

125 Years of Hurt are ended-2005 Season Review

Honley Cricket Club celebrated its 125 year anniversary as the 2005 season began but one thing remained, they still hadn't won a Drakes Premiership title in the Huddersfield and District League. They had won the Section B title numerous times throughout their history but they had yet to go all the way. How could a side that have had so many famous professionals such as Craig White be starved of success in the league for so long? The 2004 season had provided little reason to think that the wait would end in 2005 either. In 2004 Honley had finished in mid table and had lacked the consistency that was needed to try and challenge for the title even though they had talented professionals among their ranks.

Honley CC had long since established itself as a Premiership side in the Huddersfield before 2005 began. They were also boosted by the presence of a number of professional players that ply their trade in first class cricket both at home and abroad. These players would prove to be pivotal to the club's success in 2005. In addition to the professionals available to them Honley had recruited a number of players from their successful rivals Thongsbridge. Simon Kelly, Danny Howard, Richard Jakeman, Richie Howarth and Simon England had all been brought in to strengthen the squad from a club that had been stronger than Honley for all of the 1990's. Not only do these players have considerable ability they also have what club Secretary Tim Hirst calls the "winning mentality that was needed at the club" having tasted success in the past.

Peter Redding

The beginning of the success story for Honley CC in 2005 was on August 7th, the date for the Sykes Cup final. Honley CC had a poor record in Sykes Cup finals going into the game having only won once in eight previous attempts. Their opponents were Delph and Dobcross who were making their finals debut in the competition. Their team included former Lancashire pacesman Mike Smethurst, who had played county cricket up until a couple of years prior to 2005. Honley CC lost the toss and were put into bat by Delph captain Grant Jones. For once the reliable opening combination of Simon Kelly and Danny Howard was breached early with Kelly falling for just five. This cleared the stage for Richard Jakeman to hit 95 and Steve Crook 50 as Honley recorded a strong total of 251 for 6. Honley CC were well on course for only their second triumph in the Sykes Cup. All of Honley's bowlers chipped in with important wickets as Delph and Dobcross were restricted to just 155. Ritchie Howarth was the pick of the bowlers taking 4 for 47, Steve Crook, Martin Green and Rajesh Pawar all took two apiece. Honley CC had won by 96 runs and had captured the Sykes Sup for just the second time. Richard Jakeman was named as the man of the match. Honley were presented with the Sykes Cup by Bruce Jakeman who was in the Honley side that won the 1982 competition, Honley's first Sykes Cup winning side. He is also the father of Richard Jakeman. The question to be asked now was could the Sykes Cup win provide Honley with the inspiration they needed to finally capture their first Drakes Huddersfield and District League Championship?

Honley Cricket Club's success in 2005 can be put down to many things but it was the club's professionals that provided some of the telling

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contributions. Steve Crook, then of Lancashire, was able to play a part in most of the season and his contributions with bat and ball were crucial. He took 58 wickets and was the spearhead of the bowling attack. His aggressive middle order batting also proved vital on a number of occasions, none more so than in the Sykes Cup Final where he made a crucial half century. Honley were also aided by the services of Yorkshire batsmen Matthew Wood who was prolific in his few appearances for the club during the year. The overseas professional for Honley in 2005 was Rajesh Pawar, the left arm spinner who has played first class cricket in India for Mumbai. Pawar would prove to be the club's leading bowler during the season taking 82 wickets. It was very much noticeable that when both Crook and Pawar were unavailable for the last three matches of the 2005 season Honley CC struggled to replicate the form they had produced throughout the season. Honley were comfortably placed at the top of the league before they suffered back to back defeats against Meltham and Golcar. This set up a tense season finale away at Kirkburton. Surely Honley wouldn't throw away the league title at the final hurdle when they had been at the top of the league for so much of the season. The finale weekend of the season ended up being a non event with Yorkshire's famous cricketing weather making play impossible at any of the scheduled matches. At last Honley CC could toast their first Drakes Huddersfield and District League Championship.

Honley had led the Drakes Premiership for most of the season and Club Secretary Tim Hirst singled out Simon Kelly and Danny Howard for praise for their role in getting the club into this position, "The openers (Kelly)

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and (Howard) have been great all year in scoring about 2,000 runs between them, this has always given us good starts for the batsmen to build on." Hirst also praised Captain Rob Moore calling him the "Mike Brearley of the team," in reference to his well thought out tactics. Moore, himself commented "It was Honley's 125th Anniversary this summer, so it was quite fitting that we should capture the Championship for the first time." Honley CC were also awarded the Huddersfield Examiner's Sports team for what was a historic double of League Championship and Sykes Cup.

So what next for Honley Cricket Club next season? They have finally got a monkey off their back by winning the Drakes League Championship for the first time, how will they build on this? Honley's success in 2005 was a team effort and all their players contributed during the course of the season. Honley were assisted by the contributions of players like Martin Green and Ritchie Howarth who performed consistently throughout the season taking vital wickets, despite not receiving the same level of plaudits as the likes of Crook, Kelly and Pawar. Honley will need to perform just as well collectively next season, particularly as leading pace bowler Steven Crook's appearances will be limited next season after signing a county contract with Northamptonshire. Club Secretary Tim Hirst is confident that the youngsters at Honley are up to the job. He said "We have a really great youth set up at the club and some of the young players have turned out for the second team already." So what will 2006 bring for Honley CC? Will the club's second League Championship quickly follow their first? Hopefully it won't take another 125 years!

