

7. Ethnic Minorities



For the best part of a century, league cricket in Huddersfield and district has been enhanced and enriched by the contribution of local ethnic communities.

The first overseas professionals came to the area in the 1930s as a result of the increased ambition of some local clubs.

In 1934 Edwin St. Hill, from Trinidad, became the first black cricketer to play in the area when he signed for Slaithwaite CC.

Later, in the 1950s and 1960s when international travel became cheaper and easier, overseas professionals became more commonplace.

Local league clubs were also allowed to engage substitutes when their own professionals were unavailable.

So, Test stars like Gary Sobers (Paddock), Madan Lal (Meltham), Sonny Ramadhin (Golcar and Liversedge) and many others all plied their trade in the area now covered by Kirklees.

Meanwhile, families from the Asian subcontinent and the Caribbean were encouraged to move to Britain after the Second World War.

Textile barons started to recruit male Asian workers for their mills and factories, and many West Indians came to the area to work on public transport.

But immigrants arriving in Huddersfield, Dewsbury and Batley during the 1950s and 1960s were faced with many challenges.

They had to adapt to a new society, earn enough money to make ends meet, and also make friends in a new environment.

For many men folk, playing sport was a 'way in' to West Yorkshire society – and at the same time also a natural instinct.

Cricket was a religion on the subcontinent and in the Caribbean, and so cricket became their number-one pastime when they arrived in Britain.

In the early days, young children would play the game, informally and spontaneously, on pavements and street-corners.

Gradually, the new ethnic communities began to establish their own cricket clubs.

These clubs were vital to first-generation immigrants, either because they found language a barrier or encountered racial prejudice.

The first Asian cricket team in the area was formed in 1962 – Batley Muslims CC.

There followed Indian Nationals CC, Cross Bank Muslims CC, Savile Town Muslims CC and many other predominantly Asian cricket clubs.

In 1974 seven young Asian enthusiasts got together to establish Mount Cricket Club, based in Mount Pleasant, Batley, at Hyrstlands Park.

Hanif Mayet, one of Mount's founding fathers, remembers the period well: 'There were no Asian cricketers at that time at the big local clubs. I'd go to practise and turn up at the match and I'd always be twelfth man.

'If they were a man short I'd be slotted in, but even though they knew I could bat, I'd go in at number 10 or 11.

'It was a waste of time basically, so we used to play in the street with a tennis ball. One day I thought, "This can't go on - we've got to do something about it".

'We went round the neighbourhood with a begging bowl – because our fathers weren't well off. They came from India with three quid in their pockets to work in the textiles.'

And in recent years, local Asian clubs have claimed their fair share of silverware.

Mount CC, Dewsbury Young Star CC, Warwick Youth CC and Savile Stars CC are prime examples of all-conquering outfits in the Batley-Dewsbury area.

And in 2006 Mount are now being featured by Sky Sports TV in a season-long documentary about grassroots cricket.

For various reasons, it has, at times, also been desirable for predominantly Asian teams to establish their own leagues. The best example is the Quaid e Azam, established in 1981.

Caribbean immigrants also formed their own teams.

West Indians CC won the Lumb Cup in 1963 – a landmark moment. Thereafter, we see the emergence of teams such as International CC, Caribbean Youth Club CC and International Caribbean CC.

Stanley Inniss also emerged as one of the leading local West Indian players.

He later became a JP, was awarded the MBE, and came to play a senior role at the Kirklees Racial Equality Council.

Given this history and heritage, there is no doubt that cricket in West Yorkshire has been a force for good in fostering integration.

And many organisations have been founded to ensure fairness and equality.

One such body is the Kirklees Black and Ethnic Cricket Forum, which strives to rid sport of racism. Its role is to:

- Recommend policy and strategy
- Raise local awareness and offer advice
- Suggest programmes of action and promote opportunities
- Support black and ethnic minority clubs

- Disseminate information

At the same time, Kirklees sports development officials have worked tirelessly to help local clubs like Mount CC and Savile Stars CC raise funds, access grants, and enhance their coaching expertise.

The indicators are very positive.

The first Yorkshire-born Asians to play for Yorkshire CCC - Ajmal Shahzad and Ismail Dawood - were both born in Kirklees (respectively, Huddersfield and Dewsbury).

Local Indian restaurants are among the most generous sponsors of local clubs, and in Summer 2005, Kirklees authorities staged a successful Cricket Festival in Ravensknowle Park, with the accent very much on cultural exchange.