

**GREAT MATCH**  
**By Dominic Kureen**

**Opponents:** Booth  
**Venue:** Copley Lane  
**Date:** 14 September 2002  
**Event:** Halifax League Division 1 title decider

**COPLEY WIN BUT FALL SHORT OF HISTORIC HAT-TRICK**

The 2002 season will go down as one of the most exciting in the history of Halifax League cricket. Copley went into the season as favourites to retain the league title for a record-breaking third successive year despite losing their brilliant all-rounder Lee Smith and quick bowler James Dixon during the close season. Booth were somewhere towards the other end of the spectrum and were considered to be a mid-table outfit when the season began, but few had realised the impact that their talented new captain, Wajid Ali, would have.



For most of the season Copley led the way, with Booth and Triangle following closely behind, a trend which was bucked after several Copley games were rained off and they then suffered defeat at the hands of Triangle in the penultimate game of the campaign. As a result Booth finally overhauled the champions to set up a remarkable final-day scenario in which Copley had to gain five more bonus points than Booth, who just happened to be their opponents at Copley Lane!

On the day before the game the *Halifax Evening Courier's* sports editor, Ian Rushmore, wrote: "It is hard to imagine a more exciting finish to the programme, with hat-trick-seeking Copley entertaining resurgent Booth with the championship trophy almost certainly the prize for the winners."

It seemed that the match had captivated the public, as spectators streamed into Copley Lane to see which side would triumph. The toss was won by Booth and skipper Ali elected to bowl first. Copley knew that it was imperative for them to make a positive start; sadly their plans went out of the window as Chris Goulden went for a duck in the first over of the match. Chris Dalby (43) and Paul Smith (73) steadied the ship with nearly a run-a-ball century stand, before both went in quick succession. Peter Hoyle's explosive 51 ensured that Copley posted a healthy 211 for 8 from their 45 overs, receiving the maximum three batting points in the process. Booth took two bowling points thanks mainly to Ali (4-56).

Booth went into bat aware that a score of 180 or more would make them champions, although this wouldn't be easy against Copley's powerful bowling attack. Richard Thorpe, so often Copley's saviour in the past, once again produced the goods with an early wicket and when Booth captain Ali, who had hit over 1,000 league runs in the season, was removed for 28, it looked as if Copley were heading towards a famous league title win.

The bubble burst for the home side as half-centuries from Ian Sharkey (50 not out) and Zahid Mahmood (60) took Booth over the finishing line in the fading light, as they stone-walled their way beyond the requisite 180 to finish on 190 for 3. Booth's joy was Copley's despair, their brave effort ultimately falling just short of the target.

Unsurprisingly there were contrasting views of the season from the two captains. An emotional Ali stated that: "I'm very happy, I can't believe it!" While Richard Thorpe said: "It's very difficult to accept losing the league when you have only lost two games and you have beaten the team who has won the league twice."

There is no doubt that the 2002 season oversaw one of the most exciting ever climaxes to a season in the Halifax League. Despite their justified disappointment at the time, Copley put it behind them and enjoyed success in 2003 and 2004 with two more championship wins.

### **COPLEY STAR MAN: PAUL SMITH – HIS 73 GAVE COPLEY SOMETHING TO DEFEND**