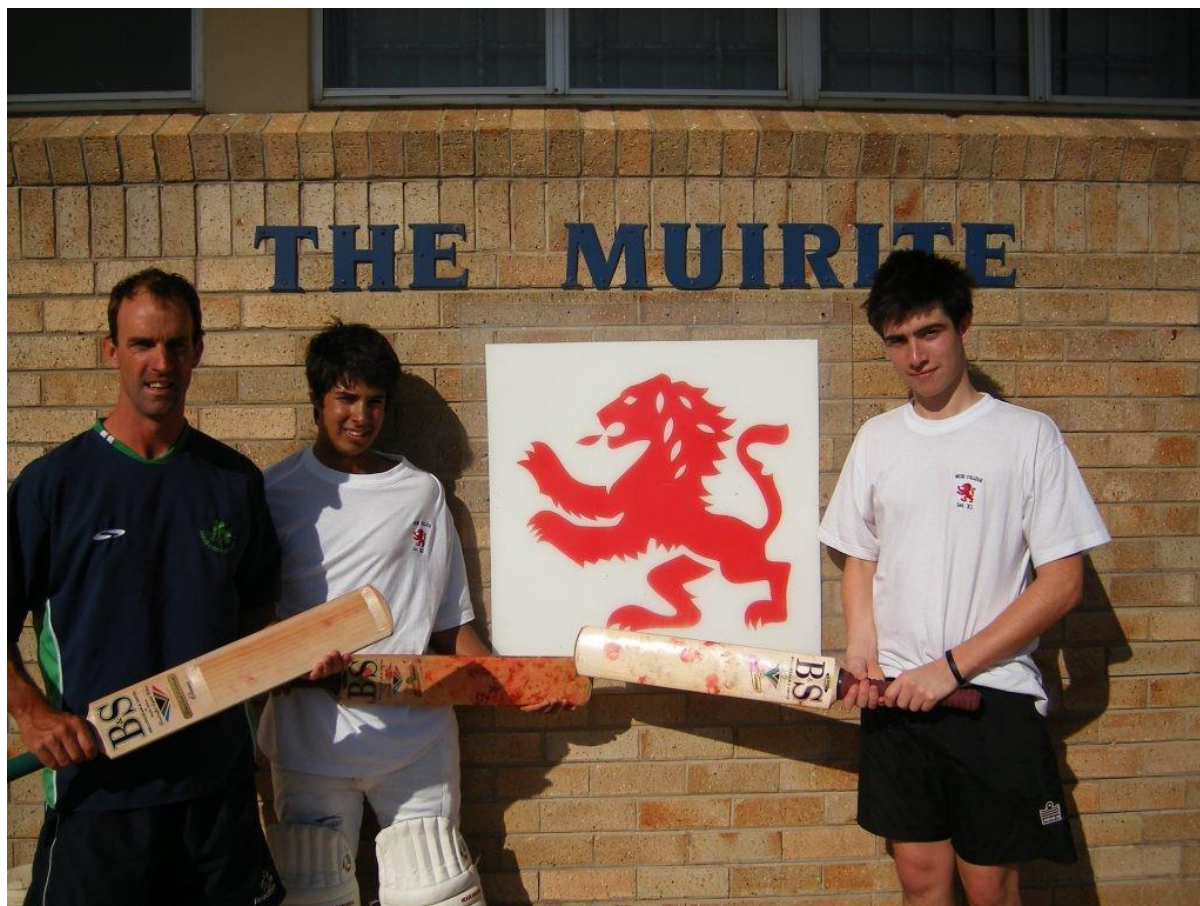


CHAPTER 48 The current test captain who played for Muir College

(sourced from Cricket Leinster's Development Programme, with particular reference to the Transition Year Placement Scheme, province of Leinster, Ireland)



Brian O'Rourke (left), Leinster Placement Programme Manager, with Sean McAuley (middle) and Andrew Balbirnie (right) in 2006

As we all wait in hope for the Irish cricket season to begin, it has allowed time to reflect on so many whose support of Cricket Leinster Youth is done selflessly, without promotion, but deserves to be acknowledged far more than it has.

Muir College may seem a distant South African college to many, but since 2003, it has played a premier role in the Cricket Leinster Transition Year Placement Programme.

The initial link was set up by Eastern Cape coach Adrian Birrell who in 2002 started a very successful period as the Head coach with the Irish National side. Adi, in conversation one day with former Muir principal and Eastern Province teammate Bun Hopley, discussed the concept of some Irish boys coming out to stay during the January to March period each year. Cricket Development Manager Brian O'Rourke, a regular visitor to Uitenhage over the

years, quickly acted on the concept and before we knew it, Ross Garvey and his dad Derek arrived to get the programme up and running.

Cricket Leinster can take advantage of the Transition Year Education programme, a non-exam year, to enable the Leinster youth players to spend time learning overseas in the classroom, sports fields and crucially the disciplined culture through staying with other students within the school Boarding Establishment.

Muir College is proud of all of its TY placement graduates but has a fond eye on those now in the Irish National sides including George Dockrell, Lorcan Tucker, Barry McCarthy, and David Delany. They hold an extra special memory of hosting the now all-format Ireland captain Andrew Balbirnie in 2006. Bun Hopley fondly remembers Andrew's first game against St Andrew's from Grahamstown, watching him score 82, and instructing the then 1st XI coach Runeshan Moodley to promote him to the 1st team with immediate effect as his talent was so clear.

