

“I FIRMLY BELIEVE WE HAVE THE PLAYERS TO WIN THE COMPETITION THIS YEAR”

Twenty20 Cup Preview by Sam Smith

A good run in the Twenty20 cup competition could be the springboard for a Premier Division promotion push. That's the view of Blackley captain Dave Townsend who believes the big-hitting 20-overs mid-week games are a boon for the Halifax League.

“Last year in this competition we scored 240 on a couple of occasions – and we took that attacking style into the Saturday game,” said Townsend. “Balls we normally might have left alone in a Saturday match started to be hit for runs.



“There's no doubt the Twenty20 games were good for some of our batsmen who began hitting bigger scores and playing in a more adventurous way. When it came to attacking the bowlers they seemed more confident.

“The more games we play in this cup competition the better. I think it will help to improve our Saturday performances and strengthen our chances of achieving promotion to the Premier Division which is our main aim.”

This season is the third year of the Twenty20, which involves eight mini-leagues before the knockout stage of the competition when the table-toppers come together in the quarter-finals. Blackley have been drawn with two Premier Division teams – Triangle and Sowerby – and two Division Two clubs – Outlane and Stones.

The matches are played on Tuesday evenings with the first one on April 29th. “Tuesdays are our usual practice night – but it's much better to be playing competitive cricket,” said Townsend.

“It keeps players' eye in between Saturdays. You might be in cracking form and have a great knock on a Saturday, then you don't get to bat for another week. But the Twenty20 gives players the chance to keep good form going. Being out in middle in a match is much better than net practice.”

In the first two years of the Twenty20 Blackley have had mixed fortunes. Last year they were knocked out at the group stage but the year before they finished top of their league to make it to the quarter-final when they finally bowed out.

"I firmly believe we have the players to win the competition this year," enthused Townsend. "We have some big hitters and bowlers who can keep things tight. They need to bowl a good line and length and adjust their pace.

"Another important factor in being successful in this competition is having good fielders and I know we can put out a team who are all good in the field. You are only allowed a maximum of five players on the boundary at any one time – the others have to be within a marked-out inner circle.

"So it is important the fielders are athletic and can keep the runs down and take the catches which are likely to come their way when the batsmen are going for the big hit."

Another benefit of the mid-week competition is that it gives the club the opportunity of "blooding" promising younger players in a First XI match. "If there is a youngster who could do a job for us in Twenty20 then I am always willing to give him a chance," said Townsend.

"These 20-over cup matches are often exciting games to play in. We have had some cracking encounters in the past two seasons and I am looking forward to see how well we can do this year."

The midweek games also provide an opportunity for club social events – they often attract a few extra spectators and players not taking part like to call in at Lindley Road to give their support.

"If the weather is good we can put on a barbeque," said Townsend, "No doubt, spectators will enjoy a pint in the bar – hopefully celebrating our victories!"