

## SPORT IN BECKLEY

During recent discussions about the facilities that should be provided in our new village hall, the need for changing rooms has been questioned. This, of course, reflects the fact that today no sport is played on the playing field by village teams. This is quite a shock as one of Beckley's major assets is the playing field. I have lived in the village for about 35 years and have been quite heavily involved in village sport during that time. When we first came to the village there was a football team with a number of the players living in Beckley or having links with the village. Indeed members of the football club were involved in the construction of the village hall.

Soon after we arrived in the village a group of fathers set up football training for the children. This met every Saturday morning. Occasional games were organised against outside teams. There was a cub pack in the village and, as most of the cubs came to the football training, we were able to put out a team in the district cub competitions that managed to win both the outdoor and indoor events. This was even though we only had about 11 cubs so all had to play! It is good to see that football training is again being organised for the children.

In the mid 1980s, mainly due to the enthusiasm of Peter Robinson, who lived in Rose Cottage, a cricket team was formed. We cut out a square, purchased equipment, constructed a net and, in the first instance, played a number of 20 over evening games against other villages and various teams from Oxford. A number of players rediscovered cricket skills that had been dormant for some time and others attempted to learn to play from scratch. We didn't always manage to get exactly 11 players on the pitch as selection and availability of players could be unreliable. We were just as likely to turn up with 12 players as 10! However the club prospered and we eventually played longer matches on Sunday afternoons. Whilst there was a hardcore of regular players there are many people in the village who played occasionally, having been persuaded to play by Peter at short notice, either having been found in the pub on Saturday evening or, more likely, having been woken by one of his famous late night phone calls. During the winter, working parties attempted to improve the square, by scarifying, raking, top dressing and seeding until eventually the square ceased to be a danger to life and limb if a bowler attempted to bowl above medium pace. Players ranged in age from 10 to over 60 and teas were organised by ladies who probably covered an even greater age range. At the end of the day of course the teams retired to the pub. The club was finally disbanded in about 2008, due to lack of support, having operated for over 20 years, .The square now seems to have disappeared from sight.

Soon after the cricket club was formed Arthur Cooke very generously offered to put the money up for a tennis court. The Parish Council oversaw the construction of the court and asked for volunteers to form a club, that would manage the court and encourage tennis to be played. An American tournament was arranged when potential players could get to know each other and a committee was formed. Members paid a small membership fee and a booking system was set up. The court was kept locked to discourage vandalism and to encourage people to pay the membership fee. The money collected was used to pay for the maintenance of the court. That system operated for over 10 years until the committee ran out of steam. We played 2 matches against Horton and some members made regular use of the court whilst others were more infrequent users.

In 2000 Studley Wood Golf Club opened and quite a number of villagers joined. In particular young players from the village have done particularly well with some going on to be club champion at a very early age. It has also provided welcome employment opportunities for youngsters from Beckley and surrounding villages. Most years we have had a golf match against Horton, when about 30 villagers, young and old, men, women and children have a most enjoyable day of social golf, with our good friends from Horton, followed by a meal.

No one would claim that the sport outlined above has always been played to a high standard, although Tony Lock, Justin Langer and Matthew Hayden, all test cricketers of distinction, did play cricket against us! However everyone involved will have shared memories of the fun that we have had and, of course, the friendships that were formed.

Looking back it is clear that none of the initiatives above would have occurred if one or two people had not taken the first steps. Then it needs the support of others, who are prepared to put the effort and commitment in to get the sport up and running. Some people have commented how they miss the sight of cricket on the playing field or how little the tennis court is used. In the recent survey carried out to test support for a new village hall people have shown an interest in resurrecting sport in the village but it needs a few people to step forward and take an initiative. I'm sure they would quickly find many others prepared to help to get things going. I would be very happy to help anyone who is interested in getting sport up and running by providing insight from the past or by putting them in touch with others who have past experience.

Sport can be a great catalyst for social interaction, it can bring the generations together, could provide badly needed business for the village hall, improve the social life in the pub and ensure that the playing field is used more regularly than at present.

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