

## **Ethnic Minorities at Birkby Nuffield Cricket Club**

**By Stephen Darwin**

Birkby Nuffield C.C. have had a history of attracting an assortment of talented cricketers from ethnic minority backgrounds. In 1991 Pakistani players Sohail, Irfan and Sarfraz all made telling contributions to the clubs 1991 Huddersfield Central League Section 'B' title victory. During that season Sohail produced a magnificent six-wicket haul against Leymoor, which also included a commendable hat-trick. Sarfraz also formed a highly impressive total of 131 against title contenders Shelley in the same season. To score a century against any opposition is quite an achievement but pulling it off against title rivals really proves Sarfraz's unquestionable ability at the crease.

The Birkby area has a large Asian community, which might help explain the steady rise in ethnic minority representatives for Birkby Nuffield C.C. (and formerly the YMCA C.C.). Historically, interest in cricket around Birkby was at a minimum and YMCA teams of the past would often struggle to put a team together. Although throughout the years, a steady influx of Asian settlers in the Birkby vicinity has helped transform the fortunes of the Birkby Nuffield Cricket Club. Asian youngsters are consistently being encouraged to get involved with cricket, and Birkby Nuffield C.C. have been imperative in catering for the recreational demands of young cricket enthusiasts. Former club favourite Maynard Bluff indicates that 'the running of many age group teams allowed the club the chance to get more younger Asians involved,' thus improving the fortunes of the club in the future.

A key figure in attracting ethnic minority cricketers to Birkby Nuffield C.C. throughout the last few decades has been Riaz Iqbal. The gifted all-rounder captained the side during the late 1990's and has been at the club since a very young age. Iqbal joined at the age of around ten years old and has been prominent in helping the club flourish at amateur level over the years. Maynard Bluff, himself such an instrumental part of the cricket club in the past, pays tribute to the work carried out by Iqbal, labelling him to have been an 'influential' part of the clubs development. Bluff added that 'he (Iqbal) helped introduce a few ethnic minorities to the club and to be fair, without them, we would have struggled.'

David Riaz was another Asian player that positively influenced the progress of the club during the 1990's. Riaz was once a professional in the Bolton League and widely acknowledged as a terrific batsman. Former club personality Dave Thompson vividly remembers the clubs recruitment of the talented Riaz, describing the turn of events that brought him to the club in considerable detail: 'Well he used to come down and do nets with us until one day I remember him asking if he could play for us for the rest of the season.' Thompson added that the club simply couldn't afford to pay the wages of Riaz, yet as Thompson states, 'luckily he just wanted to play cricket and would take the opportunity to put himself in the shop window.' A technically gifted player that had the respect of his team mates, where purely Riaz's influence would install confidence throughout the side.

Former Pakistan cricketer Akram Raza played 9 tests for his country and 49 one-day internationals during his six-year international career. Dave Thompson to his astonishment can recall Raza turning out for Birkby Nuffield C.C. on one occasion. Thompson said, 'This one guy played for us on a few occasions but I remember seeing him playing for us one minute then the next time I saw him he was on Sky Sports playing for Pakistan!'

Racism in all walks of life is a disgrace and it continues to be a problem in modern day sport. In football, the *Kick It Out* campaign has been a relative success in promoting equal opportunity in the sport. Cricket has displayed its own incentives to combat racism through the ECB's *Clean Bowl Racism* and *Let's hit racism for six* campaigns. The *Clean Bowl Racism* campaign was launched by the ECB prior to the 1999 Cricket World Cup and has been supplemented by the *Let's Hit Racism For Six* campaign. These campaigns aim to carry the message that racism will not be tolerated in cricket, yet despite efforts from the ECB to defeat racism, it would seem the issue is still a shameful part of the sport.

Amateur cricket in Huddersfield has witnessed various forms of racism in the past that should be dispelled and combated through any means possible. Dave Thompson, a man firmly against racism in cricket, condemns those racist players he has played against during his time with the Birkby Nuffield Cricket Club. He labels them as 'narrow minded people' and witnessed many cases of racism during matches where simply no action was taken. Thompson also feels that amateur cricket is beginning to appreciate talent regardless of skin colour, religion, creed or race.

The creation of the Shabab league in Huddersfield is seen as a direct barrier against racism. The league has been formed exclusively for Asians and is a useful method of welcoming those wishing to showcase their talents but feel threatened by racist tendencies in grassroots cricket.

Commitment comes to mind when discussing the attitudes of ethnic minorities and as Dave Thompson reflects, 'the Asians were always attending training sessions and matches, always committed to the cause.' Thompson continues by saying that: 'Although the ethnic minorities missed out on dressing room banter, due to a genuine lack of understanding, there was still a great team spirit amongst all the players.'

With the evident batch of ethnic minority players showcasing their cricketing talents in the Yorkshire area, it seems strange that a deceptive majority are still being ignored at county and international level.