

# “BATTING IS PIVOTAL TO SEASON’S SUCCESS,” SAYS VICE-CAPTAIN

By Samantha Shilton

The sun is shining and the cricket season is officially underway, but there are some dark clouds on the horizon for Upper Hopton’s First and Second XIs.

“I think we’ll be hit hard this season,” says Russell Laycock, Second XI vice-captain. “A couple of the boys are going off travelling the world in June, and they’ll be missed”.



And Laycock is right. The boys that are going travelling just happen to be Craig Gardner and Robert Holdsworth, captain and vice-captain of the First XI respectively. “Obviously it was not our intention to leave in the middle of the season, it is just how it has worked out when we have put everything together,” says Gardner, 23.

Luckily, Upper Hopton have a number of younger players keen to break into the adult team and who are more than willing to take advantage of the situation.

Laycock suggests that “there will be a need to reshuffle the teams a bit, a few of our players will be bumped up to the 1<sup>st</sup> XI, and then some of the younger players will need to step into our shoes. It will be tough, but then for players like Tom Heaton who are ready to step up to the mark it is a positive thing”.

The question then is whether this reshuffle will affect the club's bid for promotion? "I don't think we'll be contenders for promotion this year. Unfortunately people have other commitments so players that are available one week can't play the next, and this upsets the balance in the team."

"It could be that these players will be required to play more consistently in order for the club to keep up its challenge for promotion - whether that will happen though is debatable. The best result that we can hope for from this season is finishing middle of the table."

In order to do that, the teams' training must be of a high standard. "Unfortunately we don't have the best facilities, and it can get a bit dark up here sometimes which makes it increasingly difficult when you're practising batting".

Laycock's solution? "Me and one of the other players are going to attempt to cut a wicket and have it on higher ground. We've got mobile nets as well, and if we are successful it'll mean that we can do some more effective batting training".

Laycock believes that this could be the key to the teams' success this season, and is possibly where previous seasons have been lost. "The 1<sup>st</sup> XI's batting is actually pretty good, but with the loss of those key players the batting strength will be affected and it's important to take pre-emptive measures. If we can improve on our batting, then there is no reason why we shouldn't have a good season and finish in a good spot in the table".