

At the close of our first season in the HCL speculation was that the 2024 season would be just as tough and our target would likely have to be at least 15 outright wins, requiring a ten percent improvement across all disciplines. Youth was on our side with a strong committee to back the players. We had made many new friends and found people in the HCL very welcoming and complimentary. But in 2024 the focus would be less on diplomacy and more on dominance.

The reality was exactly as speculated. The team did the job on the field and the committee continued to back them with further investment in the infrastructure and management of the club. We did gain the sought-after promotion place, just behind Sowerby St Peters as we had projected.

Pre-season we learned that successful 2023 returnee Sam Nettleton might not be available and that work commitments would continue to deprive us of services from Liam Humphreys. Jordan Powell had also left the club. But the biggest loss was to be the transfer of leading batter Bradley Powell to Buttershaw St Pauls of the Bradford League. So significant change in personnel was in the air, but on the positive side all-rounder Jack Davison was fully back from injury. The task of making up for Bradley's bowling prowess was handed to 16 years-old Tom Raby whilst the batting line up had no definitive addition. The cumulative potential loss of runs from Bradley, Sam & Jordan became the principal discussion topic and the prospects for promotion seemed further away for some on-lookers.

As in 2023 the season began with an April washout, this time at Outlane. Our first match was to be against relegated Mount CC, so an unknown quantity for our boys. Rob inserted the visitors and their stand of 72 wasn't a great start, but once Patel was winkled out by Brannan, wickets began to fall for spin twins Jack and Thomas. Stubborn opener Rawat carried his bat to be last man out but his contribution was 47 from 78 balls. The Mount total collapsed to 134 all out, losing the last 8 wickets for just 30 runs in the face of 5-32 from Thomas and 4-28 from Jack. Joel played the anchor role with 31 from 50 as we struggled with the bowling of Ismail Mayat. The worries about the batting line up were on the lips as we reached 89-7 but Jack D was still there shepherding the tail in a 46-ball stay. The tail had carried the total on to 119 but 9 wickets were down with 16 still needed for the win. Last man Tom Raby joined Jack and we inched towards the total but at 127, Tom was run out by Mayat who added to his 5-36 haul. Tom had scored 6 at a run-a-ball but left Jack D stranded on 24 not out. We had lost by 7 runs.

The following week we made the short trip up the mountain to Queensbury, no doubt with memories of the losing run fest last year. Queensbury chose to bat and soon began to regret that option. No doubt buoyed by his efforts last week, young Tom blasted the Queensbury batters with high pace as this week our seamers entered the fray. Tom's out-turn was an amazing 7-11 from just 7 scintillating overs. The remaining 3 wickets went to James [2] and Jake [1] as the home side crumbled to 64 all out, the sweetest wicket was perhaps from James in that of Oliver Challis who had smashed us for 163 in the last match of 2023. It wasn't plain sailing but we did take the points losing 4 wickets by the 17<sup>th</sup> over, making 67-4 as Jake remained resolute on 42no from just 48 balls. Points on the board and the prospect of the Parish Cup 1<sup>st</sup> round tie with Premier Division Warley & Elland the following day. That we made our highest score of the season was notable but at 139 all out, a second rapid exit from the Cup was on the cards. Four batters passed 20 but none passed 30 as all Warley-Elland bowlers picked up wickets as we batted to the 44<sup>th</sup> over. An opening partnership of 68 again signalled the likely outcome and so it proved despite 3-13 in 6 overs from Jack D. Warley ran out winners at 140-4 [Bottomley 48] but we had taken them to the 36<sup>th</sup> over.

A home match with 2023 strugglers Leymoor was perhaps what we needed for confidence and Rob again inserted the opposition. Again it proved a wise decision as we reduced the visitors to 35-5 with Tom Raby again in rampant mood. A stand of 48 steadied the Leymoor ship but the removal of Walkden for 31 by Jack brought about a further tumble of timbers to conclude at 116 all out in the 42<sup>nd</sup> over. Tom again was destroyer in chief with a successive league 7-for this time for 39 runs in his 13 overs. Joel and Dan did a grand job kicking our reply off with 71 runs, Joel making 36 and Dan falling 1 short of a half-century. He went at 95-3 and we quickly finished the job at 117-5 in the 37<sup>th</sup> over. A second win engineered by the bowlers was welcome, but doubts about the batting were still around. The next opponents were Sowerby St Peters, many people's favourites for the Championship. The top four St Peters batters all made decent runs, the best their Skipper Aidan Green with 47 as his team reached 98-3. But our bowlers again stepped

