

“WE NEED GIRLS PLAYING CRICKET AT SCHOOL”

Women’s Cricket at Blackley CC by Sam Smith

Blackley’s flirtations with women’s cricket have been all too brief over the years. There have been some memorable dates – in the 1960s and, more recently, a challenge match five years ago – but, suffice to say, Blackley and women’s cricket have not had a long-term relationship.



The Blackley women’s team in 1969

“There just has not been the interest in sufficient numbers from women in the area in order to get a side together to play regularly,” said Lindley Road stalwart Steve Williams.

“We have had a decent number of girls in the junior teams but it seems that by the time they are 14 or 15 years old many start losing interest. They become more interested in clothes and shopping and some get Saturday jobs.”

But Steve has not given up on the possibility of a woman’s team at Blackley one day in the future – a sentiment echoed by his sister, Susan Clough, who played in the last women’s side to represent Blackley.

The date was Sunday 12th August 2001, when Blackley Ladies went head-to-head with a women’s team from local rivals Outlane – a match that created much

local interest and was reported on in both the *Halifax Courier* and the *Yorkshire Post*. The game was played in order to select a stronger joint team from Blackley and Outlane to take up a challenge from Huddersfield League outfit Upperthong.

Pre-publicity ensured a big crowd at Outlane – there was even a barbeque. Blackley’s team was made up of the wives and girlfriends of the male cricketers with a few junior girls – the age range was from 12 to 45. Outlane were bowled out for just over a 100 and Blackley knocked them off for the loss of eight wickets.

“All the girls enjoyed the game and it was nice to see so many people turn up – but the great pity was it never took off and that was our last game,” said Susan, who recalled that a planned return game against Outlane was rained off and the challenge match against Upperthong never took place.

Susan – who has been a scorer at Blackley since the age of nine but now only scores occasionally – believes that the key to encouraging more women to take up cricket lies with local schools. “We need girls playing cricket at school and they need to push the message that cricket doesn’t have to be a male-dominated sport,” she said.

“The club can play their part by coaching girls and arranging more women’s team friendlies and weekend tournaments. Clubs could join forces to get up a joint team. One club might just have half a dozen players and another six – together they have enough for a team to play regularly.”

Up-and-coming young female cricketers certainly have plenty of role models. The England women’s team more than holds its own against Australia and Susan pointed to a ladies championship match played at Blackley two seasons ago between Yorkshire and Durham. “The men were amazed just how good these women cricketers were,” she said.

Another serious incentive for Blackley to foster women’s cricket is the all-important Clubmark accreditation which the club have proudly held for three years. Clubmark encourages clubs to foster and nurture women’s cricket. As Peter Kay says about garlic bread... it’s the future.