

SCARIFYING, CUTTING AND TRIMMING!

Interview with Groundsman Joe Townsend by Sam Smith

How long have you been groundsman at Blackley?

I first started helping with the ground about 25 years ago, when former president Roy Chappell was the groundsman here. For the last 15 years I've been doing the majority of the work, as I'm available in the week when others are working. I do receive lots of help from people within the club and there is now a team of about six that are responsible for the ground, wickets, outfield and surrounds.



The Blackley square

What equipment did you use in your early days of being groundsman?

I remember we only had one very heavy roller which took the whole team to push. So the wicket didn't get much rolling, but it did bring the team together just before the match and at the interval! We would always have a good bit of banter when rolling the wicket and it was a chance for the team to bond. The equipment was nothing like it is today and we only had one wicket mower that was handed down to us by another cricket club. In those days we even used sheep to graze on the outfield!

How do you go about preparing a wicket for matches?

We normally decide about two weeks before the game which wicket we are going to use, depending on whether the first or second team are at home. The first team takes preference, and by league ruling the wicket must be in the middle of the ground. The second team is a bit off-centre and the Sunday team and juniors are more towards the edges. I start out by marking out the wicket and giving it a light scarifying and trimming the grass. I'll keep cutting the grass most days, not too short, and give it a roll at every opportunity, if the weather is right. Then on a matchday I will be at the ground for about 7 in the morning, where I give it a final cut and roll and mark out the wicket ready for play.

Do you talk to the respective captains as to what kind of wicket they would like?

No, not really, we just prepare a wicket as best we can for a good game of cricket. You hear about a spinner's wicket or a batter's wicket but we haven't got the skills to do that here. We just try and create a wicket that neither favours the batters nor bowlers.

How well does the water drain at the ground and do you use covers?

The drainage isn't too bad at all. Up at Blackley we get strong winds that help to dry out the ground very quickly. However, this is not always a good thing as the wind can sometimes be too strong to play cricket! Also the strong winds prevent us from using covers. We tried using the covers on wheels but they got blown away and smashed. So our only option at the moment is to use a large plastic sheet and peg it into the ground. It's not ideal because the air can get under and it sweats, so it can still end up being damp. But it does a job if there is a short sharp shower in the middle of a game.

What future ground improvements would you like to see at Blackley?

The club is certainly progressive and although it's nothing to do with the actual playing area we are hopefully going to have an extension on the clubhouse. The money generated from this will enable us to get better equipment that will improve the playing surface. We will be on the lookout in the market to see what equipment becomes available. And generally just looking to maintain standards and improve them where we can.