

## XI Season Review 2011

By XI Captain Craig Hitchenor

The shock departure of Ian Philliskirk at the end of the 2010 season left the club with much re-organisation. Others to replace were left arm opening bowler Andrew Walker who returned to his home club Moorlands, Adal Islam who made a quick departure back to Manningham Mills and overseas wicket keeper batsman Shane Gadsdon returned to New Zealand.

Their replacements in the shape of young home grown wicket keeper James Midgley and former players Tabbi Bhatti and Ahsan Butt who were part of the Championship winning side of 2009 together with a Sri Lankan overseas player in Dehiwalage Perera gave a much changed look to the first team but it was felt a mid table finish should be the minimum expectation.

A new captain was appointed and Craig Hitchenor took over with Simon Webb as vice captain.

An excellent all round performance in the opening fixture against Undercliffe proved a false dawn, a day later we were out of the Heavy Woollen Cup, losing at Yeadon. In a 22 game season it was critical to make a good start to the league and the loss at short notice of Mushtaq Ahmed was a huge factor in the following two defeats against Farsley and Pudsey St Lawrence.

The overseas player had yet to arrive and defeat at East Bierley preceded a timely home victory against Hanging Heaton. Again it proved to be a case of one step forward, two steps back as we were unceremoniously dumped out of the Priestley Cup in the first round round at Division 2 side Great Horton, admittedly, Suleman Khan, Great Horton's overseas player played a leading role in our defeat but there was a sense on the day that Great Horton had a greater desire to win. Fringe players given leading opportunities that day disappointed and crushing league defeats at Woodlands and Bradford & Bingley followed, the one bright spot being a remarkable last wicket stand of 88 between Craig Hitchenor and James Midgley in the defeat at Bingley.

The match at home to Gomersal the following week was shaping up to be crucial and we produced a strong performance with a comfortable 94 run victory, this gave us 3 wins from 8 and although still no sign of the overseas player it was something to build on as we approached the halfway point of the season so whilst our lowly league position was a concern such was the competitive nature of the league, we still felt capable of stringing some wins together. Indeed, winning positions were thrown away in each of the next 3 matches. A one wicket defeat from the jaws of victory at home to Pudsey Congs was a major blow, the following week Manningham Mills were in trouble at 75-5 thanks to an inspired opening burst from Richard Atkins but they recovered to amass over 200 and we fell short and in the final game of the first half of the season we were 117-5 chasing 154 against Cleckheaton but collapsed to hand the points to Cleck. Three pivotal matches from which confidence never recovered and the season quickly fell away.

...e and Farsley and whilst an exciting 2 run win in a reduced  
...ffered some relief the writing was on the wall long before  
relegation was confirmed following defeat at Pudsey Congs at the end of August.

Ironically we finished the season with back to back victories showing a competitive spirit remained to the end of the season.

There were some heroics along the way, Mushy opened up with a 5 wicket haul against Undercliffe, Richard Atkins grabbed his first Bradford League 5 wicket haul against Hanging Heaton, Craig Hitchenor recorded a remarkable undefeated 74 in that amazing last wicket partnership at Bradford & Bingley and followed up with 6-15 in the victory against Gomersal. Ahsan Butt made an excellent 100 at Hanging Heaton and in the final day victory at Cleckheaton, Tom Smallwood achieved career best figures of 4-49.

Richard Atkins performances with bat and ball stood out throughout the season, finishing with 562 runs and 43 wickets, unfortunately the vultures were circling long before the season ended and he has now joined East Bierley for the guarantee of Division 1 cricket.

Others to depart seeking Division 1 cricket or more opportunities are Tabbi Bhatti, Ahsan Butt and Harry Smallwood.

So the winter will again herald much change but it is hoped the right mix of youth and experience can be brought together and allow the side to have a real go at returning to the top flight come the end of 2012.