosts. There were half-centuries from Trescothick and Compton as they posted 312/6. Essex, forced to play aggressively, consistently lost wickets as they sought to chase down the big target. Kartik picked up two of those wickets as he conceded just 40 runs from his eight overs. In the end Essex were bowled out for 217 inside 30 overs, completing a 95-run victory for Somerset. 'I thought Somerset played exceptionally well,' admitted Essex captain James Foster after the match. 'I definitely think they're the benchmark in all forms of the game at the moment.'

Somerset were heading to Lord's, but not before the Championship finale against Durham at Chester-le-Street. Sitting in second place behind Nottinghamshire, they needed to defeat the defending champions and hope results elsewhere went their way. The odds were against them, but they had never had a better chance to win the Championship. Quite simply, it was the biggest first-class match in the club's history. They did not get the start they required, however. The match did not begin until after 3pm because of rain and when it did, Dale Benkenstein frustrated them. Durham's No.4 made an unbeaten 71 as they closed on 132/2. 'He's a really fine player and he played very well,' said a frustrated Rose. 'The first session

on Tuesday morning will be vital. They've done very well to only lose two wickets, but there's still everything to play for.'

Yet Somerset were not the only team to suffer from the bad weather. Just six balls were bowled during the first day of Nottinghamshire's match against Lancashire at Old Trafford, giving Somerset the upper hand in the title race. And things got better for them during the next 24 hours. More rain descended upon Manchester as just 27 overs were possible during the second day. Meanwhile at Chester-le-Street, Somerset had quickly ended Durham's innings. They were dismissed for 286 with Phillips taking four wickets. The visitors then made quick runs. Trescothick scored 75 off just 89 deliveries as they closed on 226/4. After acquiring both bowling and batting points, Somerset were now above Nottinghamshire in the table. Everything seemed to be falling into place.

Both matches continued to go in Somerset's favour on the third day. No play was possible at Old Trafford, allowing Somerset to increase their advantage. A seventh Championship century of the summer from Hildreth and a brutal half-century from Trego helped them post 426 and take a lead of 140 into the second innings. Durham managed to claw that deficit back before the end of the day, reaching 171/2 at the close. Nevertheless, they had picked up four more batting points as Nottinghamshire remained in the pavilion. But the next morning Durham dug in. Michael Di Venuto scored 129, while Benkenstein and Gordon Muchall used up 199 precious deliveries between them. When their innings eventually ended, Somerset needed 181 inside 17 overs. They gave it their best shot, promoting Kieswetter, Buttler and Trego up the order, but

they could only manage 48. The match finished in a draw and Somerset picked up just three more points.

So, to win the title, Nottinghamshire required nine points. And the morning went in their favour. Batting with blue skies above, they went about their business proficiently. Adam Voges scored a century and Patel made a blistering 96 off 91 balls. To have any chance of winning the title, they needed to reach 400 and achieve maximum batting points. And for a while, it looked like they would fall just short as they crawled to 390/9. Yet England bowlers Sidebottom and Pattinson got them over the line. They declared on 400/9 in a bid to get the three wickets they required to claim an all-important bowling point. But with them only having 16 overs, there was still a very good chance Somerset could be crowned champions. As they shook hands at Chester-le-Street, the team quickly made their way to the nearest television they could find to watch the drama unfold.

Somerset were powerless, however, to stop Sidebottom and Andre Adams. They dismissed Karl Brown, Mark Chilton and Shiv Chanderpaul within five overs – and just as the rain was starting to fall again. Nottinghamshire, having picked up 214 points, the same amount as Somerset, were declared champions by virtue of having won more matches. ‘The vast majority just said let’s go out and bash 400 and take three wickets,’ said a delighted captain Chris Read after the match. ‘Last night a lot of the guys got together and had a chat about what we should do. This morning we were devastated to see we weren’t going to start on time because we thought it might scupper our plans. But we decided, on balance, the best route was to back ourselves to get 400. My dad is a lifelong Somerset fan so he will have mixed emotions, and I grew up in Devon watching

Somerset as a lad. For them to come so close to their first ever Championship, they must feel gutted, but they can take heart from probably being the form side of the summer in all forms of the game.’

While Read’s sentiment would have been appreciated, it meant little as Somerset’s dream was left in tatters. The class of 2010 had missed a golden opportunity to become the first team to bring the Championship trophy back to Taunton. ‘The lads are pretty disappointed after a long, hard season and a lot of hard work put in to be second again,’ said Trescothick after Nottinghamshire had clinched the all-important third wicket. ‘It’s gutting, really. It’s terrible. Something that will live with us for a long, long time to know we were so close – touching distance to the trophy – but so far away when Notts got that third wicket. Any time you lose a big cup or a final it’s disappointing. Twenty20 Finals Day still haunts me even though we’re six weeks away from it, but with this being the elusive trophy for the club it is going to hurt, no doubt about it.’

