

The Route to the Final...

**Shepley v Batley, 1990 Heavy Woollen Cup Semi Final,
Sunday 15 July 1990**

By Dave Wooding

Underdogs Shepley take on a strong Batley line-up, who are defending their title, with a place in the final at stake

Perhaps the most prestigious cup competition in the Yorkshire area, the Heavy Woollen Cup sees teams from various leagues competing against each other. The year 1990 witnessed Shepley enjoy a good run in the competition, with perhaps the most exciting match of their campaign coming in the semi-final, which saw them entertain the holders and firm tournament favourites, Batley. The final was now within touching distance for which ever team could triumph.



With the toss won by captain Geoff Gill, it was decided that Shepley would bat first and try to defend a total, a tactic familiar to the team throughout Gill's time in charge in the 1980s - thus hopefully giving the home side a crucial advantage in this mammoth tie.

Very much the star of the Shepley innings was their overseas player Raju Kulkarni, who over the course of the season prior to this game had either dazzled or frustrated the Shepley followers, with either a match-winning performance or a forgettable one. However, this particular Sunday the side of Kulkarni that Shepley wanted to see did appear. Kulkarni helped Shepley set a winning total, with the former Bombay captain smashing 44 as Shepley reached 183-7 at the close of their innings. Dale Skelly, opening the batting, also showed stubborn resistance and top scored with 60.

With Batley needing 184 to reach yet another cup final, Shepley keeper Skelly recalls: "We identified all-rounder Paul Blakeley as their key batsman. We believed that if we could get him out cheaply then we had a good chance of winning." With the bowlers knowing who their target was, the Marsh Laners set about the task of cementing their place in the final.

Opening the bowling, Raju Kulkarni tore into the Batley openers, and he was able to dismiss the first three batsmen in a relatively short period. Batley then appeared to be in deep trouble when Harrison was trapped lbw off Steve Carter for just 4, leaving the favourites at 48-4, but with their star batsman Blakeley still at the crease.

However, with Prentice now accompanying him, Blakeley started to build his innings, causing the fielding side considerable concern, not least when Skelly put down what he could only describe as “an easy chance” off the bowling of Rob Holliday. Worse was to come, though, for the stopper, and as the rain began to fall he again dropped Blakeley, much to the disbelief of his watching teammates. Eventually, with the match delicately balanced, rain and bad light made the conditions unplayable, and it was decided the match would continue on the following day, Monday 16th.



Play on Monday began with Batley on 94-4, and their dangerman Blakeley still occupying the crease. Wicketkeeper Skelly recalls spending the whole of the previous night hoping his two dropped catches wouldn't cost Shepley a place in the final. However, things were to get worse before they got better. With Holliday's unfinished over from the day before re-commencing, the keeper was again guilty of letting Blakeley off the hook, as yet another catch failed to stick in his gloves.

Having seen Skelly drop Blakeley three times now, the crowd must have been beginning to think that it would be Batley's day and they would romp to victory. However, Blakeley and Batley's luck began to change when Indian overseas player Kulkarni stepped up a notch in his second over of the day, and made Prentice play onto his own stumps, thus breaking the key partnership. Three balls later, Kulkarni had another victim as he clean bowled Darren Archer. Kulkarni's next over saw the end of Paul Heaton, as Batley slipped from 102-4 to 106-7.

No.9 batsman Rukin provided some support for Blakeley, but when he was run out with the score on 121 Shepley sensed victory was well within their reach. As partners began to run out, Blakeley was forced to increase his run rate, and was eventually the last wicket to fall, caught on the boundary by John Lindley from the bowling of Holliday. Monday had seen Batley lose six

wickets for just 36 runs, and Shepley had secured a place in the Heavy Woollen Cup final, with a 53-run victory.

The final of the 1990 competition took place on 5 August. Unfortunately, Shepley were unable to repeat the heroics of the epic semi-final, as they lost to Mirfield, with a top-order batting collapse leaving them at 30-4 and severely hindering their chances of matching their opponents' total of 245 for 6. However, a brave innings from Kulkarni gave Shepley a glimmer of hope, with the Indian contributing 70 in just 84 deliveries. However, it was just not to be, and the Marsh Laners were eventually beaten, but not without recovering enough to make a respectable 165 all out.



Scorecard from Sunday 15/Monday 16 July:

Shepley Innings:

D Skelly	c. Rukin	b. Prentice	60
A Beever	c. & b	b. Kershaw	1
R Potter	c. Rukin	b. Blakeley	28
G Gill	c. Harrison	b. Prentice	14
R Kulkarni	c. Archer	b. Blakeley	44
R Holliday	c. Rukin	b. Blakeley	0
S Carter	run	out	14
J Lindley	not	out	13
A Goodair	not	out	1
		Extras	8
Total (for 7wkts)		50 overs	183

Fall of Wickets 4, 68, 106, 119, 119, 146, 181

Bowling:

Noble 13-3-32-0
 Kershaw 6-3-11-1
 Blakeley 19-2-62-3
 Prentice 12-0-71-2

Batley Innings:

D Dove	c. Kettlewell	b. Kulkarni	2
D Lovell	c. Beever	b. Kulkarni	31
R Cooper		b. Kulkarni	0
P Blakeley	c. Lindley	b. Holliday	50
N Harrison	lbw	b. Carter	4
J Prentice		b. Kulkarni	21
D Archer		b. Kulkarni	0
P Heaton		b. Kulkarni	0
T Rukin	run	out	4
E Noble	run	out	1
G Kershaw	not	out	0
		Extras	17
Total (all out)		45.2 overs	130

Fall of Wickets 12, 25, 42, 48, 102, 106, 106, 121, 124, 130

Bowling:

Kulkarni 20-7-36-6
Goodair 3-0-18-0
Carter 12-0-40-1
Kettlewell 3-1-9-0
Holliday 7.2-0-17-1