

## 1989 – The Season That Nearly Was

By James Norbury

Sport carries a certain notoriety for its unpredictability and the notion that literally anything can happen. That is why it is so compelling to both watch and compete in, but there is also a very fine line between ecstasy and heartbreak.

The old saying 'so close yet so far' will arguably never be more fitting than when used to describe Mirfield's campaign during the 1989 season. Despite a brave and inspired run in three cups as well as the league, Mirfield found themselves trophy-less after the final ball of the season had been bowled. In a season that was dominated by two of the best sides to have ever graced the Central Yorkshire League, Mirfield were caught up in an epic battle with close rivals Batley CC.

Mirfield got off to a flying start in the league and soon found that they – along with Batley – were safely clear of the chasing pack. It was a similar scenario in the Heavy Woollen Cup and Jack Hampshire Trophy, where the club had reached the semi-finals of both competitions in convincing fashion. Club legends Iqbal Khan and Russell Heritage had both had sensational seasons and had helped to ensure that Mirfield remained in pole position as the club closed in on the business end of the summer.



Iqbal Khan

Mirfield's first major game of the season came against Liversedge in the Heavy Woollen cup semi-final. They competed in the match with the same form that had seen them claim top spot in the division, thrashing their opponents in a comprehensive eight-wicket victory. The match will be remembered for the intriguing battle of ability that took place between Mirfield's Khan and Liversedge's Kulkarni. Both men had left their mark on the other in the previous two meetings between the two sides that season.

It was, however, Khan who emerged from the clash with his head held high, as he put in a man-of-the-match performance scoring 84 runs. If his batting was exhilarating, his bowling was phenomenal as he put Liversedge to the sword, taking 5 for just 52. To his credit Kulkarni was the stand-out figure in the team, scoring 82 runs. But it was Mirfield who would go on to contest the first major final of the season.

It was a different story in the Jack Hampshire semi-final against Ossett. Mirfield had scraped through their league match 24 hours earlier with just two deliveries to spare, and seemed determined to overcome Ossett in similar fashion. The game had looked a foregone conclusion after the Ossett batsmen suffered a dramatic collapse. After looking comfortable at 143-2, Ossett lost another 6 wickets for just 21 runs. They finished their innings on 179.

However, with Mirfield starting well at 40-0, *déjà vu* struck as they lost seven wickets in 17 overs for just 47 runs. With the situation looking desperate, Mirfield found stability in the batting partnership of Simon Geldar and Pat Neal. The two batsmen steered their side to victory with a no-nonsense partnership of 84 that they notched up within 13 overs. While Mirfield narrowly scraped into the final, Batley destroyed Gildersome with batsman David Lovell scoring 77 off 45 balls. This came just 24 hours after he had scored 114 at Methley in the league. The result meant that the two sides would meet in both the Jack Hampshire Trophy and Heavy Woollen Cup finals. And with there being a possibility of meeting in the Council play-offs as well as contesting the league title, an epic battle was inevitably on the cards for the four trophies.

Batley's second team had already lifted the Crowther Cup, in what was shaping up to be a memorable season for the club. It was, however, Mirfield who were top of the league as the teams battled out the Heavy Woollen Cup final. It was Batley who drew first blood, winning the tie by 42 runs.

The game attracted a record gate, as 800 fans turned out for the match. With Batley batting first, Mirfield got off to a promising start, when they bowled out dangerman David Lovell after just 37 runs. Batley's depth showed through, however, as Bob Cooper stepped forward to score an unbeaten 72 – leaving his side on a healthy 196-7 at the end of the innings, despite Iqbal Khan taking four wickets. Cooper's plight for the man-of-the-match award would come under threat, however, from teammate Elliot Noble whose lethal bowling left Mirfield all out 154. Despite a brave performance from Mirfield, Batley proved too strong this time round and the side looked towards the remaining silverware of the season.

As the Jack Hampshire Trophy final approached, Mirfield were sitting two points clear of Batley and were emerging as the mainstays at the top of the division. Their season hopes were dealt a massive blow in the final, however, as they lost to Batley by 10 wickets.

Mirfield's hopes of avenging the Heavy Woollen defeat were severely dashed when they were bowled all out by Batley for 101. Man-of-the-match Paul Blakeley did the damage, taking 4 wickets for 17 runs in 7 overs. With Batley chasing such a low total, Mirfield's attack fought bravely as Lee Morrith and John Foster restricted Batley to just 10 runs from the first 10 overs. However, in the end Mirfield were unable to prevent Batley from reaching the necessary total.

The end of August saw Batley pull back Mirfield's two-point advantage in the league and with the two sides delicately poised at the top of the table, the sides met in the most important league game of the season. Mirfield had home advantage at the Memorial Ground, and looked in control after a convincing batting effort. Indeed, their total could have been even more, had they not surrendered four wickets in the final two overs. Batley reached the final over 15 runs short of Mirfield's total, but an inspired batting performance from David Lovell saw them score 15 and the game finished a draw.

There were just two games of the season remaining and there was a big chance that the title could be decided on averages, if both sides maintained their impressive league form. Unfortunately averages were not needed, as Mirfield lost their penultimate game of the season to fourth-placed Gomersal. An uncharacteristic batting display from Mirfield saw them all out in the league for the first time that season. Their final total of just 78 was way short of the 140 set by Gomersal. Meanwhile, Batley fought back against Ossett to get one hand on the league title.

The last day of the season saw Mirfield requiring a six-point win over East Ardsley and a Batley defeat at Gomersal to ensure a famous league victory. Despite a valiant effort, Mirfield were unable to bowl East Ardsley all out, so only secured four points. A Batley victory ensured the inevitable as once again Mirfield were left with little to show for their heroic efforts.

The following day Batley completed a memorable quadruple as they defeated Mirfield by four wickets in the Yorkshire Council Play-Off Final. It was a cruel end to a disappointing season for Mirfield that had promised and arguably deserved so much more. Their courageous fight on four fronts had been overshadowed by the clinical performances of Batley and the Mirfield players were left with nothing to show from what had looked likely to be a successful season.

However, in sport, one of the main tests is how well you respond to setbacks and defeats. It is all about character and determination. While some teams may have folded after such heartbreak, Mirfield responded the following season by securing the league title. They completed a memorable double by also lifting the Heavy Woollen Cup for the first time since 1963.