

WINNING START

Elland v Clayton West, Saturday 25 April 2009

By Ian Hirst

Elland made it two wins out of two after they saw off Clayton West by eight wickets. After last week's victory against reigning champions Honley, Elland kicked off their home matches with a convincing victory.



Both Ryan Robinson and 16-year-old Jack Pulley made half-centuries but it was Greg Buckley and Jimmy Thornton who set up an easy victory for Elland.

In overcast conditions and with moisture in the air, Clayton West were put into bat. Elland have the unique honour of probably possessing the best two opening bowlers in the league in the shape of Danny Rhodes and Craig Fletcher, an ex-Yorkshire junior. In the first few overs the opening batsmen, Jonathan Butterfield and Mark Firth, had to deal with some sharp pace and swing in the difficult conditions. However, once the sun started to appear from behind the clouds, the opening batsmen opened their arms.

After 13 overs Clayton West had moved on to 49 without loss and were looking comfortable in the sunny conditions so captain Ryan Robinson changed the angle of attack by bringing on the spin twins of Greg Buckley and Jimmy Thornton. This certainly worked as the pair stifled the opening batters. With the pressure mounting, Elland made the breakthrough with Butterfield driving straight into the hands of Craig Fletcher at mid-off off the bowling of Buckley.

Buckley was picking up from where he left off last week against reigning champions Honley, when the Lancashire boy stole the show. He skittled out Honley's middle order and ended the match with figures of 7-79, which included four wickets in four balls, a feat that is very rarely achieved. It demonstrated what Elland had missed last season as he was ruled out for

most of the season with a broken ankle which he sustained playing football. Some of his deliveries were unplayable but it was his senior partner at the other end who was helping Elland turn the screw.

Jimmy Thornton, who has been at the club since he was a boy, was another casualty from last season as he missed some of the campaign due to injury. However, this term the operation seems to have done him a power of good and he was finally rewarded with a wicket as he bowled Firth.

At the halfway stage Elland had turned the game around in their favour after the early dominance of Clayton West. They were now 66-2 off 25 overs. The pressure was now mounting for them to get up to a fighting total so their bowlers had something to bowl at. However, the tight bowling of Thornton and Buckley, along with the clever fielding positions that Robinson was setting, meant that piling the runs on heavily and quickly was a real challenge.

Thornton then claimed an important wicket in the shape of Adita Rai, who had played in India's Ranjit Trophy competition. Looking to score quickly, Rai drove straight back into the hands of Thornton as the visitors struggled to 75-3 off 29 overs. Buckley then claimed his second wicket of the game as he had Danny McDermott caught behind. That left Clayton West 91-4 off 36 overs and they finally brought up their 100 after 40 overs. With wickets in hand it seemed that they might have been able to make a late charge to try and push their score past the 150 mark. However, Buckley and Thornton had other plans.

Thornton struck again by claiming the wicket of Mick Sharp, who made 27. Buckley then got into the act again as he cleaned bowled Ibrar Kola for just 19 and then bowled Robert Kaskiewicz, who failed to trouble the scorers. That left the visitors 139-7 with the target of 150 seeming a long long way away.

Not to be outdone, Thornton entered the fray again. After Buckley's heroics last week in taking four wickets in four balls, Thornton decided to try his hand at it. Elland were needing three wickets in the last over if they wanted to seal the maximum six points - bowling out the Clayton West team and then successfully chasing down their total. So enter the evergreen Thornton.

With just the tail-enders remaining, he first disposed of Chris James by clean bowling him for 0. It left the visitors 140-8. Simon Lockwood suffered the same fate, hearing the death rattle as his bails came flying off. Out to the crease came Ashley Thompson. How should he play the next delivery? Should he play the ball on its merits? If it's a bad ball despatch it to the boundary fence or try and block it at all costs? He chose the latter and got a big stride in with his bat and pad. However, the ball struck his pad first and up came the finger to give Thornton his hat-trick.

Thornton finished with figures of 6-42 off 18 overs. He was backed up by Buckley who claimed 4-57 off 22 overs which meant that he had claimed eleven wickets in his first two matches of the season. As the players went for

tea Elland only needed to chase down 140 on a wicket that seemed to be doing very little as the sun shone down.

Opening the batting for Elland were captain Robinson and 16-year-old Jack Pulley. With such a low total to chase down, both batsmen kept their heads on, rotating the strike and punishing the bad ball as it travelled to the boundary edge. Pulley, in only his second first-team outing, made his half-century as did Robinson. Though both were not able to lead the team to their victory total, Pulley (58) being caught behind and Robinson (63) being caught off the bowling of Thompson, Elland easily reached 141 in just under 30 overs.

Despite not yet signing an overseas player, Elland's strength in depth, in terms of experience and youngsters coming through the ranks, proves that the club will be picking up a lot more victories like the one today. Next up are Lepton Highlanders in the Sykes Cup.

Scorecard

Clayton West

Firth b Thornton.....	29
Butterfield c Fletcher b Buckley.....	30
McDermott c Pulley b Buckley.....	21
Rai c and b Thornton.....	4
Sharp c Whiteoak b Thornton	27
Kola b Buckley.....	19
Rank not out.....	7
Kaskiewicz b Buckley.....	0
James b Thornton.....	0
Lockwood b Thornton.....	0
Thompson b Thornton.....	0
Extras	3
Total	140

Fletcher 3 – 0 – 19 - 0 Rhodes 6 – 0 – 19 – 0 Buckley 22 – 5 – 57 – 4

Thornton 18.4 – 4 – 42 – 6

Elland

Robinson c Lockwood b Thompson..... 63

Pulley c Rank b Thompson..... 58

Rhodes not out..... 7

Shackcloth not out..... 9

Extras 4

Total 141

Butterfield 5 – 0 - 25 – 0 Sharp 5 – 0 - 20 – 0 Kola 5 – 0 – 27 – 0 Rai 5 –
0 – 28 – 0 James – 5 – 0 – 25 – 0 Thompson 4.5 – 1 – 15 - 2