

COUNTY PRIDE

The Yorkshire Factor by Sam Smith

On January 8th 1863 at the Adelphi Hotel in Sheffield a sporting club was formed – which grew to become a “religion” to the people of Yorkshire. And today there are plenty of “worshippers” in a packed congregation at Blackley Cricket Club, and the 900-plus other clubs in the county.



The event at the Adelphi was, of course, the formation of Yorkshire County Cricket Club who, four years later, won the first-ever county championship, finishing on top of a seven-team league. Another 32 championships have followed and the county have spawned some of the world’s greatest and most famous players – including Hutton, Trueman, Boycott, Close and Illingworth, to name just a few. (You only need to mention the surname of these players – every cricket fan knows who you mean).

This pride and passion for cricket in the county – the “Yorkshire factor” – is part of what makes things tick at village clubs like Blackley, according to club stalwarts. “It’s more than a game – it’s a religion in Yorkshire,” said club president Roy Chappell. “Cricket means a lot to Yorkshire people, from supporting the county side right down to the grassroots.”

Club treasurer Steve Williams said the passion for cricket in Yorkshire is something special – and is evident at all levels. He said: “You can always tell a Yorkshire cricket crowd: they are the most passionate. Test matches at Headingley have a special atmosphere and that passion for the game is also seen at clubs like Blackley.

“Yorkshire has always been top of the tree when it comes to cricket. We’ve been used to having a good county side which creates interest. We have more cricket

leagues in Yorkshire than in any other county and the sport is well organised. The passion for cricket has been passed down the generations.”

And coach Andy Ingle said: “Cricket and Yorkshire seem to go together. There is a special feeling towards the game here.”

The county’s cricket pride was for more than century perfectly demonstrated by the sacred rule that to play for Yorkshire you had to be born in Yorkshire. It seemed to be telling the rest of the counties that the White Rose could reign supreme without the help of any non-Tykes. Alas, in 1992 after 24 years of failing to win a championship title, members of the county club “reluctantly” allowed the committee to seek reinforcements from outside Yorkshire.

Meanwhile, Blackley coach Tony Baxter believes the Yorkshire tradition of producing top-class fast bowlers has its roots in the county’s working-class tradition. “They used to say if you want a fast bowler – shout down the pits,” he said. “The pits have gone but we still produce quality fast bowlers. I believe Yorkshire still lead the way in cricket in this country. It a great tradition that has been passed from father to son down the generations.”