

THERE'S MORE TO US THAN JUST KP!

James Ayles delves into the chronicles of Cannock Cricket Club and spots a few very familiar faces learning their trade

At 157 years old, Cannock Cricket Club have plenty of history behind them. Yet in any discussion about the Warwickshire club, long-serving club secretary Graham Machin admits that one name dominates the conversation: Kevin Pietersen.

Cannock's run to the Birmingham & District Premier Cricket League Premier Division title in 2000 featured a young overseas player who would go on to make a big name for himself elsewhere.

Yet Graham admits there are mixed memories of Pietersen's time at the club. "In that title-winning year our captain was ex-Leicestershire player Laurie Potter and our overseas player was a 19-year-old Kevin Pietersen," he said. "It's that name that everyone associates with Cannock.

"He had a few run-ins with Laurie, but he was just an overseas player who didn't stay the full course and didn't have any particular impact on or off the field. It was a surprise to see where he ended up. His talent certainly shone through and I have admiration for what he did for England over the years.

"It's always nice to say we had Kevin at the club and I wish maybe it had turned out a little different when he was with us."

Pietersen aside, Cannock have had several memorable overseas players including Australian Brendan McDonald and Big Bash winner Jake Lehmann. But for Graham, one name stands out above the rest.

South African first-class batsman Brian Barnard was set to move to the club in 2015, only to suffer a near-fatal car crash.

"He had a brain operation, and it was obvious he would not get well enough for the start of the season," he reflected.

"He put a video on Facebook of his recovery year, going from tubes and half his head cut away for operations to the first time he hit a ball again. It's quite a fantastic story. Amazingly, almost 12 months after his accident we re-signed him.

"Brian won a league batting award for us with the most number of runs; he hit a very big ball very hard and a very long way. He was keen to play not just on a Saturday but on a Sunday and it's always nice when your pro wants to play extra games."

After their success in the early 2000s, the club suffered several relegations, returning to the Staffordshire Club Cricket Championship Premier Division in 2014, where they finished runners-up in 2017.

Yet for Graham, the future is looking bright. "The club itself is in a much better place now," he adds. "The



All-rounders: Cannock Cricket Club forms part of an impressive complex with neighbouring sports clubs - but maybe not for long

whole team is made up of Cannock lads, homegrown lads who have come through the ranks and grown from the fourth XI and now they're playing at a decent quality.

"We've stuck with an overseas player every year and that's really it. Apart from that it's ten other Cannock lads playing around. It gives me a lot of pride to see that team play."

Now in his 51st year at the club, Graham has fond memories of some big-name players turning up in Cannock for benefit matches.

He said: "I remember seeing Bob Willis coming on about five paces to open the bowling against our first-team batsman. Apparently, our batsman said, 'that's not much

is it?'" after the first ball, so Bob took his full run, bounced him and the ball hit the sidescreen, it was a proper effort ball.

"We had people like Alvin Kallicharran and Norman Gifford, a lot of old school players. It was great to see because these kids got to see the players they looked up to on the field of play, and afterwards they'd have a sandwich and a beer before they went off."

Despite all that history, it is the future that is most exciting for Graham. Shared with Cannock Hockey Club, the club's current facility include three all-weather hockey pitches, two cricket pitches, a clubhouse, a bowls green, and tennis court.

Yet with debts to pay and a desire to control their own destiny, Cannock will be on the move again to a brand new ground soon.

"It's nice to see the club about to go on to its next phase," he concluded. "We all want to see this transition to our new site through so we can go into our new home and be in charge of our own destiny. We want to see the future."

Young star: Kevin Pietersen

We re-signed South African Brian Barnard just 12 months after a near-fatal car crash. It's quite a fantastic story



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