

QUIETLY CONFIDENT

2008 Season Preview by Matt Ottey

Next season for Nortonthorpe has the potential to be very successful. Both the first and second eleven showed last season that they have the credentials to push for promotion and in 2008 will be out to go one step further. Nevertheless, the club hasn't always been in such a good position.

In the latter half of the 90s Nortonthorpe were struggling on and off the pitch, with dwindling numbers of players and volunteers to help run the club. It looked at one point as if the club may dissolve altogether. In 1999 Nortonthorpe's second eleven were withdrawn from the league due to a lack of players. However, their fortunes were turned around thanks largely to a number of ex-players and interested outsiders, who together halted the freefall and started building again. Adrian Whittaker, ex-player and current groundsman at the club re-formed the second team and helped begin the process of restoration.



“Having played at Nortonthorpe on a number of occasions, I knew they were struggling both on and off the field. They had very little funds and only one team,” said Adrian. “I approached Roy England, Roger (Littlewood) and Brian (Woodhead) and said I would come on board to start a 2nd XI, write to businesses for ball sponsorship, sponsor the fixture card and be the groundsman.”

And now almost a decade later, Nortonthorpe have a strong first and second eleven with their sights set on success.

Matt Hayes has taken on the role of second team captain for the coming season and is optimistic about the forthcoming campaign. “Last season the seconds only just missed out on promotion, and

this year we've only got stronger on paper, but we've still got to put the performances in if we want to better last year."

The seconds currently play in Section 'E' of the Huddersfield Central League, and have been there for a number of years, but Matt thinks that with the right attitude they can start climbing back up the divisions. "Hopefully we can get promoted this year - there's no reason why we shouldn't be there or thereabouts come the end of season. One of the positives is that we've got a relatively young side; in fact, the firsts aren't very old. We've got some young players coming into the team so we'll be looking good come the start of the season. It's quite an exciting time actually!"

Current player Roger Littlewood thinks the first team have a good chance if they can do a bit of rebuilding. "I think the 1st team need to get a few players in to challenge. We've lost good batsmen successively over the last two or three years. Ryan Jagger was a good lad who we lost and now Pete Herd; having said that, he didn't play for a large portion of last season, but he still won the batting average so that says it all really doesn't it? Don't get me wrong - they won't get relegated, not by a long shot, but I can see them struggling to keep up at the top."

Roy England is an ex-Nortonthorpe player and, coincidentally, his son Paul is captain of the first eleven who, after a disappointing end to last season in Section 'B', will be targeting promotion to Section 'A' come the opening day. "He must be doing something right because he's been captain for a few seasons now," says Roy. "I think the firsts should be looking at getting promoted this season; they only just missed out last season, and that was through dodgy circumstances! Everyone's looking forward to it, it should be a good competitive season and there's no reason why we shouldn't be challenging for the top spot; we've got a solid team, perhaps not as good as the one when I were playing, but they ain't bad!"

Roy's wife Margaret shares this view: "They looked good last season, but this season they just need that little bit extra and we'll be promoted."

Both teams have got an outside chance of promotion this season if last year's campaigns are anything to go by, but they're certainly not getting overly excited about the prospect. They're just quietly confident.