

The Value of Overseas Players

Merrion's Experience



With some breaks in transmission, professional cricketers [called ‘overseas players’ in the Cricket Leinster playing regulations] have come to our shores since the late 1970s to play for a season or more. Some of the most notable visitors ended up staying on and qualifying for Ireland and had a major role in Ireland’s ascent to Test status.

Merrion was one of the first clubs to avail of outside assistance. Initially, it was only the weaker clubs, of which Merrion was one at the time, who were allowed to hire an overseas player. But by the early 1990s such restrictions were removed and they became a familiar and important part of the cricket scene.

Beginning in 1978*, when Saleem Uddin, a player of indeterminate age from Pakistan, was engaged by the club, Merrion has had 23 overseas players over 30 years. The job of selecting a candidate can be a difficult one even with the benefit of player statistics and personal recommendations. Different conditions, being far from home and temperament has meant that some have not proved all that successful. Against that some of the most influential cricketers in the modern history of the club have started their Irish career as an overseas player. One has only to think of Brad Spanner, who between 1999 and 2002 not only performed magnificently on the field but proved an inspiration to a generation of young cricketers. Closer to the present day, John Anderson, one of the dominant club cricketers of the past decade, first came to Ireland to play as an overseas player for Railway Union. In what proved to be Merrion’s gain he came back to settle in the country and apart from playing for Ireland and captaining the Leinster Lightnings he accumulated has over 6,500 runs for the club, the fourth highest aggregate senior runs for Merrion.

But who was the most successful overseas player for the club. A case could be made for Greg Clarence, who was on the team that won the Irish Senior Cup for the first time in 2010 and with Dom Joyce had an undefeated partnership of 150 to win the final against Railway Union. Or perhaps Chris Torrisi in 2001, who alongside Brad Spanner who was living in Ireland at the time, helped win the Leinster Senior League for the first time in over 40 years. Between them the two players scored nearly 1450 runs, Torrisi making 917. And finally, Matt Petrie who over four years between 2007 and 2011 led the Merrion bowling attack and helped bring home the Leinster Senior Cup [after a 50 year gap] and an Alan Murray title.

Three players stand out in the statistics scoring in excess of 1600 points [one per run and 20 per wicket / dismissal] in a season. Sean Flegler [2002] made 749 runs [average 46.81] and took 44 wickets at an average of 18.45. Brad Spanner [in 1999 which was his only year as an overseas player] scored 1014 runs [67.6] and took 31 wickets [13.87]. But the individual accolades must narrowly go to David Robinson back in 1981 who made 746 runs [39.26] and took 45 wickets [14.73]. He took these wickets despite the fact that he considered himself only an occasional bowler and indeed converted from spin to medium left-arm while in Ireland.

Senior Averages Overseas Players

Name	Year	Matches	Innings	NO	HS	Total	Bat Ave	Wickets	Runs	Bowl Ave	Ct / St
Saleem Uddin	1978	20	20	0	87	667	33.35	13	294	22.62	4
Saleem Uddin	1979	20	20	0	81	503	25.15	19	409	21.53	16
David Robinson	1980	20	20	0	133	776	38.8	41	613	14.95	6
David Robinson	1981	21	21	2	117*	746	39.26	45	663	14.73	4
Michael Thompson	1990	16	13	3	29	120	12	19	590	31.05	4
Riain Smit	1994	15	13	2	27	98	8.91	6	81	13.5	6
Gerry Brophy	1995	21	20	2	74	593	32.94				26/4
T McLaren	1996	20	20		49	477	23.85				28/1
Jody Myers	1997	21	21	5	82*	614	38.38				21/5
Brett Hughes	1998	21	21	2	106	600	31.58	2	18	9	15/10
Brad Spanner	1999	23	20	5	130	1014	67.6	31	430	13.87	15
Chris Torrisi	2000	20	20	4	126*	965	60.31	1	15	15	7
Chris Torrisi	2001	18	18	2	157*	917	57.31	1	17	17	7
Sean Flegler	2002	23	21	5	94*	749	46.81	44	812	18.45	10
L Stevens	2003	6	6	1	44	131	26.2	10	124	12.4	3
David Celep	2004	18	18	3	76*	385	25.67	14	331	23.64	8
Daniel Payne	2005	16	15	1	124	705	50.36	19	542	28.53	8
Dean Waugh	2006	15	15	2	71*	333	25.62	1	40	40	9
Matt Petrie	2007	15	12	1	53	186	16.91	36	337	9.36	5
Matt Petrie	2008	14	10	2	44	178	22.25	35	246	7.03	7
Matt Petrie	2009	14	12	3	54	194	21.56	24	361	15.04	1
Greg Clarence	2010	14	14	1	46	214	16.46	14	355	25.36	7
Matt Petrie	2011	17	16	4	62	231	19.25	35	533	15.23	7
Tim Lang	2012	13	12	0	100	359	29.92	1	60	60	3
Brett Thompson	2013	13	13	2	102*	631	57.36	0	4		4
Brett Thompson	2014	16	15	3	121*	521	43.42	1	54	54	6
David Rhoda	2015	13	13	5	119*	592	74	29	408	14.07	3
Adam Lockhart-Krause	2016	4	4	0	66	136	34				2
Poonish Mehta	2018	16	11	1	58	340	34	30	419	13.97	6
Oliver Newton	2019	14	12	2	37	149	14.9	34	382	11.24	1

But in the end it is not the runs scored or the wickets taken that make the real difference. it is the influence the overseas players have on young cricketers by example and coaching. Merrion has been fortunate over many years to have had many fine coach / players. But of all of these one stands out - Brad Spanner. For four years Brad coached youth teams in Merrion to their great benefit in terms of lasting friendship as well as performances on the field. But it could have been very different as Brad only barely survived his first encounter with Ireland’s weather conditions and Merrion youth. His first practice session was with a girls group and was accompanied by a light snow storm. The girls took great delight in explaining that this was what we called a soft day in Ireland and that it would certainly get colder later in the month. Fortunately his Irish fiancée was able to explain to him that it also got warmer and he had to learn to live with the Irish sense of humour when it came to the weather.

So what is the future for overseas players in Leinster and Ireland. As professional cricket draws on club resources while at the same time makes it ever more important that the gap between club and representative cricket does not grow, it would seem that there is a place for overseas imports. At the same time, as coaching structures improve in Ireland, clubs may come to rely more on domestic resources to develop young players. And we have still to take account of the impact of the pandemic, not just on travel but on the financial condition of clubs.

* There is mention of a professional cricketer, C Brockway, who played four games in 1942. There is nothing else known about him.