

Nice One Napes



As a former Essex Captain and true Essex Boy (adopted of course) it gives me great pleasure to write a benefit article for a lad who has come through the system in the county and done well.

Napes, Plank, George, Georgie that's only a few nicknames that I was made aware of has overcome many battles (mainly injuries) to establish himself as a first class cricketer at Essex. I can remember it like yesterday when he was a seventeen year old being around the lads and his face getting lit up at all the free kit. At this stage he was looking for his first big bat sponsor (probably to flog a couple down Colchester High Street) as he hinted to one or two of the lads if they had a spare piece of willow his talent was available.

"Napes's" ability to strike the ball to all parts of Essex was obvious from the start with a good eye and pure strength. But for "Plank" knowing his own strength and making the right shot selection was going to be a challenge for all of us. We all remember it well during a match for Essex when he trudged back to the dressing room having smacked 16 off 3 balls and got caught out at the deepest, longest boundary that man could remember (fielder needed binoculars) we asked what was he thinking? What was his plan? Back came the answer "I was just pushing it for one!" Good job he didn't go for it as would have ended up in Clacton was one of many comments. What a classic!

Like many of us "George" has had his fair share of injuries. As a professional cricketer you quickly work out the difference between a niggle that you can play through or an injury that stops you competing at the highest level. Unfortunately he's had plenty of the latter starting with major back surgery what he joined us as a teenager. This was a major influence on his consistency because as proved later on in his career as he got older, stronger and stayed fit he was a dynamic cricketer! His bowling was a major asset for me when I was captain and really helped us become a force in one-day cricket again winning back to back titles in 2005 and 2006. Bowling at good pace, developing an excellent yorker and slower ball he really made everyone stand up and look. For me his batting was a bonus and when he came off, well, watch out the flat's overlooking the Ford County Ground, brutal.

Let's not forget how brilliant a fielder (in his younger days) he was! At backward point diving around stopping and catching the ball just like the Ipswich goalkeeper he had dreamt of being (height a problem there especially getting lobbed from the penalty spot!). One of his most memorable catches has to be in the late evening of the Semi Final of the Cup against Worcestershire. The mighty Graeme Hick came to the wicket and we all knew this was the guy we had to get out or we were in big trouble. Firstly I steamed in to bowl at Hicky having just knocked over the previous Worcestershire player. The noise was deafening from a packed Ford County Ground as the light started to fade. Hick got a beauty from me that bounced and left him taking a thickish outside edge which would need a huge effort to catch. "George" leapt like a salmon at backward point and took a beauty! The Essex faithful went crazy as did the players and just on that one moment our place at Lords was secure.

"Georgie" the lad? Well what can I say, very genuine, true, honest, whole hearted and committed every time he has worn the Essex shirt.

"Nice one Napes", have a successful benefit year.

Ronnie Irani
Essex and England

