

## Profile of Graham Spencer

By Jon O'Shea

Graham Spencer's involvement with Northowram Hedge Top CC began at a particularly early age. His formative years were spent following his dad, Ian, around the various grounds (and public houses) of the Halifax League, and more often than not getting into assorted scrapes. One such incident occurred when, as a young lad, he took it upon himself to scale a huge tree at Booth CC's Broad Fold Park while Ian was behind the stumps representing the second team. Naturally, Graham's eager sense of adventure meant that he had shown a youthful disregard for the golden rule of tree climbing: "what goes up must come down...eventually". He was stuck. It took two of Booth's waiting batsmen to clamber up and rescue him – but it certainly wouldn't be the last time a young Graham would tinker with trouble.



Luckily though, this episode did little to dissuade Graham from following in his father's footsteps and representing his local club side. The two even played in the same XI on several occasions – the most memorable of which was a fine father-and-son stand of more than 80 in a Crossley Shield match at Mytholmroyd. In due course, Graham would progress to don the gloves for Hedge Top as his dad had done before him, but he initially embarked on his cricketing career as a gifted left-handed batsman, renowned for his excellent work in the field.

When he'd worked his way through the youth ranks to make the 1<sup>st</sup> XI alongside great friend and club legend, the late Mark Oldman, their youthful exuberance undoubtedly made a lasting impression on some of their more seasoned teammates. During one particularly tense game, Mark spontaneously decided it would be good for team morale to sprint from his fielding position to kick Graham – then keeping wicket – squarely between the legs! Graham's obvious pain certainly gave his team, and the opposition, something to laugh about.

On another occasion, Graham, rather unwisely as it turned out, boarded a canoe used to retrieve wayward balls at a riverside ground during a lull in play. Mark, who of course couldn't afford to miss such a glorious opportunity to get one over on his

friend, seized Graham's paddle and gave the canoe a helping boot into the middle of the river. Graham was left stranded yet again.

Perhaps the deadly duo's (not so) finest hour together came as 20-year olds during Northowram Hedge Top's ultimately successful Crossley Shield campaign of 1987. On a blisteringly hot mid-summer's day, Hedge Top met old rivals Copley in a semi-final tie. Graham quickly set about the Copley attack and was in touching distance of a well deserved century, on 87, by the time he was joined in the middle by Mark.

With his friend looking in such good shape, Mark called for an impossible single and though Graham quickly responded he was never going to make the ground before his stumps were shattered by an opposition fielder. Although he had been ignominiously run out, Graham's fine innings that day sealed a priceless victory and assured the team's passage through to the Crossley Shield final.

In the intervening period between the win over Copley and the final, Graham sauntered off on a well-earned holiday with his friends. Unfortunately for him, his return flight was heavily delayed and he soon realised that his place in the final line-up was in serious jeopardy. Agonisingly, Graham returned only just in time to see his team-mates holding aloft the Crossley Shield. As if to rub salt into the wound, their triumph had been largely thanks to an invaluable knock of 60 from the man of the match...one Mark Oldman!

Unbelievably, Graham's run of poor luck on the cricket field failed to end there. On the day after he celebrated his 21st birthday (and subsequently perhaps still just a little inebriated) he contrived to break his collarbone while executing a spectacular dive in the field in a game at Stainland. In a gesture which wouldn't be in the running for too many sportsmanship awards, the opposition batsmen – seeing Graham lying prone with the ball in his hand – ran six before the umpire called a halt to proceedings. Generously, he halved the runs scored to three upon seeing the full extent of Graham's injury – scant consolation indeed!

Regrettably, Graham's burgeoning cricket career came to a premature end when he suffered a diving accident while on holiday. The incident unfortunately caused him to suffer injuries serious enough to confine him permanently to a wheelchair. Though he evidently misses taking to the field each week, Graham relishes the memories of his time representing Northowram Hedge Top alongside his now sadly-departed friend Mark, and he remains closely involved with the club; paying a keen interest in the current team's fortunes. Certainly, Hedge Top Lane will always remain a place very dear to Graham Spencer.