

DELIA COULDN'T DO ANY BETTER...

The Blackley Tea Ladies by Sam Smith

They could rightfully claim the title of being the Delia Smiths of the Halifax Cricket League...but down-to-earth modesty prevents the tea ladies of Blackley CC from accepting such an accolade.

Like Delia they work wonders in the kitchen – although it's not *haute cuisine* they are famous for...but bargain cricket teas which are well appreciated by players, umpires and spectators alike.



“Visiting players and umpires tell us that our teas are up there with the best in league,” said tea lady and club stalwart Julie Pearson. “And at £2.20p they reckon the teas are very good value for money.”

Very good value for money is perhaps an understatement. You have to marvel how they put on such a mouthwatering spread to satisfy healthy appetites worked up on the field of play – and still make a profit for club coffers.

Sandwiches with a variety of fillings – supplied fresh on the day – accompany salads, pasta, pork pies and sausage rolls, chips (sometimes) and a selection of cakes. All served with mugs of tea from bottomless teapots. On cold days at the start and end of the season jacket potatoes and chilli make their way onto the menu. Cricket food has certainly come a long way since the days when all that was on offer was cake (occasionally stodgy) and tea.

Julie is one of the magnificent seven who form the core of the tea-preparation team at Blackley – Susan Clough, Christine Townsend, Christine Peel, Nicki Baxter, Cherie Lowe and Martin (yes, there is also a tea man) Goldsborough. “Apart from Martin they are mostly wives and girlfriends of players and even mums of the junior players help

out,” said Julie. “We draw up a rota at the start of the season and the duty days are shared out.”

Julie shops for the necessary produce on Saturday mornings and the meats are delivered directly to the kitchen in the brick-built pavilion at the Lindley Road ground by Mason Meat, based at Market Place, Huddersfield. (“Make sure you give them a mention,” added Julie).

The culinary labour in the pavilion kitchen usually takes the team about two hours – Delia Smith, whose current TV series shows viewers how to “cheat” to make delicious meals within a matter of minutes, would surely approve of such efficiency.

One task Delia probably does not have to grapple with is the dreaded washing up. This used to take our intrepid Blackley tea team quite a while – now they have a catering-standard electric dishwasher which turns dirty crocks into sparkling clean ones in just a few minutes.



But what makes the tea ladies give up their Saturdays to work as volunteers? “It is about supporting the husbands and boyfriends who love the game of cricket,” said Julie. “We also enjoy the social side of the club and friendship. Of course we take pride in putting on a good show for tea. It gives us satisfaction when people say what a lovely tea they have had.”

For Julie and the team that’s as good as a ripple of applause to acknowledge a well-battered half-century.