

Neil Jurgenson

Profile by Dave Wooding

Neil Jurgenson, more commonly known to those around Shepley as 'Jurgy', is one of the more memorable overseas players to have plied their trade at Marsh Lane.

Hailing originally from Johannesburg in South Africa, Jurgy joined Shepley in 1981 purely by choice. With Holmfirth making the mistake of recruiting two overseas players at the same time, it was agreed that the Marsh Laners would take one for the season.



During his two seasons at Shepley, Jurgenson embraced the club in a way many other overseas players at clubs throughout the country fail to do. A hugely popular character and player, Neil was one of those players who never missed anything involving the cricket club during his time in the village.

A right-handed batsman by trade, he was at one stage captain of the Under-19 South Africa side, in the same team as players such as Kepler Wessels, who went on to represent the country (and also Australia) at senior level.

While he failed to reach the heights of some of those around him in that team, Jurgy excelled at Shepley, with perhaps his most significant achievement during his two seasons at the club coming in his first, when he became the first person in the Huddersfield League for seven years to pass the 1,000-run mark in a season. This feat becomes all the more impressive when one realises that at the time an innings lasted just 45 overs, as opposed to 50 nowadays.

Upon arrival at Shepley, the powerful South African made an instant impact, with his debut at Marsden seeing him make a century. As former team-mate Ian Glover put it: "We knew straight away after that knock that we had got hold of a very good player."

And it didn't take long for his reputation to reach every corner of the village. As Glover recalls: "Someone would come up at the toss to see if we were batting first, and news would travel back to the Farmer's Boy and beyond as to when Shepley were batting. People always made sure they were at the ground to see him bat."

Another of Jurgy's many memorable knocks came at Elland, where the big-hitting opener managed to score 126, with former Shepley player and longstanding supporter Trevor Curtis recalling: "It was the first time I have ever seen a ball hit from the square completely out of the ground at Elland." The overseas import was one of few players to really scare Elland. Ian Glover adds: "During one match, after just three overs, the Elland captain had put every fielder back in fear of Jurgy."

It was not just on the field that Jurgy was a big hit at Shepley. Those around at the time will have fond memories of the worse-for-wear camper van he and his then girlfriend Lesley acquired during their second spell in England.

And it was during his second season, in 1982, that he played a significant role in helping the club lift the Byrom Shield, an achievement Shepley have yet to repeat since his departure.