

“Pinkneys Green Cricket Club? I love it.” - Au Revoir Darren

Shortly before the start of the season, Darren Craythorne relocated to Hampshire. Given his long and outstanding playing career, it felt like a timely moment to ask him to reflect on his time at the club.

Darren's first cricketing memory was playing for Desborough school at Wellington College scoring 34 not out. Then one Sunday, in 1985, he was eating his dinner when his friend Colin Coddington knocked on his door and asked if he could play for the Pinkneys Green 2nd XI at Crowthorne. Darren had played football in the morning so was pretty tired but Colin begged him to make up the numbers.

Captain Geoff Lister soon gave Darren the opportunity to turn his arm over. He responded by returning fantastic debut figures of 6-36. Later on he hit the winning runs to get his 37 year career at the Green off to a flying start.

Aged 16, Darren was initially a bit daunted by some of the characters at the club but soon found his niche. He was quickly taken under the wing of all time club legend Lennie Timms who proved to be the biggest influence over his playing development. However Lennie “once moaned at me for being too competitive. He was just jealous that his peak had gone.”!

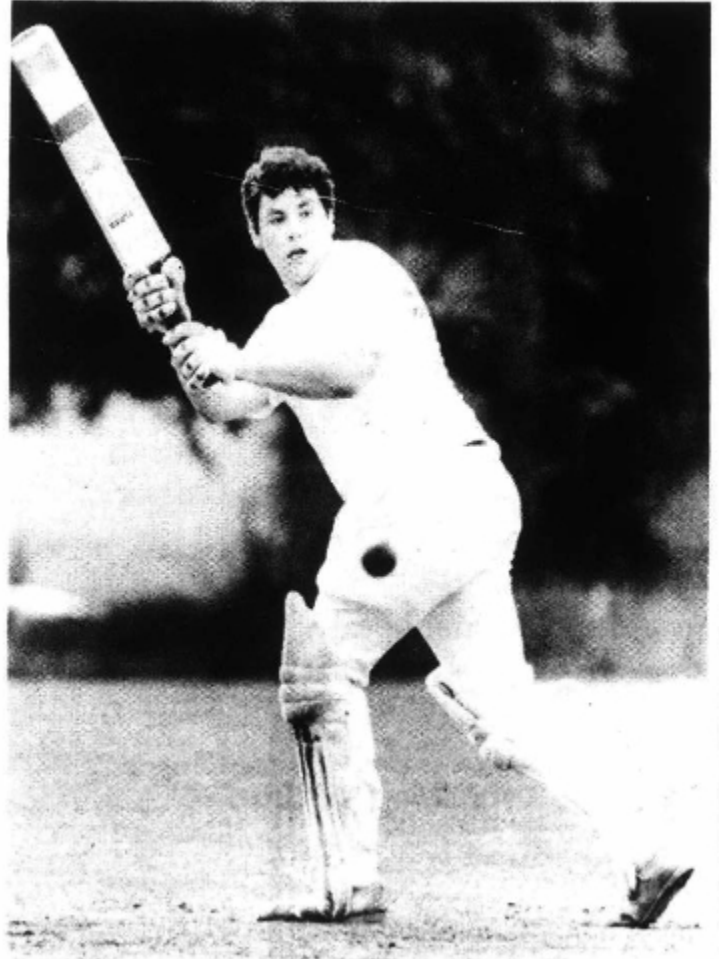
Towards the end of that first season, Lennie gave Darren three jelly beans before a friendly at Littlewick Green. This had a somewhat dramatic effect with Darren making the short trip with his head out of the window trying to sober up. He fared no better with a ball in his hand bowling five wides in one over but went onto score his first half century, winning the match with 68 not out, still barely compos mentis.

Through the eighties, Darren made his way into the Saturday 1st XI, eventually becoming captain of what turned into the best team for many years before or since. During this time Darren recalls that the Green played at Compton and Colin bowled a vicious bouncer which hit the batsman. He went to hospital, and returned to the crease with a massive bandage on his chin. Colin welcomed him back with a beamer.

