

1963: Mirfield's 'Double'-Winning Season

By James Norbury

If you could look back at any single season in Mirfield CC's history that demonstrated the club's resolve, character, fortitude and ultimate success, you would have to glance no further than 1963. For this was a season when Mirfield were rewarded for their hard-fought and gritty performances with a level of success rarely seen before, or indeed after, in the Central Yorkshire Cricket League.

Following on the back of a first Heavy Woollen Cup final victory, over Shepley the previous year, Mirfield's players entered the 1963 season confident that they could emulate and even surpass the triumphs of the previous campaign. They would not disappoint.

Despite the imminent success which would arrive at the club come the end of the season, the fight didn't begin smoothly for Mirfield. The opening match of the season was a home tie against newly-promoted Dewsbury. However, like many of the matches that weekend, the game was called off due to rain and the points were shared.

The next match saw Mirfield pitted against Chickenley. Mirfield were huge favourites for this contest, but it was Chickenley who emerged as the emphatic victors. Having declared on 159, the Chickenley attack took the game to Mirfield, whose first four batsmen were out for just ten runs. All four wickets were taken by the opposition's deadly bowler Farrar, and Mirfield eventually succumbed to a below-par 87 all out.



Colin Peacock

Mirfield quickly made amends for the previous week's disappointing showing, with the annihilation of Ossett. Perhaps it could be argued that the signs of what was to come during the rest of the season were first visible that day at the Memorial Ground. Mirfield declared at 154 for 4 with Colin Peacock grabbing an impressive 92 for the home side. Barry Wood was also influential on that day, contributing 70 runs to the total. The Ossett attack had begun quite brightly, managing to frustrate the Mirfield attack with their conservative bowling. However, the bowlers quickly tired and Wood and Peacock accumulated a commanding lead for their side. The opposition were on the end of a real thrashing when their final wicket fell on 57. This was largely down to the top-class bowling of Mellor and Bert Wilcock. Wilcock took 6 for 28 while Allan Mellor took 3 for 20.

One must feel a certain level of sympathy for Ossett player Vernon Grace. Grace had transferred from Mirfield to Ossett two days previously, and had also been part of the Mirfield eleven that was so comprehensively beaten by Chickenley the week before.

The first victory of the season saw Mirfield lying seventh in the league and five points behind early leaders Hanging Heaton.

Any attempt by Mirfield to gain momentum from the victory over Ossett was hindered when their match with Cleckheaton fell victim to the typical English weather. The following week, Mirfield met Heckmondwike in the first round of the Heavy Woollen Cup. Mirfield batted first and made 151 before the innings was suspended. The ever important partnership of Peacock and Clive Brook put on 69 before Brook was run out for 41. Heckmondwike made 168 in reply before Mirfield resumed their innings. The necessary runs were quickly accumulated with Jones making the last two to secure a deserved Mirfield victory and passage into the second round.

The fourth league game of the season saw Mirfield travel to early title contenders Batley. In a close, hard-fought encounter it was Batley who emerged victorious, thus putting a big dent in Mirfield's title ambitions. Batley looked beatable when they finished their overs on 101 for 8, but a strong bowling performance from the home side left the Mirfield batsmen frustrated. The Batley attack of Lyons and Burnley were too much for Mirfield, and at one point they were seriously struggling at 63 for 5. Throughout the game Mirfield failed to take their chances and, as a result, they were punished by the ruthless bowling of Lyons who took six wickets during the contest. The result could have been worse if it had not been for the fact that leaders Hanging Heaton were beaten by Thornhill.

In the following match, Mirfield were once again frustrated, this time against Thornhill. Despite Peacock picking up an impressive 136 not out, Mirfield were unable to see off the stubborn Thornhill batsman with the game eventually being tied. The result left Mirfield with just one victory in their opening six league matches, and the league title was beginning to look highly unlikely.

