

# **Breeding Talent: Brett Lee- from Backyard, to World's Fastest Bowler 2007**

By Chris Beaumont and Joe Millman.

## *Brett Lee Summary Box*

**Sport:** Cricket

**Time Spent with the Academy:** 3 years (1990-1992)

**IAS Highlight:** “The Academy is very important as it is a great stepping stone in developing young talent, it provides the platform to move forward to develop each individual’s true potential.”

**Career:**

- 1994 selected to play in the Australian Under-19 side for a tour of India.
- First-Class debut for NSW in 1997
- 1999 awarded the Wisden Young Cricketer of the Year Award
- December 1999 selected to play for Australia in his first Test Match against India. Became the first Australian in 22 years to claim a wicket in his first test over.

“I remember hearing this really loud crack and I saw him stumbling. There was blood all over the pitch. I felt sick; it shocked me.” Australian cricketer Brett Lee was 12 when he claimed his first short-ball victim and he continues to add casualties to his list today. “As much as I wanted to bowl as fast as I could at that age, seeing the results made me think I'd gone too far,” Lee says.

Despite that admission, he hasn't held back since that eventful day 17 years ago. He is still wildly passionate about his cricket, and he is still taking batsmen by surprise.

His reputation as a ferocious fast bowler, notorious for his ability to break both stumps and the confidence of batsmen, stems from his time spent as a fresh-faced

junior cricketer in the IAS. Lee's time at the Academy spanned three years from 1990, and laid the groundwork for his state and international appearances. Lee's first tour came in 1990, when he and the IAS squad travelled to Wagga Wagga and Canberra. The team stayed in an old shearing shed, and the highlight of the tour was seeing an electric turbine. Today, Lee stays in five-star hotels and witnesses some of the most sought after tourist attractions in countries all over the world.

The young paceman sees his humble beginnings at the Academy- the training, working and competing rigorously- as an important time in his career. "I learnt about discipline, developing my skills in a team environment and developing the realisation of the fun associated with doing what I love," Lee says.

Brett's first taste of International cricket came in 1994, two years after graduating from the IAS when he was selected to play in the Australian Under 19s side for a tour of India. A month after bursting onto the First-Class scene with NSW in 1997, Lee was selected for the Australia 'A' side to play South Africa.

But things could have been very different. Throughout his career, Brett has been dogged by lower back injuries with the first major injury in 1994. It kept Lee sidelined for several months, but he was able to regain the fitness and vigour that had initially gained the interest of both state and national selectors.

Lee was again bowling well and turning heads, but unfortunately re-opened the stress fractures in his back. This injury was so severe he was placed in a back brace for over three months. "It went from my head to my bum," he said. "I looked like

Frankenstein, and was basically off my feet for 14 weeks. The rest of the season was a write off,” he adds.

Lee has also sustained injuries to his elbow that have required surgery. Yet throughout his recovery periods he has remained as strong willed as ever. Nothing could stop the Brett Lee juggernaut. One year later, he was back playing for his club and State, and continued to fire on all cylinders.

One of the most important influences on Brett’s cricketing career, through the good times and the bad, has been his brother, Shane Lee. As the elder of the two, Shane blazed the trail for Brett to follow, right through the IAS, State cricket for NSW Blues and culminating in 1999 when Shane’s international career ended and Brett’s blossomed.

In 1992, Brett was the only one of 20 male cricketers in the Academy to represent the New South Wales Under 17 squad, meanwhile Shane was representing Australia in the Under 19 team.

The two brothers played together on the One-Day International stage in 1999, shortly before Brett was awarded the Wisden Young Cricketer of the Year Award- a far cry from their childhood days in the backyard where Shane dominated. “Shane always set the rules and he was a little bit of a cheat too,” Brett says.

Shane, meanwhile remembers Brett requiring some assistance from their mother.

“One time I scored 300 odd and got Brett out first ball and mum had to come out and give me a smack and make sure I bowled to him again,” he says.

Shane was there for Brett’s big moment (without his mother’s help), when he was selected to play for Australia in his first Test Match against India. It took him only four deliveries in his first ever Test over before he claimed the scalp of Sadagoppan Ramesh with a scintillating pace, becoming the first Australian in 22 years to claim a wicket in his first over.

The brotherly love has evolved from pure backyard competitiveness to both men sharing great admiration for each other. While his brother has retired to a quieter life, Brett Lee continued to shine on the international cricket stage. Although the effects of his talent once scared him it never slowed him down.