

## **2007 Season Preview**

**By James Norbury**

***As the days grow longer and summer's imminent arrival beckons, Mirfield CC are gearing themselves up for the start of the new season in the Huddersfield Central League...***

The Mirfield squad are hoping to build on their solid fourth-place finish last season. With a potential promotion finish not beyond the realms of possibility, the players will be looking to move quickly out of the traps while maintaining a high level of consistency. Mirfield's club captain and secretary Pat Neal believes that his side have what it takes to mount a credible push for promotion this time round: "We are confident that we can challenge for promotion. We have strengthened our team with two good players and I believe we can improve on last season."



**The club is strong on female support**

Mirfield have added to their ranks this season with the arrival of two new players. Mathew Hanson joins the squad from neighbours Moorlands. The opening bowler is also a strong batsman and will be a good all-round addition to the team. He will be joined by hard-hitting batsman Amjad Mahmood, who joins from former Central Yorkshire League rivals Batley.

Mirfield will be looking no further than the opening game of the season – an intriguing home tie against Woodfield Park. The Mirfield eleven will be hoping to make home advantage at the Memorial Ground count, as victory over their challenging opposition may set a positive tone for the remainder of the season and Pat is under no illusions as to how important the game could be: "Personally I will be telling the lads to hit the ground running. It would be great to get off to a winning start and that would be really positive for the rest of the season. We need to perform well."

Since their arrival in the Huddersfield Central League back in 2005, Mirfield have steadily advanced up the ranks. Immediate promotion to Section 'A' showed character and a successful progression. While last year's season helped consolidate the club's position in the league, the hope for the forthcoming campaign is that the team can continue its drive to recovery, following its merger with Harry Lime CC, after withdrawing from the Central Yorkshire League.

Despite the steady progress that the club has made, Neal admits that last year did not go quite to plan for the team: "Last season was a little disappointing and we weren't able to get a settled side together. There wasn't a lot of stability and there were too many disruptions."

As well as the league, there are also the cup competitions to contend with and Pat is confident that Mirfield can put together at least one credible cup run: "We have a good draw in the Allsop Cup against Birchencliffe and we made the semi-finals in that last year. It would certainly be nice to get a decent cup run this season. We had a good run in the 20/20 competition a couple of seasons ago, so it would be great to do something like that again."

So which Mirfield players does Pat believe will have the biggest impact on the team this season? "I think batting wise, the person to look out for is fifteen-year-old David Bolt. He's one of our top batsmen and he was good last year. I think he is improving all the time and I think he will score a lot of runs this season. I think Ajmad Zarif will be an important bowler for us. He is our fastest bowler and he didn't get much luck last year, but I think he should take a lot of wickets this season."

It is also hoped that success will come the way of Mirfield's second team, Mirfield Harry Lime. They received a fortunate break last season when they were reprieved from relegation. The second-team players will be hoping to take full advantage of this and their plight will be strongly helped by the arrival of some former first-team players. The Section 'D' side welcome in Paul Newton, Graham Whitworth, Danny Martin, as well as former captain Rob Hague. Pat believes that these new additions will ensure that this season will be very much different to last year's campaign.

He says: "I think Mirfield Harry Lime will have a better season than last time. They were let off with the reprieve last year and I really hope they can build on that. They have been strengthened this season by some first-team players and I think they can finish near the top this time. I think both sides have a great chance of promotion if they play well."