And a decade later, it still hurts. ‘The bitter side of it was the last game at Durham,’ recalled Suppiah. ‘I remember us finishing our game and we shook hands and the Notts and Lancashire match was on the telly. We all thought, “Okay, three wickets in X amount of overs, Lancashire can do this – especially with Chanderpaul in their line-up.” And then we saw the first wicket go and it was like, “Oh, great.” A few of the boys just stepped outside because they couldn’t watch it anymore. And then the second wicket fell and I was like, “What the hell is going on here?” It was unreal. And eventually the third wicket fell and that was a bitter pill to swallow because we had one hand on the trophy and it was taken away from us. And for Notts, too, they had to

score X amount of runs in so many overs. It was ridiculous how they got that as well. It was a hard one to comprehend.'

Compton can also remember the agony and disappointment of not getting over the line. 'It was just painful,' he said. 'When Nottinghamshire got the three wickets they needed, it was hard to watch. We thought we had a great chance. We had a great team; I'd say we had the best team. I guess Nottinghamshire will contest that ... That Durham game was very disappointing. If it had not rained, then I think we would have won. And I think even going into the match, there was a lot of belief – there was an electricity in the club – that we were on the brink of something.'

Yet that something did not come as Somerset were left to ponder what could have been. 'I remember batting with Murali Kartik and we fell short of 400 to get the last batting point [against Lancashire],' said Willoughby. 'We were trying to get him on strike and I got run out, stupidly. And you just think that one point could have won us a Championship. But, ultimately, Notts won it because they had one more win than us. So, in theory, they deserved to win it. But it was a tough pill to swallow.'

And that pill became even tougher two days later at Lord's. After being sent in to bat by Warwickshire, Somerset were restricted to 199 thanks to Imran Tahir's five-for. It was a below-par score – and a frustrating one as they were well set to make a big total having been 176/3 in the 31st over. Although they gave themselves a chance of winning by taking early wickets to restrict Warwickshire to 39/3, an excellent performance from Ian Bell sealed the victory. He hit 107 as they reached the target with just one over remaining. Somerset had finished as runners-up in all three

competitions. ‘It’s very tough to take, but we have to learn some lessons from what is happening,’ said Trescothick after the match. ‘There is a reason why it happens. You only have to look at the two guys from Warwickshire; Imran Tahir getting five to take the heart out of the game then Ian Bell showing the world-class player he is. That’s what you’ve got to do if you want to be the best, you have to show it at crucial times. We’ve got to improve and try to emulate that.’

In hindsight, it could be suggested that Somerset were not mentally prepared for the final with it coming just days after their Championship loss. Warwickshire, on the other hand, were in buoyant mood having beaten Hampshire in their final red-ball match to seal their Division One status. They also had a physical advantage with three players not appearing against Hampshire. In comparison Somerset, who used the same 15 or 16 players all summer, made just one change for the final. No Somerset player would use this as an excuse, but it is hard to deny it made a difference.

‘That very day [after the Durham match], or that very evening, we travelled to Lord’s for the final and we lost that as well,’ remembered Suppiah. ‘So it wasn’t a great couple of days. Between 2009 and 2011, we pretty much used the same set of players in all formats. We had a squad of probably 15 players and 80 per cent of them would play in all three formats. So a lot of players were still quite down about it and, it’s probably an excuse, but perhaps it did affect us. Bell played a superb innings, but the emotions – and the travelling and all that – can run quite high. You probably don’t have enough time to prepare for it. Whereas Warwickshire, I’m not saying they had more time to prepare, but they could have done more white-ball practice.’

We were still in a Championship and the Twenty20 ... It could have played a part.'

Dibble, who was on the fringes of the team throughout the summer, believes using the same group of players in each format could have had a negative impact. 'This could have been a weakness, but the team during those few years – no matter what type of cricket it was – was the same team,' said Dibble. 'They were very used to playing with each other and everyone knew their role really well. I think that was a pro and a con in a way because you could argue that come the end of the season, they had all played a lot of cricket and that could have been counter-productive, physically and mentally.'

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, however, and did not change the fact that Somerset had come up just short in all three tournaments. Yet it had still been a marvellous season for the club. In the Twenty20 Cup, they had won 13 matches – more than any other side – and they had finished top of their group. And if luck had gone their way during that bizarre last over of the final, it would have been Trescothick picking up the trophy rather than Cork. Moreover, to lose a final by virtue of having lost more wickets is cruel – so much so the rule no longer exists. They had been equally as impressive in the ECB 40, winning ten of their 12 group matches – a return matched only by Yorkshire. Despite losing two finals, they had enjoyed a great summer of white-ball cricket.

They could also take pride in the fact they had become the closest Somerset team in history to win the Championship. They had come closer than the team of Richards, Garner and Botham. They had come closer than the class of 2001, the first Somerset side to finish second.

If they had achieved that result in 1977, when Kent and Middlesex shared the title, they could add that missing trophy to their cabinet. If they had just got one extra point here or there, or if Nottinghamshire had failed to get those three wickets at Old Trafford, they would have been triumphant. It was a tremendous effort from Somerset – and one they should be very proud of. ‘It was a good season,’ admitted Willoughby. ‘It went down to the wire and there was just one point in it, in the end. And that could have been won or lost at any point in the season. But there were a lot of good, solid performances throughout the year.’

Although they did not win any trophies, 2010 has gone down in Somerset’s history as one of the most exciting and memorable summers they have ever known at the County Ground. But for Trescothick, his captaincy and the bid to win a first Championship, it was just the beginning.