

The Great Match

Mytholmroyd v Barkisland (Parish Cup 2nd Round 1998)

By Russell Eggar

1998 was a year that did not promise much for Mytholmroyd Cricket Club. Struggling with their league form and failing to attract new players into the fold, the club was very much in a period of transition. With a bid in the pipeline to win a lottery grant to improve facilities at Ewood Holmes, the club was perhaps at a point where the cricket side of things took a back seat in favour of the administrative work that was needed to improve the general condition and status of the club. Club captain at the time Martyn Astin remarked: "The club was at a fairly low ebb, both on and off the field".

However, the season also produced one of the club's most memorable matches – one that is still re-lived in the public houses of Mytholmroyd by those who were involved or were watching.

The coveted Parish Cup competition provided a welcome distraction from the 1st team's inconsistent form in the league and also offered the possibility of success; but a second-round draw that pitted the club with runaway league leaders Barkisland was a different challenge altogether.



The challenge started on a Sunday afternoon at Mytholmroyd's home ground. When rain delayed the start of play in the morning, it looked as if the game was going to have to continue through the week, but although they were playing on a damp field, the team's spirits were anything but dampened and early performances with the bat showed Royd's intentions. As the overwhelming underdogs, the team knew that they had nothing to lose.

As the game progressed and the crowd increased, the intense nature of this 'David v Goliath' fixture began to show. Jon Russell remembers the feeling well: "There was a lot of pressure even though we weren't expected to win the game."

Mytholmroyd finished their innings with a score of 141-9 with Astin scoring an impressive 80. Mytholmroyd had dealt with the pressure well but it was nothing like the pressure they were about to feel over the next two days. Barkisland started their reply on the Sunday night, managing to see out 20 overs while confidently scoring 60 for 1, but would have to return to Ewood Holmes a couple of days later to effectively finish the job and hopefully cruise through to the next round.

A particularly beautiful day in comparison to the Sunday, Tuesday brought with it a dry track and outfield but also limited hopes that Mytholmroyd would progress into the next round of the cup. However, none of the players or spectators could have imagined how the final few overs were going to unfold. Everyone thought that the game was all but over. Astin freely admits that he

didn't expect it to go any other way than a Barkisland win: "We were coming back to get finished off"

Again the crowd grew large and the pressure and tension from Sunday seemed to return undiminished. A few big hits and lucky wickets later and Barkisland were at 131-6 and it looked like the match was all but over. It just needed a couple of big hits to settle it, but with only seven overs left there was still a faint hope that Mytholmroyd could at least come away with some pride through their valiant attempt to challenge the illustrious opposition after starting the match as underdogs. All they were trying to do was keep the opposition out there for as long as possible. But to everyone's surprise, and with a couple of maidens bowled, the mighty Barkisland were looking nervous and the game was down to the final two overs with Russell bowling from the top end with his "medium-pace, accurate trundlers" and Jon Bamford at the bottom end bowling medium-pace away swingers. All of a sudden the bowling attack was questioning the bottle and the nerve of the Barkisland batsmen to finish the game off and although they now needed just six runs to win, Royd could feel them crumbling.



Still needing a miracle, the home side were more determined than ever to create history. Russell's penultimate over was the just the start of the amazing spectacle that was about to develop. Although the opposition scored a couple of singles, he took a wicket and left the rest to Bamford's last over - with three runs to score and three wickets left. This over was about to become one of the most memorable for anyone involved at the club and the story of it will be retold again and again for years to come.

The first ball swung and the already nervous batsman took a large swing and missed. With the second ball, Bamford had the batter caught behind.

139-8. Four balls left and two wickets remaining

The next man in to bat was the experienced Brian Crabtree and as soon as he stepped up it was clear he was trying to do what the others before him should have done - and hit the ball out the ground. With a little dance down the track and a big swing...he missed the ball and was stumped by wicketkeeper Astin.

139-9. Three balls left and one wicket remaining.

The tension was unbearable and the result still hanging in the balance. The last man came out and connected so firmly with the first ball that it was hit away for four.

Game over. Or so they thought.

It was only a miraculous dive at deep mid-wicket that prevented the final runs being scored.

Two balls left and still one wicket needed, the opposition still requiring three runs to win.

With their hearts in their mouths, the crowd watched on as once again the last man connected with the ball but could only scramble a single.

140-9. One ball left, two runs needed for Barkisland to go into the next round and a single needed to force a replay.

A game that had taken two days to play out had come down to one solitary ball. Mytholmroyd set a bit of an in-out field in anticipation of either a big hit or a thin edge. The opposition had obviously decided to force a replay and tried to run a single. Astin recalls: "The batter got a little inside edge - a nightmare for any wicketkeeper and it went past my gloves, hit my leg and trickled away about 10 feet. A deafening 'YES' from the batsmen saw them running for the single. I ran for the ball, grabbed it and in one swift motion, turned, ran and with an underarm lob threw the ball at the stumps."

The ground erupted in ecstasy as the bails fell to the floor before the batsman could ground his bat.

Mytholmroyd had produced an amazing win over the impressive Barkisland line-up by one run - and also some memories that everyone involved on those fateful days will never forget.