

1997-2000 - Dave Weston

After the euphoria of the Sykes Cup/Paddock Shield/Examiner Mini Cricket Treble in 1996 the next major challenge for Scholes Cricket Club, by now firmly established as a real force in the Huddersfield League, was to show consistent form and win the first League Championship in the club's history.

As with all clubs, changes had occurred during the winter and although not many players leave Scholes Cricket Club through choice the outstanding Chetan Sharma Indian International and popular favourite among all at Scholes was not retained. The signing of Chetan had proved a masterstroke, it gave the club credibility and showed the ambition which attracted other quality players. Other changes were also made, Bob Milne, legendary drinker, did not return from Peterborough and Steve Booth, one of the people who drove Scholes to the top of Huddersfield League Cricket, stood down as chairman to be replaced by Bob Pell. On the incoming side Craig Horner, the affable Australian well regarded throughout the League signed from Skelmanthorpe, Tom Weston from Mirfield and Scott Marsh came as wicket keeper. Another major change was Paul Wharton standing down as captain to be replaced by myself. An inspirational captain, Paul had instilled a great team spirit in the Scholes dressing room and surely the first league title was very close.

The signing of Chetan Sharma had cost the club a lot of money and my first thought was that we did not want to follow the boom and bust cycle of so many other clubs. I also felt that the club's English talent was as good as anywhere and that these players deserved the opportunity to perform themselves in Section A.

My first season 1997 will be remembered as one of the wettest on record. I remember playing in fog and mist at Meltham, a week long Sykes cup tie at Lepton Highlanders, an early exit from the Sykes Cup at the hands of Honley and trips to places such as Goole Town and Harden as an inconsistent team managed a trip to the Yorkshire Champions final where a disappointing loss to Pickering ended a mediocre campaign.

The 1998 season followed a similar pattern. Scholes had great strength in depth putting out two strong teams with the 2nd XI playing in section B and not only holding their own but also beating many of the teams we had struggled to beat five years earlier. A Paddock Shield win was also a deserved reward for a squad including the likes of Nicky and Darryl Brook. My memories of the season were of another inconsistent summer both for play and the weather. A Sykes Cup semi-final against Hall Bower was lost on a Monday night, Spen Victoria came to Chapelgate in a heavy woollen semi-final (the unofficial Yorkshire Cup) and won and an enjoyable trip to the Radbrook Hall Hotel, Shropshire was again enjoyed, as the tradition for an annual tour was revived.

After two years as Captain I knew that the team was good, but to become great I thought extra quality was required. With this in mind, and the committees' blessing,

I went with Paul Wharton and signed surely the best ever batsman to have graced Chapelgate, Wasim Jaffer.

The new season started well with early victories boosting optimism. New signing Nick Bisby batted well and the whole team began to look like a unit. It was obvious when playing against him what a class player Wasim Jaffer was and for all at Chapelgate his innings became compulsive viewing. Has the league itself ever seen such classical style with shots to all parts played to the highest standards and technical level? Add on to that a modest character and it is not hard to see why he is held in the highest regard both at Scholes and by the rest of the league. He had found a welcoming home in England at Scholes.

As the 2000 season dawned I was becoming frustrated at some people's observation that Scholes Cricket Club were the 'nearly team' of the league. With Wasim Jaffer (now an Indian Test Player) settled in and confirmed as the best player in the league we had a professional who was the envy of many clubs in Yorkshire. We also had quality and talent with Simon Parkinson (the best seam bowler in the league in my opinion), Andy Hutchison and Coddy (the legend) all consistent performers as well as talented batsmen Nick Bisby, Tom Weston and Ian Bray, and Kristian Whittaker was emerging as an all rounder. I now added to this one more quality player in Chris Stockdale who had played cricket round the world and at Minor Counties and Northern League level and had experience and class. I convinced him he was joining the best club around, a fact I am not sure he was convinced of when I collected him one Friday in April to take him to a foggy Chapelgate to meet Coddy!!

Needless to say with all that talent in the squad the team won on a regular basis and became THE team to beat. At the halfway stage though Delph and Dobcross aided by a few drops of rain were twelve points clear and a few doubts about our challenge began to surface.

A Sykes Cup run had progressed and on a hot day in June Lascelles Hall were beaten in a pulsating quarter final when the crowd at Chapelgate roared us to an unlikely victory. At the end of the game a very popular member of the team, Paul Wharton, hung up his boots and as all enjoyed a night of drinking a naked game of cricket (the first and the original), later to be immortalised on page 3 of The Sun and the Big Breakfast (channel 4), took place. This was then followed by another unbelievable game v Delph in the semi-final (over 600 at Chapelgate) and then yet another Sykes Cup disappointment as without the injured Simon Parkinson and despite another memorable Jaffer century at Elland, Kirkburton took home the cup. Our next game against Slaithwaite, our only challengers, demanded character; the team delivered with a crushing 100 run win. This left us a run in of Kexborough, Linthwaite, Elland and finally Hall Bower at home on the last Saturday. Nothing we couldn't handle there. However on Tuesday Wasim dropped the bombshell that he had to return home early for Indian State training - we would have to play the last four games without him!

In many ways this allowed the team to dispel the persistent accusations that we were a one-man side. The quality of the squad showed through as both Kexborough and Linthwaite were seen off, before a worrying loss at Elland left us needing to beat Hall Bower on the final day of the season.

A good score of over 200 included Chris Stockdale's 100th hundred in club cricket, and although happy with this, the darkening skies meant we would have to hurry to get in our overs. Simon Parkinson chipped in with five wickets in a twenty-five over spell as a large crowd gathered to watch the climax. As the last ball was delivered I felt an overwhelming sense of relief that the goal of the last four seasons had been achieved and Scholes Cricket Club were Huddersfield League Champions.

To captain Scholes Cricket Club was both an honour and a pleasure. For me there will never be another club to touch it. The enthusiasm, the friendliness, the ambition which are all apparent in the people involved in the club all go together to make it special. The dressing room has always been an inspiration providing a special spirit, which has been our 12th man in close situations. I wake up on Saturdays always looking forward to playing for Scholes. I will continue to contribute both on and off the field in whatever way I can and will never forget the day the Byrom Shield came to Chapelgate for the first time.

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