

# SEARCHING FOR THE NEXT RYAN SIDEBOTTOM...

Meltham Juniors by Rob Hardie

For a large number of local league cricket teams, the junior section is a breeding ground for the players of the future and Meltham CC is no exception. Mean Lane currently has five junior teams and four age levels that range from under-11s to under-17s, and currently has around 80 junior members.

Second team captain and under-15s coach James Moulson spells out the importance of the kids sections, saying that “the importance of getting kids into the club is paramount”. He is also aware of the difficulties of attracting new junior players. “Nowadays, there’s more distractions for kids in terms of entertainment - things like television and computer games stop kids getting into local cricket.”



**Ryan Sidebottom:**  
**Meltham Juniors & England**

True, in this modern age there are many alluring pastimes for kids with all the new technology, whereas years ago there wouldn't be anything else for youngsters to do except go outside and play sports such as cricket. “Kids get put off by the long hours in the field,” Moulson explains. “They don't want to spend days playing cricket when, in their minds, there are more attractive things indoors to be getting on with.” With the older age-group teams there are also problems. Priorities change with age: here, girls, alcohol and going away to university are the most common cause of junior dropouts!

The fact that the club had a fantastically successful spell during the early 1990s can also be seen as detrimental. Moulson comments, "The team back then was that good it picked itself most weeks and juniors couldn't make a breakthrough into the team." Why change a winning formula, after all? 12 major titles in six years speaks for itself, but it had an adverse effect on bringing kids through. And as many couldn't get into the first XI, they simply left the club.

In terms of attracting kids into the club, it's mainly word of mouth and family ties that get members signing up, although a newsletter was trialled with limited success. The club has begun plans, though, to hopefully attract new members. As it currently stands, under-11 and under-13 age groups have to train in alternate weeks, but that could all change for the better in the future. Meltham have been awarded a £6,000 grant to build new practice facilities at Mean Lane, and these new facilities should be completed in the next six months and will provide a welcome new addition to the club's amenities.

As the 2<sup>nd</sup> XI captain, Moulson recognises the importance of balancing his side with experience and youngsters to provide them with knowledge of cricket at a higher level. "I have always watched junior games and kept an eye on training," he says. "In many respects this is the hardest job at the club - keeping people happy is always a tough job." Obviously it would be ideal to have 7 or 8 juniors in the 2<sup>nd</sup> XI but this needs to be balanced with more experienced players.

Whatever the circumstances, the club always welcomes new members and the new facilities will be impressive when completed. Plus, who knows? Maybe one day the club will produce a great cricketer who makes it into first-class cricket just like former Meltham junior Ryan Sidebottom, who plays county cricket for Nottinghamshire and is now an England regular. Only time will tell...