





NGIDI & OLIVIER

Lungi Ngidi and Duanne Olivier have emerged as the Proteas' next generation of fast bowlers

WORDS: SIMNIKIWE XABANISA

LOOKING AT THEM, LUNGI NGIDI AND DUANNE

Olivier are so different they could well be the heads or tails of the same coin.

One is Zulu, the other is Afrikaans. Ngidi is the son of a primary-school caretaker and a domestic worker; Olivier's parents work for a bank; yet Ngidi went to the prestigious private school Hilton College, while Olivier matriculated at little-known Centurion High. It took Ngidi just a handful of games to make his debut for the Proteas at 20; Olivier worked away at his craft until his time came at 24; and, of course, the players made their debuts in completely different formats.

On the other hand, it's probably prudent to point out the most obvious thing the two have in common – they are the bruisers looking to unhinge the Proteas' selectors' door the day Dale Steyn, Morne Morkel and Vernon Philander call it at day.

The experienced trio may be unpleasantly surprised at this magazine greatly exaggerating their pending demise, but even they have to admit that the end is nigh.

The fire still burns white hot in Steyn's crazy eyes, but will it remain undimmed after he

Cricket 55





gets the five wickets he needs to overtake Shaun Pollock's national record of 421 Test wickets? And how long will that famously wiry but increasingly fragile body hold?

Morkel may be fit again after a spot of back trouble, but his priorities are changing – multiple seasons in the international cricket grind aren't really first prize.

And while 'Big Vern' has been at one with his mesmerising mix of control and downright sorcery with the ball over the past seven months or so, he has been doling out his instalments of magic in between bouts of ankle issues.

Which brings us to Ngidi and Olivier who, injury permitting, could form a petrifying pace attack with Kagiso Rabada for years to come.

At 1.90m and 95kg (Ngidi) and 1.94m and 89kg (Olivier), both extract bounce from the

wicket and bowl at a similarly uncomfortable 140km/h, with the former visibly lively while the latter looks more deceptively so.

On being seen as the coming men of South African fast bowling, they take different things from being mentioned in such exalted company but one can't mistake the underlying modesty. Ngidi says it can only be motivation, while Olivier prefers to keep his head down.

'When people first started talking like that I got nervous, because those are pretty much legends of our game,' says Ngidi. 'Hearing your name mentioned along theirs at 20 can be a bit daunting, but having them come to you and congratulate you, you think, "Maybe I can do this".'

Having played over 50 first-class games before his Test debut against Sri Lanka in January, Olivier prefers to look at the queue

in front of him and the body of work those men already have: 'It's one thing to be mentioned in the same breath as Steyn, Morkel and Philander, but they've been doing so well for years and I've only played in one game [where he took five wickets]. I'll wait for my chance and be grateful if it comes again.'

But clearly the bug has bitten, if the way he helped the Knights charge over the finish line in winning the Sunfoil Series is anything to go by. In the end, Olivier took a series-topping 52 wickets at 18.13 in the tournament, with teammate Marchant de Lange a distant second with 34.

Olivier allows himself to look forward to working with Rabada: 'He's done wonders for South African cricket at only 21. He's obviously the future and working with him and Philander was an honour for me.' ■

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MUZIT/ITR/HELAR/CAP/AGENCY





Perhaps fittingly for men with seven (Ngidi) and 61 (Olivier) first-class games, their preference of format varies.

'I love both formats but they come with different tests,' Ngidi says. 'I don't really have a favourite but T20 [where he made his sensational debut against Sri Lanka] is on the top of my list at the moment. I know red-ball cricket is the ultimate but with T20 you've got to be on the button from the first ball.'

'With red-ball cricket you can bowl three bad overs and still have time to get it back together.'

For Olivier there is no contest – the longer format of the game is the be-all and end-all. Yet for all their difference in their upbringing, approaches and the fact that they barely know each other, the similarities in their progression are remarkable.

When they were in Grade 9, both were sat down by their high-school coaches and told to choose between rugby and cricket.

Ngidi, a burly inside centre, says Hilton College dean of sport Shane Gaffney broke the bad news to him: 'He told me he'd coached guys with cricket talent before [Dominic Hendricks and Temba Bavuma at St David's in Johannesburg] and he felt I would go down the same path.'

'I guess I made the right decision because this has been an amazing journey. I've got a lot to thank cricket for.'

