

## Interview with Mick Smith

### Golcar's groundsman on pitch preparation, his time as a player, and the prospects for Swallow Lane pitches in 2007

By Peter Redding

Cricket is a game known for its players and more specifically its star performers; when we think about the game we rarely think about those who put the effort in behind the scenes. It is important to remember that when we see high-class matches it is largely due to the surface that the game is played on. The majority of great matches are played on good surfaces. The role of the groundsman is therefore crucial in setting the scene for an entertaining cricket match. For the past decade the responsibility at Swallow Lane has fallen upon Mick Smith and while cricket is a summer game the role of the groundsman is certainly not. I spoke to Mick to find out more about the job and get an insight into what we can expect from the wickets at Swallow Lane this season.



#### **What encouraged you to become the groundsman at Golcar?**

The grounds had deteriorated in the 1994 and 1995 seasons. At the start of 1996 I put myself forward for the job, I wanted to help improve the playing surface and with the help of David Law I think I helped to do this. I think the wickets have continued to improve since then.

#### **How does your job differ during the season and the off-season - how does the preparation change?**

The amount of work done during the season can be determined by the quality of the work done during the autumn and spring. If the surface isn't maintained throughout this time then the job becomes even harder in the summer. The autumn work consists of spiking, re-seeding, applying a top seeding of soil and feeding the square. The square is cut occasionally throughout the winter but this depends on the weather. The spring work mainly consists of rolling the square and planning the wickets that are to be used throughout the season. During the season a variety of tasks are carried out, from mowing, rolling, marking out wickets to strimming and mowing the outfield, these are done on a daily basis so the job never stops.

**Did you play cricket before you became a groundsman - if so who did you play for and what were your career highlights?**

I've played cricket for Golcar all my life, starting in the Under-13s and progressing to be first-team captain. The highlights would be the Sykes Cup semi-final against Skelmanthorpe at Golcar in 1993 and then playing at Lord's in the National Indoor Finals. From a personal point of view my highlight would be the game against Dalton where I took 7 for 27, my best bowling figures. My highest score with the bat was 84 against Bradley Mills.

**Who were your cricketing heroes?**

My hero now would be Darren Gough but prior to that I would have said Ian Botham.

**What would you consider to be more important – producing pitches that provide entertaining cricket or producing pitches that suit Golcar and give them the best possible chance of success?**

They are both equally as important.

**How have the pitches at Golcar changed during your time?**

I would like to think the wickets have got better. They have favoured the batsmen more than the bowlers and that is what I have looked to achieve. In one-day cricket you want to see a lot of runs scored and plenty of boundaries.

**Has the job become easier or more difficult as time has gone on?**

When I first started the equipment was old, run down and unreliable; now the mowers are newer and more reliable and this has made the job a lot easier. Although the increase in the amount of teams playing at Golcar has made me a lot busier, we now have under-11 teams as well as the other age-group sides. The amount of games that the club plays increases each year, so from that point of view the job has become harder.

**How do the pitches change during the course of the season?**

In the early season the wickets are softer and give more help to the bowlers. As the season progresses they flatten out and become a lot harder; they are then a lot better for batting because the weather tends to intervene much less than at the start of the season.

**How reliant are you on good weather for your pitch preparation?**

The groundsman always gets the blame for a dodgy track. The weather is obviously something you can't do anything about. You have to prepare the pitch to the best of your ability but if the weather intervenes then the preparation can be ruined and the job becomes a lot harder.

**What kind of pitches can we expect to see at Golcar this season?**

I would like to think that the wickets will be batter-friendly. If a batsman is prepared to graft then a score of 230-plus is quite achievable but there is always something in it for the bowlers. A good pitch should always offer assistance to everyone if they are

putting the effort in but in one-day cricket you want the bat to dominate the ball slightly.

**What would you say is the ideal type of pitch that you aim to produce at Golcar?**

A wicket that gives a bit of help to everyone. I think people want to see lots of runs scored. That is the way the game has been going in recent years, but you want to provide conditions that offer encouragement to the bowlers as well.

**What is the most exciting match you have seen at Golcar?**

There's been a few exciting matches at Golcar but the one that stands out for me is the Sykes Cup semi-final against Skelmanthorpe in 1993. The weather was great, there was a good crowd and it was a really great match although unfortunately we lost by about 20 runs; it was a relatively high-scoring game so that would be my favourite match.

**Who has been your favourite Golcar player over the years?**

Dave Marshall - he had a one-liner for every occasion but above all else he was a good player who had a will to win that put the others to shame.

**What do you enjoy most about being the groundsman and how long do you want to stay in the job in the future?**

I enjoy being the groundsman at Golcar so I'll carry on until I'm told otherwise. It's nice to see the ground on a Friday teatime with everything prepared for the Saturday game and yes I do get frustrated at times when people say you should do this and you should do that but these are normally people who are never prepared to come and help you. I would imagine it is like this at every club though.