

A GROUNDSMAN'S CRAFT

Profile of Chris Berry by Rob Hardie

In the 15 years of his 1st team career at Meltham Cricket Club, Chris Berry was part of something special. Before playing for the first team, Berry played for the club from 1983 onwards in the Evening League.

He went on to become a member of the hugely successful side that dominated proceedings for the Drakes Huddersfield Cricket League during the early- and mid-1990s. In a team that included former county cricketers Ian Swallow and Paul Booth and current Meltham 1st team player Dave Cocking, Berry racked up an incredible 12 team titles in his time playing for the first team between 1988 and 2003.



Chris is on the front row, far right

These titles included four Byrom Shields, one Hinchcliffe Cup, five Sykes Cups and two Champion of Champion honours. As well as picking up these awards with the 1st team, Chris was recognised for his efforts and claimed the Black Sheep Man of the Match Award not once but twice.

A supremely confident and proud man, when asked which of these victories was the highlight of his cricketing career, the simple response came: "I won everything." Well, except one thing that is. "Well, not the Walker Cup anyway, I haven't won that." Now Chris plays for Meltham's second XI but not being part of the first team anymore has not stopped the silverware amassing, as the second string claimed victory in the Paddock Shield in 2005 and 2007, Berry playing an integral part in both victories.

However, his commitment to the club sometimes leads his temper to get the better of him and he has been banned twice during his time at Meltham for on-field incidents. The first incident occurred during a Sykes Cup semi-final one year, Berry was adjudged to have obstructed the bowler mid-delivery. The second incident was a slightly more serious one. During the final second XI game of 2006, one of Meltham's overseas players was getting severely abused by an opposition player. Berry took it upon himself to intervene and confronted the abuser and then proceeded to put the player on the floor. Berry explained what happened and is still clearly shocked at the player's reaction after the confrontation: "He just ran into my fist." Berry was given a 6-week suspension from playing.

As well as playing for the second XI, Berry is the Mean Lane groundsman, working on a part-time basis. Berry has eight first-team wickets and four for the second team to maintain and prepare for the rigours of a cricket season and the adverse weather that an English summer can throw up. The wickets themselves are a cheap form of Mendip loam grass that is very hard-wearing and similar to that which is used on bowling greens. At the end of the playing season the ground is aerated and re-seeded. During the winter months little is done to the playing surface and hopefully this coming winter will be kind to the pitch.

During the playing season each wicket takes one week to prepare, as it usually gets a lot of time dedicated to it, whether that be cutting, rolling or aerating. However, when the season starts and matches start to pile up, the preparation can be affected, especially if the weather takes a turn for the worse. As Chris explains: "Sometimes when fixtures get postponed games can get played on Mondays and Wednesdays, with team practices on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This leaves only the Friday for preparing the pitch." Obviously, this sort of situation can lead to problems if a match is due to be played on a Saturday and the weather is poor.

Hopefully, the winter months will be kind and then the summer and spring fine, sunny and rain-free. If this is the case then Chris can prepare Mean Lane for some good cricket and some trophy-winning exploits.