Having already been given the talk by his coach Johan Cloete – now an international umpire – at his school, Olivier, a rangy fullback who had been a sprinter in primary school, had his decision made for him when he tore knee ligaments at around the same age Ngidi was encouraged to give up rugby. ■

THE NUMBER 21 NGIDI WEARS AT FRANCHISE LEVEL IS SUPPOSED TO BE THE AGE AT WHICH HE HOPED TO HAVE MADE HIS FRANCHISE DEBUT, AND WE ALL KNOW HOW FAR HE'S COME ALREADY



EMERGING PAIR

Lwandiso Zuma

Alongside Lungi Ngidi and Andile Phahakweyo, the 20-year-old (above) is one of the new generation of KZN kids making the grade at a young age. Zuma, who mostly plays for the Free State semi-professional team and has played a couple of T20s for the Knights, had his progress delayed by a back injury last year. But make no mistake, he is quick, as Richard Levi will tell you after being on the receiving end of a 145km/h bouncer from the Maritzburg College old boy during the T20 season.

Michael Cohen

The Reddem Constantia old boy is probably known more for nailing six distinctions in matric and playing the guitar by his SA U19 teammates. But the 19-year-old left-arm seamer happens to bowl at around 140km/h already, which means he's one to look out for in the next few years.

JOHANNESBURG: DNEY MAHANGA/GETTY IMAGES





NGIDI & OLIVIER

LIONS BOWLING COACH GORDON PARSONS ON NGIDI AND OLIVIER

NGIDI

"Ngidi's young and very much learning his trade. By that I mean his skills, what works for him, his understanding of his action and where his pace comes from. He's still very raw, hasn't played a full season yet and has already been injured, so he mustn't be pushed too soon. But he has good pace, a nice high action and bowls wicket-taking deliveries that can get rid of good players."

OLIVIER

"He's done it over two seasons now and this season was his best. His strength is that he consistently hits good areas. He can move the ball but his best attribute is that he can hit good areas. He also bowls quickly enough at 140km/h to make people hop around."

VERDICT ON WHO'S GOOD TO GO

"Lungi is very exciting but we mustn't get carried away. Most people would like to compare him to Kagiso Rabada, but Rabada's a freak in how quickly he's learned and doesn't get injured... tough wood. Olivier's other massive asset is that he can bowl long spells, which makes him an ideal replacement for Kyle Abbott."



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OLIVIER'S WICKET-TALLY IN THIS PAST SEASON'S SUNEDIL SERIES, THE MOST SINCE DILLON DU PREZ'S 55 AND MONDE ZONDER'S 54 IN 2007-08

Believe it or not, both then suffered stress fractures around Grade 10 and 11, injuries from which they made a full recovery thanks to some remedial work being done on their actions – Ngidi to get his 'straight lines' aligned and Olivier to be more front-on upon delivery.

Unlike most sportsmen, both are continuing with their studies. Ngidi is a third-year labour law student at Tuks, while Olivier studies business management through Unisa.

Getting an education was probably always the idea for Ngidi, who would never have attended Highbury Preparatory School or Hilton had it not been for cricket bursaries. He admits to having felt the odd man out among his rich-kid peers at school.

"I felt it, but I didn't let it get to me," he remembers. "I used it as motivation because I used to look at the parents and think "one day I'll be in a position to send my kids to

a school like this". Also, my parents might be domestic workers but we all had the same opportunities at the same school.

"So I asked myself, "What is stopping me from achieving whatever I want in life?"

The clincher about the similarities between Ngidi and Olivier, who are laid-back and soft-spoken, is that they both listen to house music. In explaining his love for Euphonik and DJ Kent, Olivier is very much aware of breaking the stereotypes: "I know I'm Afrikaans, but I don't listen to Afrikaans music."

What with the similarities, who would be favourite to be chosen to replace Steyn et al if the decision had to be made tomorrow? Olivier's record of 253 wickets at 20.49 from 61 games would suggest he is the more ready-made option.

But while Ngidi has played only seven games, he has made a habit of adjusting quickly to higher levels. The number 21 he wears at franchise level is supposed to be the age at which he hoped to have made his franchise debut, and we all know how far he's come already.

It's a theory backed up by the fact that from the day he spearheaded Hilton's bowling attack at 16, he has always found himself having to do it over and over again.

So what would the decision be? Well, if you tossed a coin the new ball would be in safe hands, regardless of whether it fell on heads or tails. ❏

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