Profile of Steffan & Rachel Litjens

By Jon O'Shea

Considering that before the age of 25, Steffan Litjens had never registered any interest in the game of cricket, much less taken to the field in a competitive match, the role he now plays at Northowram Hedge Top CC signifies quite a transformation – from cricket novice to indispensable club man. Steffan, who works as an engineer, found himself gradually absorbed by the club after his marriage to wife Rachel, having initially been persuaded to stand in for a Sunday League match by his father-in-law, Hedge Top's former chairman, Ian Spencer.

Steffan has since become the definitive 'cricket convert'. During the 2006 season, he took part in an extraordinary 52 games at all levels – happily filling in when required for absentees in the first, second and Sunday XIs. He modestly describes himself as no more than "an average bowler", but his main contribution out on the square comes in the field. Since his hastily arranged debut in the sport, Steffan has earned a reputation as one of the sharpest fieldsmen at the club, and now approaches the task with relish.

Steffan

Of late, Steffan has even taken on coaching responsibilities at Hedge Top Lane. At a time when his two young sons' enthusiasm for the game is continually growing, he decided to accept the position of coach to both the under-11s and under-13s. These commitments are not to be underestimated: when he is not playing – on Saturdays Steffan will generally turn out for the 2nd team and on Sundays he is vice-captain of the Sunday XI - he can be found coaching: on Mondays and Tuesdays respectively the under-11 team play and net, Thursdays see the under-13s play, and then there is a further net session to fit in on Friday evening!

The couple also take care of the running of Hedge Top's pavilion bar and, with countless games and practice sessions to host along with many other functions, the job certainly keeps them busy. With this heavy schedule each summer, the Litjens family now find themselves fitting their holidays in around the cricket calendar, and even when they do manage to get away, they can never resist the lure of bat and ball for too long.

Steffan's wife Rachel, rather than consigning herself to defeat and reluctantly accepting the role of the classic 'cricket widow', has slowly grown to adore the game which, when she was a young girl watching her dad Ian perform behind the stumps for Hedge Top, she had hastily dismissed as: "Very boring! Lots of old men being very boring!" Now, on Saturday afternoons, she often finds herself distracted by the

fortunes of the first team when she really should be paying attention to the progress of her husband's second XI.

This radical change was well and truly confirmed to the family on a recent club-organised trip to Antigua. As the tourists were passing by the Recreation Ground in the capital St. John's, Rachel wondered aloud about the possibility of watching a game of cricket in the grand stadium once graced by the likes of Viv Richards and Joel Garner and, of course, B.C.Lara's phenomenal 375 against England. This rather than take to one of the island's incredible 365 beaches! Her transformation was complete.

During this year's Antigua visit, just before the Cricket World Cup got underway, the Litjens family shared a hotel with the Canadian and Bangladeshi squads, and also spotted Windies legend Clive Lloyd and veteran umpire Rudi Koertzen in the vicinity. In fact, some of the Northowram party took on several senior Bangladesh players in a friendly game of beach cricket, and the young Litjens boys even shared a few games of pool with talented Tiger Mohammed Ashraful, who of course then went on to light up the World Cup with his sparkling match-winning innings against South Africa. The Litjens obviously have the golden touch.

When he's not out in the middle, in the nets, or behind the bar at Hedge Top Lane, Steffan also undertakes the job of handyman – assisting the Monday Club of veteran volunteers with the upkeep of the premises. It is clear that he has thoroughly thrown himself, and his family, into the ongoing development of Northowram Hedge Top Cricket Club. By way of recognition for the Litjens family's endeavours, between them Steffan and Rachel have been named 'Club People of the Year' four out of the past five seasons. A remarkable achievement for the club's golden couple – a partnership that will hopefully continue to be the heartbeat of Hedge Top for many years to come.