

Kirkheaton Cricket Club- Overseas Professionals

Overseas professionals have the ability to entertain, excite and most of all, win cricket matches. Kirkheaton like most cricket teams in the Huddersfield Cedar Court Conference League employ an overseas professional for the calendar season.

The professional is paid an agreed amount of money to play in every competitive match in the season. It can be quite a costly business as some professionals will expect their air fares to be paid for and to be put up in accommodation on arrival. Also if a match is postponed because of the weather the professional will still get paid.

Clubs employ professionals to be match winners. They are expected to be the leading light in the team and significantly contribute with either bat or ball. Their role also involves attending training sessions to give coaching to the youth players. Most professionals make the trip over to gain experience of English conditions.

Kirkheaton have had varying degrees of success with overseas professionals over recent years. Some have been absolutely outstanding and well worth the money whereas some have been largely disappointing.

One of the best professionals to play at Kirkheaton was a young Indian batsman by the name of Asher Zaidi. He was a revelation at Bankfield and won an award for the best overseas player in the league for the 2003 season. A firm favourite at Kirkheaton, he amassed over 1700 runs at an average of 78 during his stay at the club.

He nearly led Kirkheaton to a famous victory in the final of the Sykes Cup with a tremendous unbeaten century. Unfortunately his team-mates could not raise their game to the required standard and Kirkheaton narrowly lost.

Former chairman of Kirkheaton Philip Earnshaw has fond memories of Asher Zaidi.

He enthused, "Asher was a great lad. He was an exception batsman who gave the club a real lift during his spell. He was fantastic with the youngsters and was liked by everyone within the club. We enjoyed having him and hopefully one day he will come back and play for us."

Asher Zaidi's performances were so impressive in the 2003 season that he attracted the attention of clubs in higher division. Kirkheaton obviously wanted to retain Zaidi as a professional but could not match the money that was offered to him by other clubs.

Other professions that have played at Kirkheaton have not quite made the same impact as Zaidi did.

Although one professional that did catch the eye was South African quick bowler Morne Morkel. He joined Kirkheaton in the 2000 season at the tender age of 18.

He made an impression for the sheer speed he bowled at. He was also a destructive batsman that could hit the ball a long way.

“Morny is the quickest bowler I have ever seen at Kirkheaton without a doubt. He had a tendency to spay the ball about a bit but on his day he was unplayable. His batting was a little hit and miss. But when he hit the ball, it stayed hit,” recalls committee member Eric Hepworth.

Morkel was a right arm fast bowler and left hander batter. He was abnormally tall for an 18 year-old standing at an impressive six foot 6 inches. He spent two seasons at Kirkheaton and had steady rather than spectacular success.

In his first season he took 47 wickets and scored 700 runs at an average of 34. The following season he took an impressive 78 wickets and scored over 800 runs at an average of 42. Morkel’s most noticeable achievement was taking all 10 wickets and scoring a hundred in the same match.

On the flip side of the coin Kirkheaton have employed professionals that have failed to live up to expectation. The performances of last seasons professional Mohammed Hussien were in particular, extremely disappointing. He scored a measly 250 runs and failed to reach 50 once in the whole season. He bowled part-time spin and only picked up a handful of wickets.

Hussien was a last minute replacement, as the professional kirkheaton were originally supposed to be having dropped out at the eleventh hour due to bereavement in his family. This was unfortunate for Kirkheaton as the original professional they planned for had a very good reputation and was regarded as a genuine all-rounder.

Interestingly not all the professionals to appear for Kirkheaton have been from overseas. In the 1998 season the club obtained the services of Englishman Lee Slater as their professional. Slater had the experience of playing country cricket with Derbyshire and was a cheaper option as the club did not have to pay for air fares or accommodation.

He proved to be an excellent capture and during his spell, Kirkheaton won the league and gained promotion.

Nowadays professionals are employed by most amateur cricket teams. Having a top quality professional could be the difference between promotion and relegation. It takes a lot of time and effort for a club like Kirkheaton to raise the funds to be able to afford a professional. So obviously the club wants to pick the best possible candidate for the role and get their moneys worth. Let's hope Kirkheaton get a bit more luck in the forthcoming season and select a professional that has the attributes to fire them to promotion.