

## **Player Profile – Pat Neal**

### **James Norbury**

When it comes to individuals who have had a huge role to play at Mirfield Cricket Club, there are few people in the club's history who can claim to have had as much involvement as Pat Neal.

Pat has taken up numerous roles at the club during his time, including being a member of the committee, club secretary, youth team coach, Mirfield's first ever club historian and, of course, a formidable player. He has also written two books on the club's history, one of which was produced in association with the Cricket Heritage Project at the University of Huddersfield. He wrote *50 Not Out* which focuses on the year of its re-formation in 1952. His second book *George Herbert Hirst – Mirfield Cricket Club 1891*, looks at how this legendary and inspirational cricketer spent a season at Mirfield in the early stages of his unprecedented career. Pat admits that he 'got bored one afternoon' and began trying to find whether stories that Hirst had spent the 1891 season at Mirfield were in fact true. That afternoon's research eventually led to the production of his second book.

Following a conversation with club president Clive Brook, Pat became Mirfield CC's first historian in 2002. Pat admits to have always had a certain fascination with figures and, after exploring the history of an old photograph at the time of Mirfield's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, he began to take an active role in researching the club's history. Pat has done a tremendous job in doing so, and has managed to accumulate statistics for the majority of seasons post-1952. Since 2002 he has kept detailed first and second team playing records for Mirfield.



Pat has not only been influential behind the scenes at Mirfield. He has also proved to be a prominent first- and second-team cricketer for the club. Over the course of his ongoing playing career, Pat has appeared in eleven cup finals (Heavy Woollen Cup, Jack Hampshire Trophy and the Wheatley Cup). One of Pat's finest achievements came in the 1990 season when he helped the club to the Heavy Woollen Cup and Central Yorkshire League Championship 'Double'.

The victories were made even sweeter considering that in the previous season Mirfield had been runners-up to Batley in both the league and the cup. Pat did not bat in the cup final but made a vital catch on the boundary during the game.

Pat believes his greatest personal achievement came in the 1989 Jack Hampshire Trophy semi-final tie away at Ossett. Pat recalls: 'I was part of a good side that included the likes of Andy Bolt, Russell Heritage and Iqbal Kahn...There didn't seem like there was much chance for me to bat.' Pat did get his chance, however, batting at number eight with Mirfield 97-8 chasing 180. Pat took part in a stand with Simon Gelder, the pair notching 84 between them and winning the game for Mirfield. Unfortunately, the team were unable to recapture their form in the final, narrowly losing out to Batley.

This loss is one of three final defeats which Pat has experienced during his career. However, his positive moments for Mirfield far outweigh the negatives. Another memorable moment in his career came in 1991 when he helped spur Mirfield 2<sup>nd</sup> XI to victory in the Wheatley Cup. They later won it again in 1997. During his time playing cricket, Pat has scored 12,426 runs, including 1,000 runs in a season twice for the Mirfield second team. He has also scored 13 career centuries, two of which came for the first team. In his 21 years at Mirfield, Pat has scored 84 half-centuries, including 21 for the first eleven.

Pat first got into cricket through his father. He often went to watch his Dad play in games and remembers being responsible for keeping match scores; something that helped develop his interest in sporting statistics. Born in Wakefield in 1961, Pat soon moved with his family to Herefordshire where his Dad went on to play for Ledbury CC second team. Pat occasionally made appearances for the club; when he was 12 they were a player short, and he eventually went on to play for them regularly for a few seasons. He even got to form a batting partnership with his father for a number of games! Pat did not play a lot of cricket at school, opting instead to take part in athletics where he represented his county in the 200 metres. He did, however, represent Herefordshire twice at under-15 level in cricket - against Worcestershire and Avon. And he still has the tie to prove this fact!

Pat went on to play for Herefordshire-based club Colwall in his late teens. He also began playing for his college side at St. Johns York in 1983. At this time, he saw a lot of the Worcestershire county side. He idolised players such as Basil D'Oliveria and Glenn Turner, but he always supported his home county Yorkshire. His biggest hero was the great Geoffrey Boycott. As a teenager he saw the opening batsman notch his hundredth first-class century.

Pat graduated from St. Johns with a degree in History and American Studies, and has worked in a number of different occupations which have included working for a building society, a firm of solicitors, a funeral division as a regional administrator, and finally Stockport Crematorium, where he currently works as assistant registrar. In this job he is able to use his research skills further as he helps relatives who are investigating their family history. Pat

married wife Gill on 7 April 1990. They have an 11-year-old son who currently keeps score for Mirfield CC on matchdays.

Pat first joined Mirfield in 1986 after his wife (then his girlfriend) got a teaching post at a nearby school. He made his debut against Hunslet Nelson on 10 May, but did not get to bat as Mirfield bowled out the opposition for just 51. The next game against Batley saw him open the batting with Andy Bolt, and he recorded a score of 20 not out before the game was rained off. He joined the club committee in 1989 and was under-15s cricket manager for two years from 1990. In 1996 he became club secretary, a role he still operates in today. The role includes producing the annual report at the AGM and registering new players, but Pat jokingly admits: 'It looks good on the CV to put that you are secretary of the MCC!'

Pat has taken a more prominent playing role in the first team since the club's departure from the Bradford League. And he's been very successful. At the 2006 awards night he not only topped the club's batting averages but also won an award for most man-of-the-match gongs, as well as picking up the players' player of the year award, which he admits meant a lot to him. He believes that the greatest player he has ever played alongside is Iqbal Khan, who he describes as a 'brilliant batsman, a brilliant fielder and a great spin-bowler.' During his 21 years at the club, Pat has never considered leaving. He admits that even when he received an offer from another club, he was never tempted to play away from Mirfield CC. 'It has become a part of my life...in 21 years I've not thought of playing anywhere else.'