

BREEDING THEM YOUNG

Blackley Junior Set-Up by Sam Smith

Blackley Cricket Club can proudly claim to have one of the best junior set-ups in West Yorkshire. Excellent facilities and a host of qualified coaches ensured that Blackley became the first Halifax League club to gain the ECB Clubmark accreditation. This award confirms that Blackley are a club who actively promote the development of young players, and are fully integrated with Safe Hands - the ECB's policy on young people's welfare in cricket.

Clubmark was actually awarded back in 2005, and since then the junior set-up has gone from strength to strength. Child Protection Officer and level 2 coach Tony Baxter believes that Blackley is the ideal place for juniors to play cricket. He enthused, "There are no better facilities anywhere that I can think of. The juniors have everything they could possibly want. A pleasant clubhouse, plenty of coaches to look after them, and a friendly environment to play cricket in."

Blackley currently run teams at under-11, under-13, under-15 and under-17 levels. There are also plans to introduce an under-9s team in the near future. The juniors are very well looked after by the nine ECB-qualified coaches at the club. All of the coaches have undergone Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks and taken first aid courses.

The facilities available to the juniors at Blackley are second to none. Each team has their own kitbag consisting of bats, pads, gloves, boxes and helmets. There are two all-weather cricket nets and bags of balls to practise with.



The 'Crazy Catch' facility

Recently, too, Blackley spent £200 on a modern piece of equipment called the 'Crazy Catch'. This is basically a net that can be altered so the ball rebounds at different angles, providing good catching practice for the youngsters. The addition of a bowling machine has been another added bonus and, according to Tony Baxter, can be of considerable help to the progress of juniors.

He explained, "Through the link with Brooksbank Sports College we are able to borrow the bowling machine over the summer. It is very beneficial to the youngsters; if they have a problem with their batting you can put them in against a bowling machine, set it to the right level and they can play the same shot over again. It gives them confidence and improves their technique."

The future looks bright for Blackley and they are already seeing the benefits of having a quality youth system. For example, 18-year-old Tom Baxter and 16-year-old Akram Asif have established themselves as first-team regulars and have the potential to become leading stars for the club.

All the junior teams have enjoyed significant success over recent years. Highlights include the under-17s team winning the league for four consecutive seasons and the unders-13 winning the league and cup 'double' last season.

All the coaching staff and volunteers at Blackley are continually striving to improve and further develop the junior set-up. Often their hard work can go unnoticed but it is thanks to them that young people in the area can enjoy the game of cricket in a safe and friendly environment.