Mirfield were given the chance to rectify the situation the following night, when they met their first round Heavy Woollen Cup opponents, Heckmondwike. A big performance was needed to get Mirfield's title hopes back on track, and that is exactly what the players provided. The Heckmondwike batsmen were quickly and convincingly despatched for a total of just 56 runs. Mirfield responded with 57 for 7 as Brook scored 33 in what was both a deserved and important victory.



Clive Brook

The next weekend saw the visit of Chickenley as the two teams met in the league for the second time of the season. With their thrashing at the hands of Chickenley earlier in the season fresh in the mind, Mirfield went about gaining revenge. Chickenley took to the wicket first and notched up a score of 146 for 8. They looked confident of doing the 'double' over Mirfield. Things looked even more in Chickenley's favour when

Mirfield opening batsman Clive Brook was forced to retire early in the innings after the ball struck him in the face. However, Wood and Peacock put on a solid opening partnership, which put Chickenley to the sword in the process. Peacock scored 88 not out and Wood 46. In the end Mirfield were victorious with a commanding score of 146 for 1. The win lifted Mirfield to fourth in the table, and took them to within five points of leaders Batley, who had narrowly scraped past Dewsbury.

The next two league games were both played against Wakefield. In the first clash Mirfield scored 147 for 3 to overhaul Wakefield's score of 146 for 7. Mirfield bowler Wilcock was particularly influential in this game, taking 4 wickets for 58 runs. Wood continued his impressive scoring form with an unbeaten 54. Following on from his awesome form for Mirfield, Barry Wood began playing first-class cricket the following season and would go on to play for Lancashire and Derbyshire. He also went on to represent his country, opening the batting on a number of occasions, playing in 12 Tests and 13 one day internationals, and scoring 768 runs in the process.

The second game the following weekend once again saw Mirfield victorious. Mirfield produced a stunning attacking display, with Wilcock again haunting Wakefield with a match-winning performance. The in-form bowler took five wickets for just 18 runs. This completed a run of four consecutive victories for Mirfield and they were beginning to catch up with the 'pack' in the league table - in what was actually proving to be an extremely exciting season in the Central Yorkshire League. Mirfield's old nemesis, Farrar of Chickenley, did them a favour when he led his side to victory over Batley, demolishing the opposition batsmen in the process.

Meanwhile, Mirfield were beginning to turn heads in the Heavy Woollen Cup with a series of impressive victories. After comprehensively seeing off title contenders Dewsbury in the third round, Mirfield booked a place in the semi-finals against league rivals Ossett. The cup holders' chances of retaining the trophy looked like a distinct possibility.

The next Mirfield game was billed as a major clash in the race for the league title, as they met fellow championship contenders Batley. Mirfield looked to stretch their four-match winning streak to five games and, in doing so, cut the gap between themselves and the two top clubs, Hanging Heaton and Batley. The match was delayed at the start due to heavy rain, but when it finally got underway Mirfield looked unstoppable with the ever-impressive Peacock leading the scoring with 86 not out. Mirfield declared on 121 for 4 and had Batley at 71 for 6 before rain halted play for the final time. Mirfield were left frustrated as the points were shared, but they were still in contention for top spot come the end of the season.

Mirfield met Ossett in the Heavy Woollen Cup, with a place in the final on the line. Allan Mellor was the star of the show for Mirfield and took 4 wickets for 20 runs as Ossett were dismissed for just 96. Mirfield were confident of booking their place in the final. However, they soon found themselves on the back foot when their three key batsmen - Brook, Wood and Peacock - were all out for just 45 runs. Mirfield were able to stabilise after this and got to 73 for 3 before losing three more wickets. They managed to hang on, however, and won the match on 99 for 6.

As Mirfield began to close in on the top two, they encountered Cleckheaton at the Memorial Ground. They continued their winning form with a resounding victory. Once again it was Peacock who stole the show with 64 not out. Wood was also not out on 23 as Mirfield passed Cleckheaton's total of 100. The visitors had been undone by some skilled bowling from Brook, who 5 wickets for 37. Wilcock also chipped in with

three wickets for 23 runs. The win left Mirfield trailing the top two by two points with just three points separating the top four teams.

