



STARC RESEMBLANCE

*Standing at over two metres tall, imposing left-arm quick **Marco Jansen** burst onto the Test scene for South Africa in 2022 – and he’s drawing comparisons to another left-armer more familiar to Aussie fans.*

by Richard Asher

Australian Test aficionados are well accustomed to the sight of a beanpole left-armed paceman wearing the Baggy Green. One so tall that he sticks out of the huddle like Don Bradman’s average on a bar chart. The unmistakable figure of Mitchell Starc has brought a unique dimension to the home attack for 11 years now.

But the 32-year-old Starc won’t be the only lanky lefty on the scene this time around: Mitchell, meet Marco.

While Marco Jansen’s appearance on the same field as Australia’s contemporary left-arm destroyer makes for a compelling parallel, it’s not the only comparison to have been drawn. Some have likened the youngster to Bruce Reid, that Western Australian pretty handy at turning his left

shoulder over for his country back in the 1980s and 90s.

Ask the 22-year-old himself, however, and he’ll point to yet another Aussie left-armer as the cricketer he’d most like to emulate: Mitchell Johnson.

“I remember watching that 2013-14 Ashes series, where Johnson just bowled quickly and got 37 wickets,” Jansen says. “He was definitely someone I looked up to growing up and whom I aspired to be like.”

Whomever he may resemble the most, it’s still early days for the South African. In fact, if he’s picked for the Melbourne Test, he’ll be exactly one year old as a Test cricketer. But he’s been turning heads ever since dismissing the likes of Virat Kohli, Ajinkya Rahane and Mayank Agarwal on debut last Boxing Day. While South Africa’s side has had its ups and downs, ►



ABOVE: Jansen fires one in for South Africa during the February 2022 Test vs. New Zealand in Christchurch

TEST BOWLING RECORD

MATCHES: 7
INNINGS: 13
BALLS: 1,259
RUNS: 688
WICKETS: 37
BB: 5-35
BBM: 7-91
AVERAGE: 18.59
ECONOMY: 3.27
STRIKE RATE: 34.0
4W: 4
5W: 1
10W: 0

Jansen has stood out as the most exciting addition to an already powerful bowling unit.

SHOT OUT OF A CANNON

For South Africa to have unearthed a scary left-armer at long last is an invigorating plus. Aussie fans will need long memories to recall the last Proteas southpaw to have given them cause for concern. That was arguably Brett Schultz, who sent six of Mark Taylor's men back to the sheds in the "dead" 1997 Test at Centurion. But the injury-prone Schultz never played Australia again – and South Africa battled to find a lasting replacement.

Jansen's emergence at that same ground 25 years later may just have ended the quest. Though he only came into that XI to face India as a result of an injury to Anrich Nortje, picking up five wickets in his first Test made him difficult to leave out going forward. Even more so after he snared 14 further wickets over the next two

“He took the coveted scalp of Joe Root on both occasions he bowled at him”

games as the underdog Proteas bounced back from an opening defeat to win the series 2-1.

That booked Jansen a ticket to New Zealand, where he took another nine scalps in a drawn two-match series with the reigning World Test Champions. Then, in August, it was off to England. He emerged from a losing cause with credit – and his first five-wicket haul in an innings.

That's Jansen's fledgling Test career in a nutshell – but arriving in Australia with 37 wickets at an average below 20 is not to be sniffed at. And it's worth noting he took the coveted scalp of Joe Root on both of the occasions he bowled at the mainstay of England's batting.

Though he doesn't quite have Starc's pace, nor the New South Welshman's yorker, Jansen has made himself a tough customer as only a lofty left-armer can.

The right-handed bat feels cramped for space as he tries to deal with steep bounce off a fullish length, angled tight across him in a way that makes letting it go counterintuitive. Especially when he's seen the ball swing back in once or twice.

Left-handers may find life 22 yards down the track from Jansen a touch easier, but there's reason to believe he'll come up with a plan for the likes of David Warner. He's shown himself to be a fast learner, a trait evident right away on debut. His first-innings display last Boxing Day ▶

FUN FACT

Jansen has a twin brother, Duan, who plays first-class cricket and is also a left-arm quick. Starc's brother Brandon, meanwhile, has channeled the family tallness gene differently by representing Australia as an Olympic high-jumper.





was actually pretty poor – but he adjusted quickly, roaring back with four wickets the second time around.

Though he’s a gentle giant for the most part, playing in his first series was no reason to hold back occasional aggression either. He was involved in verbals more than once, most notably getting into a war of words with Jasprit Bumrah after peppering his fellow bowler with short deliveries. The umpire had to step in to break up that Johannesburg spat.

In England, Jansen kept a lid on things, while mostly sticking to a length that would find him some swing. Australian conditions will ask tougher questions – both strategically and in terms of the mental battle. Whether he can change it up as required will go a long way to establishing whether he’s the real deal.

ABOVE LEFT: Though a bowler by trade, Jansen’s batting ability is not to be underestimated

ABOVE RIGHT: Jansen claims the wicket of England’s Alex Lees in the third Test vs. England at The Oval in September 2022

EYE ON THE PRIZE

One thing’s for sure: the first Proteas cap born in the 21st century is licking his chops at a return to the hard wickets of his home hemisphere.

“The Australian pitches should mostly favour the seam bowlers,” remarked Jansen as the series in England was drawing to a close. “Because you get a bit more bounce... and all those nice things! It’s going to be an exciting series.”

He may particularly enjoy trying to bag the wicket of Marnus Labuschagne in said series. That’s because both hail from the same little town (think Bendigo...) that is Klerksdorp. Labuschagne’s Afrikaans might be rusty, but he’ll know exactly

what Jansen’s saying if the bowler lets a few choice words fly out in the middle.

Look for Jansen to make telling contributions with the bat too. Coming in as high as number seven, he brings an excellent eye and a confident nonchalance to the crease. His towering frame is a game-changer for bowlers, who will be unable to settle on a length for as long as Jansen is at the wicket. He can drive balls men of lesser stature can’t – and do so with surprising elegance at times.

Sounds a lot like Starc the batter, doesn’t it? Another sub-plot to the battle between Australia’s left-arm skyscraper and his young South African challenger, perhaps? Jansen may look like Starc’s double, but only when he gets onto the same field will we know if his stunts can compare. ●



MARCO JANSEN

- BORN:** 1 May 2000
- HOME TOWN:** Klerksdorp, South Africa
- ROLE:** All-rounder
- BATTING STYLE:** Right hand
- BOWLING STYLE:** Left-arm fast
- TEST DEBUT:** 2021
- TEST APPEARANCES:** 7

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