

SARAH WILLIAMSON



When Sarah Williamson turned out for Southowram 2nd XI in 1993 she became the first woman player in the Halifax Cricket League. She had earned her call-up after representing Yorkshire Ladies and also having trials for England.

SARAH MAKES HISTORY

WHARFEDALE and Airedale Observer advertising sales representative Sarah Williamson made cricketing history for a second time on Saturday.

She became the first woman to play in the Halifax Cricket League when she turned out for her home village Southowram against Blackley.

Back in 1987 former Yorkshire Ladies player and England trialist Sarah became the first woman to play in the West Riding League turning out for Burn. She also played for Olympia Mills in the West Riding League.

Sarah's little bit of cricketing history follows hot on the heels of that of former Woodhouse Grove School pupil Kathryn Leng who made her Bradford Cricket League debut at the start of the current season. Kathryn is playing for Yorkshire Bank second team.

Sarah was invited to net at Southowram and was then informed she had been selected for the second team. Despite some objections league permission was given for her to play and the Yorkshire Cricket Association gave its blessing.

Sarah said: "I was selected on merit. All I want to do is play cricket. I can understand how the men might feel but I have always found that once they realise I can play their attitude changes."

Although it was an historic day for Sarah and the Southowram club it was not a happy one as they crashed by 117 runs to Blackley who made 175-8.

Sarah was second highest scorer for her team with nine of the 58 runs scored and her innings included a four off a bowler who seemed intent on knocking her head off.

The secretary of the Southowram club, Mrs Joyce Jowett, said: "Sarah's selection is both a step forward for the women and for the Southowram club."

Women it seems are playing an increasing part in cricket particularly on the administrative side. Eight Bradford League clubs have lady cricket secretaries and one has a lady cricket chairman. In the Airedale and Wharfedale League two clubs have lady secretaries while there are three in the Leeds League.

A number of clubs also have lady representatives at league meetings these days.

● Sarah reveals all about her Halifax League debut in our I Say column on page four,

Bowled over? Not this maiden!

I AM 25 years of age and so far in my life I have made history twice. But I am not famous.

The first occasion was on April 25, 1987 when I became the first woman cricketer to play in the West Riding Cricket League.

The second time I made history was last Saturday when I became the first woman to play cricket in the Halifax League, an experience I would like to share.

It means going back to Tuesday night, May 4, when a telephone call to the secretary of Southowram Cricket Club led to an invitation to go along to the outdoor net.

Not really knowing what the reaction would be, I just got on with the job in hand. I padded up, batted for the standard 10 to 15 minutes and then went to do some fielding practice.

By this time, the selectors were in the pavilion discussing the teams for Saturday. The upshot was that later that evening I was approached by the second team's captain, who told me that I had been selected on merit and I was to meet at the clubhouse at 1pm on the Saturday to play away at Blackley.

In the meantime, the league had to get clearance from the Yorkshire Cricket Association to ensure I was eligible to play. Clearance was, in fact, given - and so to Saturday.

Approached

After deciding who was travelling in whose car, and who was taking what, we made the 20-minute journey to Blackley.

On arrival, we were heading for the changing rooms, exchanging banter on the way, when I was approached by the Blackley captain. I thought 'Oh, no, here we go'.

He asked me if I was going in there with them - 'there' meaning the changing room and 'them' meaning the rest of the team - or whether I wanted him to make alternative arrangements for me to change.

After looking at him as if he had just fallen out of a tree, I just said: "I'll go in there with them, thanks," and disappeared into the changing room.

We had the warm-up, lost the toss and were put in the field. This was much to my relief, as 45 overs of fielding would settle my nerves.

However, it was not particularly pleasing to the captain who had said earlier that he wanted to bat first as he 'didn't want to field all afternoon'.

This seemingly tactical remark, as I found out later, actually meant that if we batted first and collapsed, then Blackley would knock off the runs with overs to spare and we'd be in the pub for early doors.

Does Graham Gooch think this way, I wonder.

Required

So to fielding. It's difficult to describe how I felt. You have to field every ball with that little bit extra, making sure that when throwing in the ball goes to the wicketkeeper's gloves or is a direct hit on the stumps.

If you don't, you are 'a typical woman who couldn't throw a ball if her life depended on it'.

At the end of the 45 overs, Blackley were 175 for eight, so we knew what was required of us as we headed for tea.

As we were sitting round the table, I was asked if I 'would like to be mother' and pour the tea. I pointed out that this was a sexist remark and told the man in question that he could go and do it himself.

So to batting. I was due in at No 4, but was no sooner padded up than I found it was my turn to head for the crease.

I arrived at the stumps to complete silence. No-one spoke or clapped.

I took my guard, had a look round and then waited for the bowler (who I mentally nicknamed Wilderbeast because of his long hair and beast-like features) to come steaming in.

This he did...and it was one in the ribs for me. Next ball I got my own back with a four.

At this stage I began to wonder about the beast's cricketing mind. He had packed the offside with four slips and a gully, but kept bowling at my body and not to his field.

Very relaxed

I stayed there for a couple of overs, during which two wickets fell at the other end and then Dave came in to bat.

I have never batted with anyone who, on wanting to run, shouts: "Come on, baby, let's run." Strange, maybe, but I felt very relaxed with this humour.

We batted on. During a change round at the end of one over, we met in the middle of the wicket, and if you've ever wondered what batsmen say to each other, here's a snippet of conversation.

Dave: "Easier than shelling peas, eh bonny lass?"

Me: "I would rather give birth, actually."

I hasten to add that this is something I've never done, but at the thought of facing Wilderbeast again it seemed an easier option.

We were all out for 58. I was second top scorer with nine, the highest being 15. Test Match level? I think not.

After just one game, I have been accepted into the club as a playing member by everyone.

Is this the shape of things to come? Strangely enough, I think not.

*Sarah
Williamson*