The first potential 'title decider' of the season came when Mirfield entertained league leaders Hanging Heaton. Mirfield were tipped by the *Dewsbury Reporter* to narrowly win this one, a prediction which proved to be false. In truth, Hanging Heaton were obliterated by the Mirfield batsmen before the Mirfield bowlers finished them off in what turned out to be an extremely one-sided victory. The home side opted to bat first and were led by Wood who scored 71 not out and Peacock who managed 63. The two managed a second-wicket partnership of 112. They eventually declared with a commanding lead of 176 for 4, with Heaton bowler Kilvington taking all four wickets. Hanging Heaton were dismissed for just 86 with Wilcock and Wood dominating the bowling effort. It was following this victory that people first began dreaming of the 'double'.



Bert Wilcock

The first stage in completing the double came on 9 August when Mirfield and Batley met in the Heavy Woollen Cup final. Mirfield went in to the game as the form team as Batley had endured a recent dismal run in the league. While Mirfield were favourites to retain the prestigious cup, few could have predicted the ease with which they would do so. What transpired that day was the second most one-sided final in the competition's history. Batley were on the end of a humiliating thrashing as they were all out in just over half an hour. During this period they accumulated just 33 runs. The *Dewsbury Reporter* referred to the innings as "thirty-eight minutes of furious fast bowling". The fast bowlers in question were Mellor and Peacock. Mellor took a staggering 7 wickets for just 15 runs, while Peacock took 3 for 10. Both managed to do this in 10 overs each. Peacock scored 21 not out to complete the nine-wicket demolition of one of Mirfield's closest title rivals. The awards were presented to the proud players by Mr R.A. Sheard, President of Heckmondwike CC and the Dewsbury and District Cricket League.

Hanging Heaton had played on cup final day and, having been held by Wakefield, were now out of the title race. As were Batley, who could also only manage a draw in their penultimate game. This resulted in what the *Reporter* called a "photo-finish league championship" race involving Mirfield and surprise contenders Dewsbury.

Mirfield entertained Heckmondwike in their second-to-last game of the season. And despite their massive cup final victory over Batley, Mirfield were lucky to come out of the game with anything at all. Heckmondwike stormed to an impressive 179 for 6. In reply Mirfield began to struggle and were soon 46 for 6. However, they settled and were saved by an impressive partnership between Barker and Hewitt, who frustrated the Heckmondwike attack. Hurst Barber scored 19 as Mirfield just about managed to

hang on for a draw. Mirfield's final score was 94 for 7. Dewsbury were, however, defeated by Ossett, which meant that the title would go to Mirfield if rain washed out the matches the following weekend.

In the end the final week's fixture went ahead and Mirfield were presented with a tricky visit to Hanging Heaton. Knowing a draw would be enough to seal the championship, Mirfield went into the game full of confidence. They batted first but got off to a bad start when key batsman Colin Peacock was bowled for just 1. Mirfield did not collapse, however, and managed to build a total with the help of Wood who scored 74 not out. Mirfield were eventually all out for 142. Hanging Heaton made it to 96 for 3 before rain brought the game to a close and, in doing so, signalled the completion of a memorable league and cup 'double' by Mirfield.

Club legend Clive Brook would later go onto to say that captaining the side in 1963 was his greatest ever achievement in cricket. Colin Peacock won the league batting award. The Mirfield team that scooped the 'double' contained key individuals such as Brook, Peacock, Barry Wood, Bert Wilcock and Allan Mellor, who all put in consistent, match-winning performances. However, when these players were not firing on all cylinders, there were always players in the squad who could make the step up. The league season was a long slog and it was a major team effort that enabled Mirfield to take the championship at the end of the campaign.

Mirfield did not win the league title again until 1990 when they matched the success of 1963 by also winning the Heavy Woollen Cup in the same season.