When we asked Andrew for his memories of that TY placement, they are vivid ones, ones that have stayed with him and speak of why the TY placement is such a fundamental part of the Cricket Leinster Youth development programme:

'I can still remember my first day in PE. Brian collected myself and Sean McAuley in the Muir school bus and off we headed to Uitenhage not knowing what to expect. We were warmly greeted by Mr Hopley and his wonderful family, who had us over for our first taste of a South African braai. We were very fortunate that staff members such as Mr Wahl and Mr Gouws took us under their wing and made us feel right at home from day one. Even spending weekends at Mr Wahl's family home down the road and being able to watch Ireland rugby matches was a nice touch and one that I'll be always grateful for – thanks Uncle Laurie....

'The cricket itself was a huge learning curve for me at the time. I hadn't played in conditions like that before, spending 60+ overs in the field while combating the heat was completely new to me and then the challenge to follow it up with the bat was a tremendous learning curve. Batting for long periods is what was required and again coming from a base of limited overs cricket, I loved the idea of batting for as long as possible'.

'Another great memory at the time was being able to train with the Irish cricket team as coach Adi Birrell had taken them to Port Elizabeth (NMMU) for a training camp prior to the 2007 CWC in the West Indies. An opportunity to net bowl at idols and take in everything that was good about that side, to then see them take on the world's best a couple of months later (including memorable wins against Pakistan and Bangladesh and a tie against Zimbabwe) inspired not just me, but many others to go on to be an Irish international cricketer'.



Andrew Balbirnie in 2020 – Ireland’s Captain in all formats of cricket

Brian O’Rourke, who continues to manage the Transition Year programme, is not only proud of the relationship with Muir College, thankful for Adi Birrell’s initial advice, but reflects on it with great personal fondness noting: “Adi played a massive role in Irish cricket, but few know of what he did for me as a coach and many involved with Leinster cricket. The programme is still a focal part of our youth development programme in Leinster”.

For those at Muir, Brian reflects on what goes into a placement being far more than just cricket and a gap year holiday, adding “The school’s greatest asset is their staff who have been most hospitable to the visiting Leinster boys each year and looked after them so well either within the school hostel, on the cricket fields or at place like Addo, Shamwari Game Reserve or Jeffrey’s Bay at weekends. Many of the boys, as Andrew Balbirnie shared so

vividly, have such fond memories of their time at the school, all keep in touch with the students and staff and several have made return visits to Uitenhage in recent years”.

The Coronavirus has made everyone reflect on what they take for granted, and what more they can do to help others. Brian and Muir College are united in the goal that “in 2021, you will see Leinster cricketers at Muir College who like Andrew will go out boys, come back men, ready to become the cricketers they can be for Leinster and Ireland”.

It has not all been one-way traffic – former Muir pupil Brendan Meyer played a season with Belfast club Woodvale CC in 2007 while Deihne Olivier has also travelled to Dublin to play a season with Pembroke CC. Branam Adams and Dumisani Magala spent the 2013 season with Phoenix CC in Dublin. Added to this, Muir and current Warriors assistant coach Runeshan Moodley spent time in Dublin with the YMCA club.

Leinster wish Muir College and current principal Robin Stephenson all the best in building towards 2022 (when the school celebrated its 200th birthday...) and ensuring there are TY players in place to play their part in celebrating such an outstanding historical celebration for the school.



Cricket Leinster placement student Mitchell Thompson being congratulated by Muir teammates during a match in 2018



Fellow placement student at Muir in 2018, Elliot Johns, during a practice session at the school

A listing of the visiting Irish boys at Muir College is as follows:

- 2003 Ross Garvey (St Michael's College)
- 2004 Eoghan Delany & Hugo Whelan (Belvedere College)
- 2005 Conor Sheil (Skerries Community College) & Neil Boyne (Malahide Community College)
- 2006 Andrew Balbirnie (St Andrew's College) & Sean McAuley (Belvedere College)
- 2007 Robin Russell (St Clumba's), Niall Delany (Belvedere College) & George Dockrell (Gonzago College)
- 2008 Barry McCarthy (St Michael's College), Jordan Coghlan (Clongowes Wood College) & Hugh McDonnell (St Mary's College)
- 2009 Darren Nicol (Salesians, Leixlip)
- 2010 Andrew Mowatt (St Andrew's College) & Niall McGovern (Coláiste Choilm)
- 2011 Jack Balbirnie (St Andrew's College), Thomas Anders (Castleknock Community College), Michael Hogan (St Mary's College) & Benn Hoey (St Mary's College)
- 2012 Jack Tector (Sandford Park), Nick Peters (Gonzago College), Tom Stanton (Sandford Park) & Lorcan Tucker (Coláiste Eoin)
- 2013 Cameron Shoebridge (St Andrew's College) & Danny Hogan (St Mary's College)
- 2014 David Delany (Belvedere College) & Rory Anders (St Mary's College)
- 2015 Sam Murphy (Wilson's Hospital), David O'Connor (Terenure), Mark Donegan (Gormanston College), Fionn Hand (Ardgillan College)
- 2016 Ian Anders (Castleknock Community College), Eoin Barron (Gonzago College), Aaron O'Neill (St Andrew's College), Roy McGovern & Max Neville (Gonzago College)

- 2017 Harry Archer (Skerries Community College) & Aaron McGuire (St Joseph's Rush)
- 2018 Mitchell Thompson (The King's Hospital) & Elliot Johns (Sandford Park)
- 2019 Matthew Lynch (Terenure College) & Seamus Lynch (Firhouse Community College)