Having spent most of the eighties in the doldrums, the first signs of an upturn in the club's fortunes came in the Old Paludians Diamond Jubilee Bowl. Darren was part of the team which reached three consecutive finals from 1988, winning that year and the next. Two of these finals were contested against North Maidenhead, a local rivalry, with a fiercely competitive edge which Darren always enjoyed.

This silverware sparked the club's rise from the bottom to the top division of the Berkshire League and 1993 saw a near double, as the Green finished runners up to Cippenham for the league title, and reached the Julian Cup Final.

Darren described Cippenham as his toughest league opponents, horrible to play against but certainly a team that could play cricket and he holds fond memories of that season's Julian Cup Semi-Final against Marlow Park which ended up being played four times, with two matches tied and one abandonment before Pinkneys prevailed with Darren winning the man of the match award.



Pinkneys Green's Darren Craythorne hits another boundary against Woodley on Sunday.



Terry Bolton (left) presents Pinkneys Green skipper Darren Craythorne with the Advertiser man of the match award after his fine performance against Marlow Park in last Thursday night's semi-final.

League matches in those days could often go on very late indeed. One evening Ilyas Hussain was fielding on the boundary. Darren noticed he was eating a Kebab that had been delivered to him. Darren certainly didn't smile at the time but laughed about it later.

With the club now re-established in the area as one of the top village sides, the late nineties was Darren's favourite era. He describes this as "a great team on and off the pitch. Some great cup wins and a team that would be there for each other."



PINKNEYS Green won the Old Paludians Diamond Jubilee Bowl on Tuesday night. The team is: Front row (from left) – James Anderson, Matt Lloyd, Ian Walker, Kevin Snapes, Steve Greene, Paul Cary. Back row – Rick Lashley, Wayne Nolan, Lee Clark, Darren Craythorne, Charlie Stevens, Paul Savage (12th man).
Ref 64427/11.

On the pitch Darren relished battles against Yateley's Simon Massey, a "top player" and a "top bloke". Having got to know him in later years, Darren reflects "I think we were too alike on the pitch to get on".

Off the pitch there was a team curry night at least once a month. Darren remembers that on one occasion "We decided to go for the Phall sauce and Naan bread to start. Very hot. The sauce was left on the table throughout the evening. Dan Woods went to the loo. The sauce was spread into his Masala. He wasn't well for a few days."

As the new millennium drew on, Darren's knees gradually became too painful to play but following successful operations he was able to return to the Saturday 2nd XI in recent years, winning promotion last season.

Looking back Darren liked to visit the Ibis ground in Reading for the sheer quality of the pitch and facilities but on a personal note, Sandhurst was his most fruitful ground in terms of performance.

Darren's highest score was 179 not out against Holyport hitting slow bowler Tim Hayes for three sixes in a row, whilst his best bowling analysis was 7-21 against White Waltham. Two of many centuries and five fors.

Over the course of his time at the club, Darren's best eleven would be an invincible: Rick Lashley, Paul Cary, Dan Woods, Babar Ramzan (wicketkeeper), Steve Curlewis, Mush Ahmed, Darren Craythorne (captain), Khalid Parvez, Colin Coddington, Damien Atherton, Ian Walker. "We would have won everything".

He is also eternally grateful for the support he received from Lennie Timms and Dudley Jinman, in whose company he is proud to be held in a similar respect "which to be honest I don't deserve".

Darren has many proud moments on the pitch, the Old Pals Cup Final wins, reaching the Julian Cup Final and getting promoted to the Berkshire League Premier Division, being club captain on most of these occasions.

On a personal level I have always enjoyed Darren's company, knowing that the occasional scowl driven by his boundless will to win, would soon be replaced by a smile and a joke. In the future he intends to play now and again, and indeed it was lovely to see the photos of his grandson Reggie at the club this weekend.

The final word goes to Darren: "PGCC means everything to me. It has consumed 80 percent of my life. I love the team spirit, I love that we are normally the underdogs. I love it."