

FORWARD MARSH

No Australian cricketer made a bigger start to the summer than Mitch Marsh – and that's with both bat and ball. **Richard Asher** asks: are we watching the emergence of our next great all-rounder?

Harare Sports Club. September 2, 2014. Mitch Marsh hits a fullish Dale Steyn delivery right out the middle for a dead-straight six. The South African strike bowler is not used to such treatment. Steyn reloads. Marsh swats a short one from outside off stump. It clears mid-on to hit the clubhouse roof. Marsh is cool. Steyn's not. Take three. Marsh dispatches a full, wide one over straight mid-off. Six more. Steyn just smiles.

Smashing one of the game's most feared bowlers for three successive sixes wasn't going to make Marsh popular with Steyn, but could there be a finer way to tell the world he'd arrived? And it certainly did make him popular in the Aussie dressing room. Not to mention living rooms around the country. No more was Mitch Marsh just Shaun's kid brother.

Six shooter

The Zimbabwe triangular tournament in September wasn't the first time the giant-hitting Marsh turned out for Australia in limited-overs internationals, but it may have marked a turning point in his career. His batting was one of the happiest headlines for the Aussies in a series that had its share of difficult moments.

That Marsh hit 17 sixes in that tournament was certainly a remarkable feat. That he averaged 55, and took three wickets into the bargain, is just plain exciting. Could we be looking at an all-rounder in the mould of Jacques Kallis? Well, the 23-year-old from



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Perth, who is son of former Aussie test and ODI player Geoff, certainly hopes he'll get there.

"Kallis is someone I've always looked up to," says Marsh. "Any young all-rounder has got to admire a guy who can bat in the top five and bowl at 140km/h. I want to be a 10-over-an-innings bowler in time. That might be a bit far away from me at the moment, but I'm working hard to get the body as strong as I can, and

I'm working on my consistency. The more bowling I do, the better I'll get."

That applies to his cricket at Twenty20 level too, where he made his international debut against South Africa three years ago. "An all-rounder is a great asset in Twenty20, almost like having an extra player. The more I bowl in Twenty20 the better it is for my death bowling, and I love that challenge." ►



Marsh dispatches one of many during August's Zimbabwe triangular series



Marsh's batting and bowling stats

Batting	Mat	Inns	Runs	HS	Ave	SR	100	50	4s	6s
ODIs	9	9	261	89	37.28	91.57	0	2	19	12

Bowling	Mat	Inns	Balls	Runs	Wkts	BII	Ave	Econ	SR
ODIs	9	8	192	156	4	2 / 23	39	4.87	48

He may have a South African as one of his idols – Steve Waugh is his other – but he'll be going hard at the job of knocking the visitors over this November. "This Australian team and this South African team have built up a great rivalry over the last few years, so we're certainly looking forward to playing them on our home turf. It tends to be pretty even between us, so we want to work hard to get an edge early in the series," Marsh says.

"South Africa have a very good, very well-balanced side. Faf du Plessis was in the form of his life in Zimbabwe, and you've also got Hashim Amla and AB de Villiers as key batsmen. And then there's a bowling line-up that, to be honest, is world-class.

"But if we play our best cricket we can challenge and beat anyone in the world. Playing our aggressive cricket against South Africa, especially at home, should hopefully give us a good edge against them."

Put to the Test

The name Mitch Marsh not only threatens to come up plenty in this series, but also to be around for years to come. Things are now moving quickly for the Perth Scorchers and Western Australia star. His one-day form in

Zimbabwe earned him a call-up to the Australian Test squad for last month's series against Pakistan in the UAE.

"Every youngster's dream is to be involved in all three forms of the international game, but I'm not going to look too far ahead of myself," says Marsh, who tries his best to keep a lid on all the hype. "In the last 12 months I've worked hard on my technique, trying to keep improving. I have become a bit tighter in my defence, which really helps at international level. It was nice to do well in Zimbabwe but hopefully that was just a start."

He's right not to get ahead of himself, but the punters in the stands are free to fast-forward as much as they like. They'll know that Marsh has already captained Australia at Under 19 level. And they might wonder if they're looking at a future national skipper.

Marsh won't talk about such high honours, though: "Captaincy is something I really enjoyed as an 18-year-old kid, but it would be a bit silly of me to talk about something like that at this stage. I want to focus on cementing my place in the one-day side and not look too far ahead."

That cement seems to be drying fast. Watch for it to turn solid this November!

Removing Steyn

There's a reason South African bowling spearhead Dale Steyn doesn't get smashed for multiple sixes all that often. He's fast. And he's good. So how did Mitch Marsh manage to hit him for a hat-trick of rope-clearers?

"I've got the utmost respect for a bowler like Dale Steyn, so it was satisfying to do that against him," says Marsh. "But at the time I try not to get too concerned with who I'm facing. It's a case of just trying to focus on every ball.

"It was getting to that time of the innings. It was time to really go, and he gave me three balls in my area. At one point I went down the other end and asked Brad Haddin if I should keep it up. He told me to keep going!"

"Hitting straight is always my aim, and I think it's every batsman's aim really, especially at the death. So that's what I'm going for, but then I've just got to react to each bowler's variations."

He certainly managed to do that against Steyn. And the chances of Steyn having forgotten that when the teams turn up for the first game at the bouncy WACA Ground are nil.



Marsh celebrates a ton for Australia A – hopefully there's many more to come

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