

Beginnings of Professional Cricket in Natal

On Thursday, 12 October 2006 the Kingsmead Mynahs played the DHS 1st XI on the Theobald Oval.

Talented sportsmen pass through DHS and today a lucrative and rewarding career in various sporting codes is on offer to these boys. This was not the case in the late 1960s - 1970s.

In the 1960s, cricket players turned out for Natal at Kingsmead and although there was a good take at the turnstiles, up to 14 thousand spectators on a day, the players did not receive remuneration.

In fact, Barry Richards said when a player was selected to play for Natal, he would be presented with his badge, but the cost of the blazer would be for his account. Grayson Heath first played for Natal in 1961. He says when he was first selected to play for his Province he was given a cap and told that after playing three first class matches (not 'friendlies') he would be entitled to wear the tie and blazer, but again this was for his account.

The first class fixtures over a season could span a period of 30 working days. Some players would only have up to 21 working days' leave a year. They would therefore have up to 10 days' pay deducted from their salary because of their absence from work due to cricket commitments.

Barry said, during an interview, "The doctor charges you for a house call, the baker charges you for his bread, but the cricketer is expected to entertain the public over the whole weekend for free - I'm a professional cricket player".

Circa 1971, Barry returned to Natal from overseas and was offered R5000 to play and coach for Northern Transvaal for a season. When he mentioned this offer to Natal Cricket, Derek Dowling wished him well and told Barry to take the offer as Natal Cricket could not match it.

Cricket supporters in Natal were shocked at the possible loss to Natal of such a player. A meeting of prominent businessmen was called and held at DHS on 3 August 1971. The meeting was chaired for the first time by a senior master at DHS at the time. Jock Lamb, Alan Booth, Jeff Wright, Julian Thornton, Clive Cunningham and some forty-five other cricket enthusiasts all agreed to the establishment of a supporters' club and the named men stood as guarantors to pay Barry to stay, play and coach in Natal.

This Club has grown to a maximum membership of about 280 - their aim today is still to employ men to coach schoolboy cricket.

The Club? The Kingsmead Mynahs and the first chairman at the meeting in August 1971? Our own L C W Theobald.

This article taken from Jeremy Oddy's book 'Where the Baobab grows'.