

## Profile of Mark Oldman

By Jon O'Shea

The name Mark Oldman invariably brings a wide smile to the face of those asked to remember his considerable contribution to Northowram Hedge Top CC. Mark was a man hugely admired for both his sporting ability and his conduct in victory or defeat. He is also remembered as the heart and soul of the cricket club which he joined as a junior, turning out for the under-14s, and remained a member of until his untimely death in 2002, at the age of 36.

Having grown up within touching distance of Hedge Top's ground and been surrounded by the game from an early age, it was inevitable that Mark would go on to play for the club. His father, Tony had been a mainstay at Hedge Top Lane for several years by the time he was joined by his son in the second team, during the late 1980s. The Oldmans were, at this time, part of a Hedge Top team which often comprised three or four such father-son partnerships – and with no little success.



In 1987, as a promising 20-year-old batsman, Mark was an influential component in the second XI's run to the final of the Crossley Shield. Despite carrying the dubious burden of having recklessly gotten his good friend, and fellow talented 20-year-old, Graham Spencer, run out on 87 in the Shield semi-final against Copley, Mark went on to play a match-winning innings of 60 in the final, and was subsequently awarded the man-of-the-match gong – much to the delight of his proud dad.

As he progressed through the club's ranks to eventually become 2nd team captain, Mark also became closely involved with the running of the club and, in particular, raising funds through various means, conventional or otherwise. Club members still recall today a 'donkey drop' devised by Mark in order to boost the club's coffers. For those not familiar with the mechanics of a 'donkey drop', it should be explained that members, spectators and visiting teams were all encouraged to place their cash upon which area of a marked field said donkey will go ahead and 'drop' its business in. Perhaps a little surprisingly, the event proved a huge success, and the memory of grown adults waiting eagerly for a donkey to 'deliver' is fondly remembered by those who were there.

Cricket was not the only sport that Mark dedicated his life to; having also been a lifelong member of Hipperholme's Old Brodleians RUFC. He joined the club's Colts (under-19s) side in 1982 and, aside from a short spell playing rugby league with Elland, spent his entire rugby career there; playing a total of nearly 300 games (almost half of which were at first-team level).

At the time of Mark's passing, the Brods' then chairman Colin Green paid a glowing tribute to the man who had given his club some 20 years service, saying: "Mark was an enormously respected person and liked by everyone. We all greatly admire him for facing his illness with the fortitude that he did". The illness against which Mark had to show such fortitude was bowel cancer. He had initially been diagnosed in 2001 and subsequently underwent surgery in an effort to beat it, but, sadly, the cancer had started to spread.

Early on the morning of a fundraising match against a Bradford Bulls XI at Hedge Top Lane, an event organised to celebrate the opening of the club's impressive new pavilion extension, on which he had worked tirelessly to complete, Mark passed away. He'd been the driving force behind the development and, as a plumber by trade – spending all his working life with the family plumbing business – he took a particularly hands-on approach to finishing the job. As the then Hedge Top chairman said at the time: "Without Mark it would never have taken place". Fittingly, the extended pavilion was later named in his honour.

Following a minute's silence, the game went ahead as a tribute to the man who had done so much to make it happen. Among those taking to the field for the Hedge Top XI was an emotional Tony Oldman, and other family members were also present to see the culmination of Mark's hard work, as Mark himself would surely have wanted.

The following week, Mark's funeral took place in the village's St. Matthew's Church, and his life was later celebrated by his many friends and family in the newly-opened Hedge Top clubhouse. His friend Rachel Litjens, who runs the pavilion bar, vividly remembers the occasion, as some 250 people (including a full jazz band and their instruments) were crammed inside the clubhouse, sheltering from the thunderous rain outside.

She remembers Mark as "a very big character, a one-off". No doubt, all those who played alongside him and worked at his side as he strived to improve the club will unconditionally agree. Club president Harry Andrew believes that as Mark was such a "tremendously dynamic person" he had the rare ability "to get the younger generation to rally around him" and would surely have gone on to become a future club president. Though his loss is still keenly felt today, in years to come it is certain that Mark Oldman will be affectionately recalled as one of the most important clubmen in the long and colourful history of Northowram Hedge Top CC.