

## Under-13's Report

By Stephen Bottom (Coach)

WHAT A SEASON... WHAT A SQUAD...

I have had the great pleasure of running the clubs Under 13s team this season, and what a season it has been.

For me, it started a month before the first ball was bowled, when 5 new players joined our club to add strength and depth to our existing Under 13's squad. The players who joined were, James Coleman, an attacking batter and fast bowler. Matthew Jones, an opening batter, and swing bowler. Fred Hallworth, an 'entertaining' batter who bowls leg-spin. Josh Armer, a batter and wicketkeeper, and Elijah Kelly who is also a batter and wicketkeeper. So, with having 17 players in our squad, I made the decision at the start of the season to form a joint team with our good friends at Saddleworth CC; so, to provide everyone with the opportunity for some game time.

The season started like it always seems to do, with bad weather! So, our first game against Saddleworth CC was postponed. With us being drawn at home against a very strong Whalley Range CC team in the Lancashire Cup, this therefore meant that we would only have one game to play in the league before this game, and this was at home against Glodwick CC.

Against Glodwick CC, we batted first and scored 117 [I told the players that we should always be looking to score around 120 in a 20-over game, as a run-a-ball is always a good target at this age group]. Both James and Troy batted well, both having to retire, with good 30s. [*In league games, batters must retire once they reach 30-runs*] We then proceeded to bowl them out for 55. The best bowling figures coming from Evelyn with 1 wicket for 2-runs, Matthew Hardwick with 2 wickets for 8-runs and Ted with 1 wicket for 2-runs.

In only our second game, we were against one of the favourites for the Lancashire Cup Competition, in Whalley Range CC. Batting first, we scored a very low score of 61 all out, and this would have been a lot lower had it not been for Ted and Frankie who put on a 20-run partnership to get us to that score. [An interesting comment made by Fred, when asked at 37-7 "what's happened?"; he replied, "Nothing, if we get to 50, we'll win this"] At the halfway stage, I got the players into the changing rooms and told them to go out and enjoy themselves, support one another and play as a team. At which point, Freddie, our new, shy, and very quiet all-rounder piped-up and said, "Or we can just bowl them out gaffer, will that do?". [*I just smiled*]. What happened next, must go down as one of the most memorable moments ever witnessed at Greenfield Cricket Club. Whalley Range, one of the favourites for the cup, were bowled out for 10 [ten]; (*I'll spell that like they do on the BBC 'Final Score', just in case you think it's a misprint!*) Their highest scoring batter only scored 1-run.

There were some unbelievable bowling figures with James taking 1 wicket for 1-run, Harry taking 2 wickets for no-runs, Troy taking 2 wickets for 2-runs and no surprises that the star bowling performance was from Freddie, with 4 wickets for 1-run!

We next played Woodhouses CC in the league (*we had also been drawn against them in the quarter finals of the Lancashire Cup, so this was a good opportunity to see how good they were*)

Greenfield 140 for 4, Woodhouses 78 all out.

Batting performances were from James with 31 not-out, Troy 31 not-out, Harry 21, Cillian 18, and Freddie 14 not-out.

Everyone managed to bowl, with the best bowling figures from Matthew Hardwick 2 wickets for 1-run and Matthew Jones with 2 wickets for 4-runs.

Our successful start to the season had caused a slight issue, with other teams now looking at our performances and 'taking note' (*and especially the result against Whalley Range*). Other teams became very reluctant to play us.

This made organising games for the rest of the season very hard, with teams like Uppermill CC and Mottram CC both being honest with me and saying that they did not want to play us, because they did not want their players to lose moral and confidence by facing us. (*This was even after I offered to them, that I would be very flexible and ask our bowlers to bowl slowly etc*).

Unfortunately, this happened more and more during the season and the only way I could get teams to play us, was if I asked our players to either bowl slower or change how the bowled. We also, on numerous occasions, called back batters when they were rightfully out, to give players and opposition teams a better chance.

This however, made me feel very proud, as not one of our players ever complained, and everyone always showed great respect and sportsmanship to the opposition.

Probably the biggest disappointment of the season came in our following game against Woodhouses CC in the Lancashire Cup, were we restricted Woodhouses CC to 77 for 7, but then after some very 'suspicious' umpiring (ask Mr Colman), we collapsed to 55 for 9 in reply.

On reflection, I blame myself for this performance. At the start of the game, I was asked by the Woodhouses coach if they could change their wicketkeeper halfway through, so he could have a bowl. (*Which I agreed they could, although it was against cup rules*)

He then went on to bowl figures of 2 wickets for 3-runs and effectively won them the game.

