

When David 'Bumble' Lloyd came to Bahrain, he brought with him something so quintessentially English that it made us homesick just speaking to him.

David Lloyd with the infamous 'Jack' The Russell (Ex BSPCA)

An Englishman Abroad

Before David Lloyd walked through the door of the villa, none of us were 100 per cent certain as to who he actually was. Sure, his Wikipedia page was impressive and the face looked familiar, but the fact of the matter is that we were either all too young, or too football obsessed, to know for sure. All that changed however when he opened his mouth and began to speak.

In the movie *Jerry Maguire*, the grand denouement comes when Renée Zellweger says to her Tom Cruise, 'you

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had me at hello'; when Lloyd says hello, I am immediately transported back to my childhood summers with Lloyd on the radio apparently forever as my dad gardened listening to the cricket on Radio 4. "I did that for eleven years," says Lloyd in a Lancastrian accent so smooth you could ski on it.

Later on, he would tell us that when UK satellite channel Sky Sports approached him to commentate on all their cricket coverage, "they said that mine was the voice of cricket." Before that however, he takes us back in time to his native Accrington in the North West of England. "Growing up I wanted to be a footballer, but I didn't have the heart." In fact, he did play for his home side Accrington Stanley for a short while and more recently told the Accrington Observer that he would like to be involved in the club in the future: "I would like some involvement and perhaps raise the profile. . . The town needs a football club - and I want to help to make sure they have one."

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As well as football, Lloyd played cricket at school and his skills were spotted at a young age. "I'd be playing at school, and then at county trials, and I'd look around, and I was just better than the others." He says this not with arrogance or even false modesty, but as unequivocal, northern fact. It is what it is and why pretend it is anything else. "I wasn't rich growing up; Accrington was (is) a small northern town and cricket was my way out." He says that in the 60s many towns in the north of England were insular in the extreme: "life was so parochial that I wouldn't have travelled to Blackburn (five miles down the road) for work." Cricket then, was literally his way out of Accrington.

In borrowed kit he travelled to Manchester for county trials. Aged 15 he was accepted and was soon playing with a team much older than him. "They were men and I was travelling back and forth to school." He says that when he was on his apprenticeship he actually earned more than when he went pro: "seven pounds a week when I were still at school, six when I were full time." He made the first eleven when he was eighteen, still much younger than many of his team mates. And then the hard work really started.

He says of cricket schedules then the same as he says of cricket schedules now: "teams are asked to play far too much cricket in England - it's like a treadmill throughout the summer." The tournaments then might have had different names, a testament to tobacco's banning from

sporting sponsorship, but the grind is the same. "Over the course of a week, we would be involved in three competitions over seven days. It was not unheard of for us to play 18 days straight."

He accuses 21st century cricket authorities of fostering a culture of "burn out and fatigue that is damaging the national game." He says that everywhere else in the world that cricket is played, "the game is organised for the good of the national game." By way of example, he explains how in South Africa, currently ranked number one in the world, "there are six teams who compete for the super league title each year; in Australia there are eight teams. The UK sees 18 teams battling it out week in week out over the summer." The vagaries of the English summer don't help either: "when it rains, it can seem like you are playing all day, every day, forever."

The county cricket system is setup in such a way because it is serving itself, attempting to ensure that each county

survives the harsh reality of professional sports. "In my day, we were cricketers in the late spring and summer and worked somewhere else in the autumn and winter." Then, "the club board were businessmen and would find the lads work in the winter." Today, the top teams are fully professional operations meaning that the players must be paid all year round. The logic of there being so many teams playing so many games is borne of there being a need to guarantee ticket revenue and sponsorship deals sufficient to maintain the club all year round. "It makes a kind of sense for the clubs, but less for the national side - and that's where the real money is."

Looking back, he says that test matches are the purest form of cricket. "Don't get me wrong, I am a huge fan of twenty20 and limited over matches, they are great entertainment, perfect for attracting new family audience, but for the pure love of cricket, it has to be a five day test match." He says that tests, "are exactly that, a test of skill and endurance." Asked whether cricket is a team game he says, "in the field it is, but on the wicket - it's you against him." He says too that his involvement in

'Kwik Cricket' was an attempt to promote cricket in schools and "wean kids off rounders! The hope was that we would find the stars of the future and encourage them up through the ranks until they too were playing at a test level."

For many of us too young to remember his playing days, Lloyd is intrinsically linked with our memories of the English summer. After years describing every ball played on the radio, David Lloyd moved to Sky to lead their television coverage of international cricket. Where once, he was just a voice, today he has a face. "When they phoned me and told me that I was the voice of cricket, they gave me ten minutes to decide whether I was prepared to get in front of the camera." He decided that he was and has been a part their coverage since 1999.

Comparing commentary to playing he says, "I am still as excited by the game today as I was then and anyway, I'm still knocking about with all the same faces as when I was playing international cricket; a lot of us are in the commentary box nowadays." He voice quietens, almost wistfully; the Lancastrian drawl clipped in reverence to the friends he has made: "But that's just cricket: I have made some fantastic friends over the years and we will stay together, wherever we happen to be" ■

David Lloyd was invited to Bahrain by British Club's AC Jurassic Section to speak at a dinner last month.

