

# ASIF, BILAL AND THE FOREIGN MARKET

## Recruiting Overseas Talent by Chris Knowles

The acquisition of an overseas player is now something of a prerequisite for all forward-thinking and competitive Drakes Premiership clubs.

The season ahead will be Emley's fourth consecutive year of employing an overseas player, as they opted against this policy in their first season in the Huddersfield Drakes League. Recently, 24-year-old Asif Zakir has been signed in preparation for the 2008 season. Zakir is a prolific opening batsman with an additional talent for off-spin bowling, an aspect of his game which should be fully utilised in the slow-wicket culture of the league.

So where does a South Kirklees cricket club start looking for an overseas professional?

The process begins when Emley contact British-based agents who provide a database of players from across the globe who are interested in playing in England and, more specifically, joining the Drakes League. A directory of qualities is on record for the club to view, although there is a 'luck-of-the-draw' element to the system and deals sometimes fall through in the early stages simply because of practicalities.

The search for overseas talent can be affected by issues such as which area of the team is in need of strengthening. For instance, the balance of the team is of paramount importance and an adaptable professional may offer more than one who excels in one particular aspect of the game. Ideally, the club will look for an all-round player who can score close to 1,000 runs and potentially grab 50 wickets throughout the course of a season.



Bilal Khilji (above) was arguably the finest player in the league last season and was hailed as a huge recruitment success. Nevertheless, calibre-laden professionals such as him come at an astronomical cost and can also attract interest from rival clubs. For example, the figure disbursed on the former Emley sensation was close to £7,000.

Initial problems are usually encountered as both player and club acclimatise to each other. Communication can be an issue, although adapting to a diverse culture can often be the most challenging element for an overseas player. Supplying the player with off-the-field work and

accommodation can often be the responsibility of the club and this can also have an effect on how quickly the deal is concluded.

Moreover, setting up the necessary documentation for work permits and finalising details of living arrangements takes time, and so it can often be a case of 'it's not what you know, it's who you know!'

And with a career batting average higher than that of the breathtaking Khilji, players and fans alike will be relishing the opportunity to see Asif Zakir in action.