We played Moorside CC next with us posting 134 for 5. Matthew Jones 32 not out, Troy 30 not out, Freddie 30 not out and Josh 13 were the pick of the batters. Moorside finished on 74 for 2 in reply.

I must make a special mention for Dexter. Dexter is one of our Under 11's and who was playing Under 9's softball only last year. Dexter stepped-up to play in our game against Woodhouses when we were short. During the Woodhouses game, he was hit-on-the-leg whilst facing their fast Lancashire bowler, and despite being hurt he bravely carried on. All the team wanted him to play against Moorside, so after 'shaking-off' his bruised leg and agreeing to play, he bowled and got best figures of 1 wicket for 4-runs.

At this stage in the season, the league gets split into a Performance League and a Development League; and with us being top-of-the-table, we moved into the Performance League along with the other best teams from other divisions.

Our first game in the Performance League was against Woodhouses CC where we got our revenge.

Woodhouses were 78 all out and we replied with 81 for 6.

The best bowling figures were from Matthew Hardwick 2 wickets for 1-run and Matthew Jones with 4 wickets for 3-runs. The best batting performances came from James with 30 not out and Matthew Jones with 15 not out.

Next up, our neighbours and good friends from Saddleworth CC. This is one fixture that everyone looks forward to, with everyone expecting a close game.

Despite the build-up to the game, the 'main event' was a bit of an anti-climax, as we bowled them out for 18.

The best bowling figures came from Cameron with 3 wickets for 3-runs, James with 2 wickets for no-runs with everyone getting a bowl and claiming wickets.

For the spectators, it wasn't much of a game, and it took longer for the bacon to cook than their innings.

When it came to our innings, the team decided that they wanted those who don't always get a chance to bat, to get some time in the middle. Our highest scorer was Ted with 9 not out and we ended with 20 for 2.

Our next two matches were meant to be our hardest games, with both Dukinfield and Shaw being very strong and winning most of their previous games.

Dukinfield CC was first, with Dukinfield posting 70 for 9. Our best bowling figures came from Harry with 3 wickets for 3-runs.

In response, we scored 74 for 0 with James 30 not out and Matthew Jones 30 not out. An excellent win.

Next up, Shaw CC who had also beaten Dukinfield and were unbeaten.

We batted first and scored 117 for 5 with Matthew Jones 32 not out, Troy 27 and Cillian 20 not out. We then restricted them to 81 for 6 with Matthew Jones 3 wickets for 10-runs and Ted 2 wickets for no runs.

After this run of games, things got a bit 'tricky', with the poor weather and with teams being reluctant to play us, we lost ground in the league despite still being unbeaten. Woodhouses CC eventually took top spot having played more games (Even playing games in the rain).

The league committee gave us a deadline to get games in and even though it's not always about winning, we didn't want to finish second in the league through not being able to play games.

Luckily, both Heyside CC and Royton CC agreed to play us mid-week and these two games were played with a lot of our players away on holiday.

We therefore asked 5 of our Under 11's squad to play. Dexter, James, Tom, Charlie, and Edward all stepped-up and all did an amazing job.

Heyside CC should [on paper] have been an easy game and we managed to keep their score to 80 for 8, which was Heyside's highest total of the season.

During Heyside's innings, there was another moment that made me immensely proud to coach this under 13's squad.

The moment came when Josh (our wicketkeeper) stumped a young player "out". On seeing that the lad was crying and that he was unsure why he was given out, Josh asked if the player could come back-in. This was not instigated or suggested by me, and was purely down to Josh. This got a great reaction from the very large crowd watching and showed that being a sportsman can sometimes be more rewarding than winning,

The player went on to score 11 not out.

Our best bowling came from our Under 11 player Edward, who had figures of 2 wickets for 4-runs, Harry who had 3 wickets for 17-runs and Matthew Jones with 2 wickets for 12-runs.

When batting, we just managed to get 'over-the-line' with great knocks from Troy 23 and from Man-of-the-Match in all aspects, Josh with 15 not out.

Royton CC should have been a tricky game as they have had some very good results, however unfortunately for Royton their best players had been missing for most of the season, due to playing for Lancashire.

When we played them, we also had players missing, so this was set-up for an interesting game.

Going into the game, we knew that a win would clinch the league title and that we would be undefeated in the league.

We started very poorly and batting first we only managed to get to 63 all out. Our top scorer, with a very important 27, was from Ted and 11 from Troy.

Again, under pressure they pulled together as a team to bowl Royton out for 51, with great bowling figures from Matthew Jones 3 wickets for 8-runs, Troy with 3 wickets for 11-runs and Ted with 2 wickets for 13-runs.

