

Junior Cricketer Alex O'Keefe

By David Febrero

The English Cricket Board has recently introduced guidelines aimed at monitoring the participation of junior cricket players in adult matches. These guidelines talk of the obligation of clubs to protect junior players who are representing the club's first or second team. Clearly, junior players are at risk when facing quick, aggressive adult bowlers. So why include them in the team?



Simple: if you're good enough, you're old enough. Alex O'Keefe, a 14-year-old batsman, was drafted into the Shelf first team last season, and also started the recent friendly victory over Queensbury CC. "I played for the first team a couple of times last season. I usually bat around 6 or 7 and I usually stay in and bat well," he joked after departing for a duck. "I am captain of the under-15s and I've played for the under-17s as well. I think that is where I will play the majority of this season".

Despite excelling as a batsman, Alex has been dubbed an all-rounder and recently received several awards. "I won the 1st XI fielding award last season," he grinned. "And I also came second in both bowling and batting charts for the under-15s. I open the bowling on occasions but I am mainly a batter".

Alex is possibly the youngest first-team player in Shelf history, although current first-team wicketkeeper Johnny Marshall made his debut in the second team at the age of 13. "It is fantastic to see all the youngsters coming through the ranks," 1st XI batter Dave Rawsley declared.

Last season the under-15s captain hit 23 in a first-team match and remembers it as the best moment in his short Shelf career. However, the ambitious O'Keefe is determined to improve again this season and establish a permanent place in the Shelf first team. "I am looking to get fifty for the first team and retire from under-17s duty, he admitted. Known around the dressing room as 'David Gower', possibly for his batting but more likely his blonde curly hair, Alex confesses that the biggest influence in his career so far have been the senior professionals at Shelf, who have given another talented youngster the opportunity to impress in their side.