

HONORARY GRADUATE

ARON BACHER

Aron (Ali) Bacher was born in Roodepoort on 24 May 1942, the third son of a Jewish immigrant family from Lithuania. He has always been particularly proud of both his South African and his Jewish roots. He matriculated from King Edward VII School with a first class pass and graduated with an MBCh degree from the University of the Witwatersrand in December 1967.

Bacher was a formidable schoolboy cricketer, both as a batsman and as a leader. He captained King Edward and Transvaal Schools and played for South African Schools for two successive years; made his first class debut for Transvaal in 1960 at the age of 17; played club cricket for Balfour Park, which he captained from the age of 20; and was appointed captain of Transvaal in 1963. He continued to captain the province until his retirement from first class cricket in 1974. In all he played in 120 first class matches and represented South Africa in twelve test matches between 1965 and 1970, captaining the national team in its famous 4-0 series victory over the Australians in 1970. He was appointed captain for the planned South African tour of England in 1970 which was cancelled because of the sports boycott.

After a decade as a general practitioner in the 1970s, and a brief stint in business, Ali Bacher became a full-time cricket administrator, when the Transvaal Cricket Council appointed him Director of Cricket. The game in South Africa was turning commercial and professional and required professional administrators, and in 1986 Bacher was appointed the first Managing Director of the South African Cricket Union. In 1991, he became Managing Director of the United Cricket Board of South Africa, a position from which he retired at the end of 2000 to take responsibility for organizing the 2003 Cricket World Cup to be staged in South Africa. It is no exaggeration to say that he is today the best-known cricket administrator in the world.

Bacher's fifteen years at the helm of South African cricket were momentous ones, during which the face of South African cricket was forever changed. His role in that change was central, and often controversial, but throughout he was guided by an abiding concern to protect and promote the game he loves. He has made an important contribution to the maintenance of South Africa's playing strength through isolation and into transformation to the efficient administration and financial strength of the game; to a coherent strategy for promoting transformation; and to creating development programmes. Bacher envisages a time in which cricket will become a truly 'people's game' in South Africa and will serve as a great unifying force in the country.

Ali Bacher's tenure at the South African Cricket Union was particularly noteworthy for three things.

The first was the township programme, which he masterminded. This entailed the creation of a new game – mini-cricket – as a means of taking cricket into the townships and of bringing children of all races together on the playing field.

The second was the ill-fated tour by the 'rebel' England team, captained by Mike Gatting, in early 1990. With apartheid South Africa excluded from the International Cricket Council and test match cricket, Bacher was convinced that 'rebel' tours were essential for the maintenance of playing levels in South Africa. The extent of the demonstrations provoked within South Africa by the Gatting tour made him realise he had committed a major political error and he negotiated a halt to the tour, bringing to an end the 'rebel' era.

The third was his role in leading the South African Cricket Union into unity with its rival, the non-racial South African Cricket Board, thereby ending the long-standing divisions in South African cricket. Bacher became the apostle of cricket unity, and his diplomatic skills were hugely important in helping to bring about the formation of the United Cricket Board of South Africa in 1991.

Since South Africa's return to the International Cricket Council, Bacher has played a major role in world cricket administration, notably on the ICC's Playing Affairs Committee and as chairman of its new International Development Committee. The adoption of television technology to assist umpires is a Bacher inspired innovation.

It is with great pride and pleasure that the University of the Witwatersrand confers upon Aron Bacher the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.