

## **GREAT MATCH**

### **Victory in the Face of Adversity - The Jack Hampshire Final, 1994**

**By James Norbury**

The phrase 'in the face of adversity' is used relatively frequently when it comes to reporting on triumphs and achievements in sport. However, it could not be used more fittingly than to describe the truly courageous performance put in by the Mirfield starting eleven in the 1994 Jack Hampshire Trophy final.

Adversity is certainly what was staring the Mirfield players square in the face as they took to the field on 7 August. Having been decimated in the Central Yorkshire League by Gomersal the previous day, after succumbing to an eight-wicket defeat, they were also forced to play the final without inspirational captain Russell Heritage. They had also lost their match the weekend earlier, when they lost by 51 runs to Liversedge. To make matters worse, their opposition in the final was table-topping Methley who had lifted the Heavy Woollen Cup the previous weekend. Unlike Mirfield, Methley had seen off their opposition on the day prior to the final in extremely convincing fashion.



**Man of the match John Westerby**

Mirfield looked up against it and were led out at Ossett to field first by stand-in skipper Andy Bolt. In truth, however, the game would not turn out to be the one-sided affair that many people had predicted. Instead, it would become the second closest game in the history of the cup final. With Methley batting first, they were relying heavily on their three main batsmen: Steve Bourne, Peter Oldham and Kevin Rich. By the time Methley were halfway through their 40 overs, they were 92-2. But more importantly, they had lost all three of their key batsmen. Bourne was bowled by Eric Bell and Oldham was caught by Simon Geldar before Rich followed soon after.

With their top three batsmen gone, Methley struggled to put runs on the board. They were particularly frustrated by the bowling of Eric Bell who conceded just 15 runs in 8 overs, and man-of-the-match John Westerby who took 3 for 13 in 7 overs. Following some skilful Mirfield fielding and some sloppy Methley batting, the favourites were eventually dispatched after 37.5 overs for 143.

While the total looked beatable, Methley were still regarded as the clear favourites due to Mirfield's indifferent form in the league and cups over the season. Mirfield had looked likely to go out in the first round of the competition, after they scored only 109 against opponents

Ossett. With the game looking in Ossett's favour, Russell Heritage produced a match-winning performance to save the game for Mirfield, taking an incredible five wickets in eight balls. Meanwhile, in the semi-final they had to rely on Saeed Azad to help them into the final after he scored an unbeaten century against his former club, Gomersal.

Azad was also extremely influential in the final, scoring a vital 47 which included eight boundaries. It was a fitting finale for Saeed, as it was his last game for Mirfield before he returned to his native Pakistan. Mirfield were slow off the mark with Andy Bolt out for 14, while Westerby made 23 before being caught behind. But with the help of Azad, Mirfield pressed on to score a promising 82 for 2. They began to lose wickets quickly after this, however, and by the time they had pushed their score up to 138, they had lost 9 wickets.

Mirfield needed 6 runs of 15 balls and were relying on Simon Geldar and 54-year-old Eric Bell, who was planning to retire at the end of the season. Bell said: "Although I opened the batting for Mirfield years previous, I was very nervous. But I was determined not to let it show and rely on my experience to give Simon Geldar the support he needed."

Eric Bell formed a good batting partnership with Geldar that helped secure the trophy for Mirfield. But the finish proved to be a nail-biting one for all concerned. This is best summed up by Andy Kaye who commented: "I couldn't watch the closing stages. The tension was almost unbearable!" With three runs needed to seal the contest for Mirfield, Geldar added an important single to bring his score up to 36.



**Simon Geldar**

Eric Bell took guard knowing that one mistake could be the difference between victory and defeat. The tense finale was accentuated when the ball was bowled towards Bell, clipping his pads in the process. He and Geldar managed to run two leg-byes, securing a famous victory for Mirfield. "I had every confidence in Eric and when he set off on the leg-bye I've never shouted so loud on a cricket field as when we went for a second," adds Simon Geldar. It was Eric Bell's first major trophy of his career: "I was trying to turn the ball down the leg-side; it struck my pads and we were able to sprint the winning leg-byes. It was a marvellous feeling."

The victory was a case of third time lucky for Mirfield. They had been beaten in the final by Gomersal the previous season, and in 1989 they had also lost in the final to Batley. Man-of-the-match John Westerby summed up what the momentous triumph meant to the Mirfield players: "To win as one of the Mirfield lads in the team was something special."

The cricket was not the only thing on display during the final. The game was momentarily interrupted by a male stalker, prompting the PA announcer to announce over the tannoy: "The light must be bad out there. I can't see anything!"