In this game, both Ted and Cam were the pick of the players. Whilst batting, Cam came-in as last batter and simply stayed at the crease, whilst big hitting Ted got the score to 63.

He then, with our 4 main bowlers all bowled-out and the game still in the balance with Royton only needing 11 runs to win, took the ball and with his second ball bowled their last batter out.

This led to great celebrations, with us not only winning a very hard-fought game, but also winning the league.

Despite winning the league, the season was not finished, as we still had the GMCL Cup to play. This is a league format where you play 3-games and if you finish top, you move on to the knockout stage.

We were drawn against Glodwick CC and Moorside CC with us also gaining a bye because we had finished top of the league.

So, with only needing to win two games and the rules of no batting retirements in place for the GMCL Cup, I was confident that we could progress.

First up was Glodwick CC. We bowled them out for 33 with best figures from James with 2 wickets for 2-runs. We reached the score for 1 with Troy getting 25 not out and Matthew Jones 10 not out.

Next, Moorside CC. With us winning the toss and batting first we went on to score an unbelievable 241 for 3 with James scoring 100 retired/not out (Only James will know

what he would have scored if I had let him carry on). Matthew Jones scored 54 and big hitting Ted, with a great 32 off only 10-balls. This score saw us break a junior record.

We then bowled them out for 55, giving everyone the chance to have a bowl. Our best figures were from Thea with 3 wickets for 6-runs, Fred 2 wickets for 1-run and Under 11's player Tom Russell with 1 wicket for no runs.

With these two wins, it was on to the knockout stages.

Denton St Lawrence CC was up first in the quarter finals, were we batted first and scored 158 for 3, James scoring 74, Cillian scoring 32 not out and Troy 21 being the pick of the batters. We then restricted them to 112 for 6, again everyone having a bowl. The best bowling figures were again Thea with 2 wickets for 13-runs, Cillian with 2 wickets for 17-runs and Ted with 1 wicket for no runs.

On to a semi-final against Roe Green CC. This game, from a coaching perspective was a great game. Even though we lost the game with the very last ball; I learned so much about the team and individual players.

After scoring 113 for 4 (our best batting performance coming from James 50 not out and Matthew Jones 20), they knocked it off for 117 for 7 (out best bowling was from Troy 4 wickets for 25-runs and Matthew Jones with 2 wickets for 23-runs).

The reason why I learned so much, was because of the reaction from all the players. They all blamed themselves for the defeat, they all reflected on the game, and I heard them saying "if I had just stopped that" or "hit that" or "bowled there" etc., they all looked at themselves and worked out what they could have done better.

This reaction was great to see; nobody blamed anyone else, and they all took personal responsibility.

Even though not one of them was to blame they all looked at themselves and thought of a way in which they could improve, and that, as a coach, is all what you want to see.

Even though James had to retire at 50 (*Both coaches had decided this before the game, so this would happen for both sides*) for me, it was by far James best batting performance of the season.

Onto the last game of the season, the 'Champions of Champions' game against Prestwich CC who had won the Performance League on the east side of Manchester. So effectively it was East v West, to find out who was the "Best of the Best".

Unfortunately, due to this game having to be rearranged for a Saturday and being inconvenient for several of our players, this was the proverbial "a game too far", as we arrived at the game with only 9-players.

The 9-players put in a tremendous effort, and I was very proud of them. They restricted Prestwich to 115. In our reply, despite a very encouraging start, we came up short, finishing on 55 for 7 with 10-overs remaining.

To finish (*and thank you for reading this far*), there are some big "Thank You" that I'd like to make.

Firstly, I want to say a great big "thank you" to all the wonderful parents / grandparents / guardians, who's dedication and backing throughout the season has been amazing. Without your support and commitment in getting up early on Sunday

mornings and having your child available, travelling to games etc., this season would not have been so successful.

Secondly, a big “thank you” to our secret sponsor who kindly made our success look amazing with paying for all the lovely, coloured kits that all the players wear. Also, to Liz for organising the ordering and delivery of them all.

Thirdly, to all the coaches, volunteers and my brother who have helped-out with training this season.

Lastly, but by no means least, the biggest “thank you” from me, goes to our two tea ladies, my Mum and Cath who come to the club week-in, week-out to cook bacon butties, provide drinks and biscuits, do any First Aid, and generally take care of everyone's needs. These two fantastic ladies could never be replaced at Greenfield CC and the work they put in is unbelievable. It is so much appreciated by all; they are amazing and “thank you” very much. (*Although we do need eggs with our bacon butties next season*)

Thank you to everyone and I'm already looking forward to winter nets.

*Ste*