

MAKING THE STEP UP

2008 2nd XI Preview by Mark Edmonds

Before making their bow for Slaithwaite's first team, many players hone their skills and earn their stripes with the side's second string. The plan for this upcoming season is to continue with the mix of youth and experience, something that has seen good results in the past. "It's a better way of introducing the youngsters to a higher standard of cricket," says Second XI captain Derrick Maguire. "There's no point just throwing them into the first team at the end of a season, only to ruin their confidence and their enjoyment of the game."



This is shown by the decision to put four 16-year-olds into the seconds' squad in order to give them a full season of experience. They train with the senior side instead of the junior set-up and everything is done in order to try and integrate them within the first team as much as possible. The main emphasis though is on fun. "We try to make games as fun as we can really," explains Derrick. "We'll move people up and down the order, bowl people at different periods of the game – it's all to keep things interesting." Derrick also makes the point that all of this chopping and changing actually helps the players by forcing them to adapt to the situation they're put in.

"There are around 16 players in the squad, so we can rotate and rest players throughout the season," says Derrick. "You have to remember that some of these youngsters are still kids really, and we don't want to burn them out on cricket." The club's cricket representative Chris Payne is also a member of the seconds, bringing with him years of experience with the first team. "Payne is still more than good enough for the First XI, if I'm honest," admits Derrick. "However, he's playing more for fun these days, and that rubs off on to our younger players. If the main cricketing guy is around them, giving them advice and having a laugh with them, then that can only be good for their development."

So where does the development go from here? Well, Derrick already believes that at least a couple of players will be pushing for first-team status as the season progresses. "The club's demotion last season to the Frank Platt Conference means that the jump from second to first team isn't as big as it

could have been,” Derrick explains. “Hopefully, players like Tom Oakley can hold their form and try and make that step up – the potential is certainly there.”

The sometimes large jump from second to first teams is something that the league could look at readdressing. There are some in the league who have argued that the Frank Platt Conference should act as a second tier which is open to all teams, and not just first XIs. As long as there aren't two teams from the same club in the same division then it would encourage players to rise to the top, and eradicate the chasm that some players have to face when moving up. Obviously, this would all be down to the Drakes League committee, but nonetheless it is an idea that could well be worth looking into.