OXFORD rain put paid to Australian Universities’ chances of success in their inaugural cricket match against Oxford Universities on Tuesday.

Chasing 313 to win in 98 overs, the visitors looked to be cruising towards victory at 240/6 off 63 overs when heavy showers hit The Parks.

By the time the rainclouds disappeared and the hard-working Oxford groundstaff removed the water from the covers and the infield, Australian Universities Cricket Clubs were left with only 11 overs to get the runs - a task that proved too much with the rapid departures of Dan Mulvenna, Jimmy Hortle and Tim Newhouse in their pursuit of quick runs.

It was left to Melbourne University all rounder Chris Grant and University of Queensland opening bowler James Holliday to ensure the popular visitors finished with a well deserved draw.

Grant made a polished unbeaten half-century (following on from 10 economical overs on Monday) that must have put him close to Player of the Match honours for his team. The cultured left-hander who is currently plying his trade with Welwyn Garden City looked a class act in the visitors’ deep batting line-up.

The start of the day had been lit up by Monash University’s Sathesh Sriskandarajah whose timing and power brought the 100-plus spectators at The Parks to life very early in the day.

University of Queensland’s Brendan Logue, Adelaide Uni’s Harry Byrnes Howe and ANU all-rounder Nathan Docker rounded out a top four that all looked secure and accomplished, but failed to pass 40.

It was Mulvenna, with a short backlift and punchy drives, who looked like the man most likely to post a half-century until he was unfortunate to be given out caught behind on what was a thrilling day.

The match proved to be a great success - with healthy crowds on both days and the Oxford and Oxford Brookes players appreciating the chance to play a two-day game with all of the ebbs and flows that it entails.

The Australian Universities players were great ambassadors for their country with spectator requests for autographs and photos, and media demands for interviews always being granted with a smile. Their quick over rate and attacking fields when bowling, and consistent scoring at around four runs per over were also appreciated by the crowds on each day.

Ironically it was the team’s designated non batsman Jakob Roth who won a custom-made bat from Oxfordshire batmaker Saibats as the Australian Player of the Match. The Adelaide University firebrand shared eight wickets with fellow pacemen Holliday and Gordon Kerr on a first day when Roth, in particular, constantly beat both edges of the Oxford players’ bats.

Speaking from the team’s base at the Oxford Belfry yesterday morning, skipper Tim Newhouse said the four-day tour had exceeded all expectations.

"We had envisaged that the tour would have been all about building ties with Oxford and playing a competitive match, but it quickly morphed into an Australian intervarsity get-together with players who would rarely meet, if ever, getting on famously and building ties between our Premier Cricket universities."

"We are thrilled at the prospect of playing inaugural matches against Cambridge University and other MCCUs next year. But equally exciting, for example, is the very real prospect of the University of Tasmania and Melbourne University resuming intervarsity matches with each other after a 50-year hiatus - all due to jovial team dinners and relaxed recovery sessions 12,000 miles away from our university clubs."