

“I WANT TO SEE THEM SMILING”

The Juniors

By Samantha Shilton

It's that time of year again – the sun is out, the evenings are longer, and the cricket season is finally underway.

Upper Hopton's junior teams have already begun outdoor training for the upcoming season, and not a minute too soon as three out of the four junior teams have a game this week. With most teams finishing mid-table last season, will Ian Heaton, Junior Teams Co-ordinator and coach of the Under-9s team, be going for top this season?



“All I ask is that the boys try their best. That is all I have ever asked of my teams. I want them to come off the pitch after giving it their all, and win or lose I want to see them smiling”. Heaton is right to take such an attitude towards the game at this level, the boys are young and at this age it is crucial to keep cricket in their minds as something fun to do.

“It's very much a team-orientated sport, and that is what I like to keep it. Everybody has a fair chance, and anybody that is playing at a high standard will be allowed to progress”. Heaton adds, “We have got some juniors in the

Under-15s that will be playing in the adult cricket this time; if we see the potential then we do like to push them through as it saves us older folk from having to play!”

The main problem that the junior teams will be facing is one related to age. For example, the Under-15s have only three players who are 15, and the rest of the team will be 14 years of age and under. Heaton believes that “the Under-15s will struggle this season because of that fact.

However, next season they will have a much stronger side as the boys develop and get that bit older. It is a similar story for the Under-13s as well, where I think there are four or five 13-year-olds and the rest of the team is made up of younger players”.

But this is not something that should put the boys off. Seasons like this one are where players can really show their worth and impress their coaches. This could ultimately lead to them being chosen to receive one of the many awards distributed at the presentation evening in August.

“We give out a variety of awards, Best Batter, Best Bowler, Best Junior, Players’ Player etc, and there is a set of awards for each age group so every junior has a good chance of receiving one,” Heaton says.

Awards are not something Heaton likes to give too much time to, however. “I’m not a big believer in it to be honest; I try to give recognition throughout the season, not just at the end of the season at a presentation evening. The kids seem to respond well to it though”.

As to whether the junior teams will win any other sort of awards, such as finishing top of the league table or winning the Armitage Cup, Heaton remains tight-lipped. “Our main aim is to have a good time really. Winning is a bonus; if it comes it comes, if it doesn’t at least we’ve had fun trying”.