

SECOND TO NONE!

Chris Knowles on 2nd XI Prospects in 2008

With the 2008 season on the horizon, I decided to seek some views on the 2nd XI's chances for the forthcoming season.

The majority of players that I have spoken to over the past few weeks have been of the opinion that the team can launch a worthy title challenge and reap the rewards they were denied last season. 2nd XI Player of the Year Simon Lewis outlined his views on the season ahead: 'Hopefully we can do the same as we did last year and challenge for the title. We can push any team on our day and we need to show that.'



The team will obviously be looking to begin the campaign successfully and chalk up some early victories as they did last season, winning their opening three fixtures. Replicating the eight-match unbeaten spell last summer will be tough although there are a number of factors which are working in favour of Emley at the present time.

Luckily, Clarence have been handed the more favourable fixtures, finding themselves on home turf for the crunch matches against Cedar Court teams Delph & Dobcross (July 12th) and also Barkisland (Sept. 6th), who are generally seen as posing the toughest threat.

Furthermore, Simon speculates on adding to the team. 'There's a possibility that a 1st team player will be joining us in the 2nd XI this season and filling in where we need the help.'

He goes on: 'This happens sometimes when players find that personal commitments stand in the way of playing regularly for the 1st XI. I made a similar move to the 2nd team a few years ago and it not only allowed me to continue playing but it also helped the team.'

Regardless of the reasoning, this will undoubtedly strengthen the 2nd team and add depth to the current squad of players, especially as resources wear thin at some points in the season.

Simon explains, 'During the holiday season, we can often lose a few players and this obviously has an effect on the team. It all depends on how you handle this period really and the depth of your resources to cover for absent players.'

Another positive aspect of the approaching season will be the burst of youth on the Emley scene.

2nd XI captain Alex Moors would like to bring in at least two players from the under-15s in an effort to maintain the progress of young players, a key Emley concern. He says, 'I could have brought players through last year but I thought some of them weren't quite ready for the step up.'

The under-15s have been invited to 2nd team training sessions before the season starts and Alex declares, 'I think I'll look to bring a couple of players up to the 2nd team, see how they do, and let them experience the change of standard.'

A suitably-handled blend of youth and experience is one which works well at any level and in any sport. It will be interesting to see if Emley's 2nd team can capitalise on it during the summer of 2008.