

# **'Good times that gradually got increasingly tough'**

**by Gareth Le Prevost GEP**

Have you noticed the severe scarcity of left-handed batsmen in the Guernsey cricket team over the last 10 years? Probably not, I suppose, because I certainly hadn't until starting to put together a Team of the Decade. Selected from all the players who have won a 50-over Inter-Insular cap during that period, amazingly only two 'lefties' have taken guard for Guernsey against the old enemy and one of those – New Zealander Iain Atchison – played in just the first match of the decade before leaving these shores. The other, Zak Damarell, doesn't make the final cut either, but his prowess in his winter sport ensures he will feature prominently in another edition of this series.

Despite the lack of left-handers, though, there are no concerns about where the runs would come from in the final line-up because there is quality throughout, including a fair sprinkling of cricketers who have held professional contracts in their time. As far as obvious selections go, Lee Savident and Jeremy Frith are probably fighting it out for top billing. Not only perhaps the most talented all-round cricketer the island has produced, Savident is one of the best all-round sportsmen. Whichever sport he turns his hand to, whether it be cricket, basketball, football or even darts, the big man tends to excel. Meanwhile, Frith came to the island in his early 20s and quickly earned the moniker of 'Mr Cricket' for obvious reasons. With his left-arm orthodox bowling, Frith formed a formidable 'spin twin' partnership for both club and country with off-spinner Gary Rich, whose sterling service to Guernsey cricket ended with his retirement after the World Cricket League Division Five tournament in Singapore in 2012. The 20 overs Frith and Rich used to Guernsey in unison made their captain's job so much easier. That captain for much of that time for both Cobo and the island is part of a strong, potentially destructive middle order in this XI. There may be a suspicion of nepotism in making Stuart Le Prevost skipper of the side, but it was always obvious that he was held in high regard by his peers and the messages written on a framed shirt signed by the squad and presented to him on his retirement endorse his leadership quality. (That shirt is proudly on display in the smallest room of his house.) Knowing his career so well – probably better than him – one of the biggest compliments I can pay my brother's batting is that it continued improving until the day he stood down from representative cricket, and it was non-too-shabby when he top scored for Guernsey on his Inter-Insular debut in 1997 as a teenager.

He, along with another former pro Tim Ravenscroft and the hard-hitting GH Smit, all have the innate ability to hit boundaries off good bowling, something so vital in white-ball cricket. If given the sort of platform you would expect from a top three of Savident, Frith and Matt Stokes – the class act of the current squad – that middle order could cause carnage.

The rest of the team would all be capable of batting high up the order, but in this line-up they are selected for the other strings to their bow. Jason Martin is an excellent wicketkeeper and capable of match-changing dismissals in the blink of an eye. With

the spin twins Frith and Rich bowling in tandem, you need the best gloveman possible behind the stumps. To supplement Savident's bowling, pacemen Will Peatfield and Jamie Nussbaumer offer firepower at both ends of the innings. Peatfield has developed into the island's outstanding layer in the last couple of years and regularly makes early inroads into an opposition's batting order, which is such a valuable asset to have. For the few of us lucky enough to witness it, Nussbaumer bowled one of the best spells ever from a Guernsey bowler in international competition when he turned an extremely tense World Cricket League match against Kuwait in the Sarnian's favour with a brilliant burst of quick, accurate death bowling in the stifling heat and humidity to finish with 5 for 35 in a 12-run victory. The Cobo man specialised in that difficult role and every limited-over side cries out for someone like that.

The final position in the XI is a bit of a toss-up. In terms of raw ability, Will Fazakerley would walk into an island side and even earned a contract with Leicestershire because of it. Unfortunately a stress fracture to his back, as well as his penchant for football in more recent times, has largely curtailed his involvement with Guernsey cricket although hopefully not for good. In contrast, all-rounder David Hooper has been a marvellous servant as well as often being a match-winner, whether it be with his unorthodox batting, the wide variety of his bowling or his dynamic fielding. Hooper's infectious personality is also a terrific addition to any team environment.

**Team of the Decade (in batting order):**

- 1. Lee Savident**
- 2. Matt Stokes**
- 3. Jeremy Frith**
- 4. Tim Ravenscroft**
- 5. Stuart Le Prevost (Capt)**
- 6. GH Smit**
- 7. David Hooper**
- 8. Jamie Nussbaumer**
- 9. Jason Martin (Wkt)**
- 10. Will Peatfield**
- 11. Gary Rich**
- 12<sup>th</sup> Man Will Fazakerley**