up and with 4-66 from Thomas coupled with 3-15 via 12 very tidy overs from Brannan pegged the home side to 153 all out. Young Tom's return this week a more modest 1-36 [9 overs]. But could we bat well? At 55-6 it seemed the answer was 'not today'. Brannan made 30 with only Joel and James also reaching double figures. We were on the way home after 33 overs having responded with 97 all out after Watson 3-11 and Harris 4-31 did the job for St Peters.

So after five league matches, we had 2 wins, 2 defeats and an abandonment allied to the Cup exit. Our end-of-2023 assertion that it would be tough in 2024 was entirely accurate and 13 of the hoped-for 15 wins would have to come from just 17 remaining fixtures. But the light of hope was still glimmering as news reached the club that Bradley had not settled at Buttershaw and was heading back to Wide Lane. But any euphoria at the news would have to wait a little as the transfer back would delay proceedings for a further 3 weeks. So on the first day of June we hosted Stones CC in better heart but without Bradley in the line-up. Rob again won the toss and inserted the visitors and once again we got off to a flyer with the scoreboard showing 33-4 thanks to a terrific opening spell from Jake who had 3 of them. But the crucial strike was from young Tom with the prized scalp of Gary Hulme for 6. It was William Thickett who stopped the rot as he went on to 66 thanks to the middle order. The lower order crumpled to bamboozle from Jack D [4-24] and with Jake 4-12 and Tom 2-49 the Stones final score was a modest 127. Over to the batters. And oh dear they initially weren't able to respond well as Foster [4-34] and Robbins [2-29] proved very accurate. At 29-6, the remaining 99 runs looked mountainous. Things picked up a little with Akeel [18] and Jack D at the crease but the score reached only 51-7. Another partner was needed for Jack and the cross fell to bowler Thomas. Jack's patience rubbed off on Thomas as the pair batted for 133 and 61 balls respectively to carry us towards the victory target. But with 11 runs still required Thomas was run out for a sterling 20 by Robbins to crank up the tension once more. Tom strode up and his 3 contributed to the 11 needed as we crossed the line at 130-8, the heroic Jack on 45 not out.

Still without Bradley we headed for another likely tricky match at Old Town. Rob once more called correctly and inserted the home side. A first over strike from Jake removed the dangerous Shaheen but it prefaced a 67-run stand for the second wicket. But reminiscent of the match v Mount CC, spinners Tom and Jack kept the rest in check, hopefully with no repeat of the Mount result. But sadly that was the case as we subsided to 90 all out in 35 overs. Nazakat Ali had earlier top-scored with 46 and he added a terrific 5-14 to undermine our batting. Jake [30] and Akeel [16no] took the fight to the home side but it wasn't enough. With Bradley available the weather intervened and the match at Southowram was abandoned without a ball bowled. So Bradley's return would be at Wide Lane against long-time rivals Cullingworth on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June. Cullingworth called correctly this time and chose to bat. Tom opened the bowling and had experienced Scot Pearson [5] back in the hutch. Bradley shared the new ball and was frugal in allowing few runs. His return brought 1-21 from 9 overs, his victim top scorer Michael Dennison for 26. It was Jake who really turned the screw with 4-13 in 7 superb overs. Thomas kept the spinners wicket tally mounting with 3-24 as Cullingworth collapsed to 86 all out. The Cullingworth bowling attack was as expected highly dangerous and with James Bloodworth 3-47 and former Oak, Grahm Rankin 2-18 we too found scoring at a premium. But 87-6 was reached in the 26<sup>th</sup> over to claim full points. So we stood at played 8, 3 wins, 3 defeats & 2 abandonments. 14 matches in which to add 12 wins was a tall order.

A Friday night Keighley Cup 20-20 slog with Crossflatts provided a lighter occasion with the Flatts winning by 5 wickets. Jake continued his rapidly improving batting form with another 34 runs and a couple of wickets each for Jack and also improving Ellis.

An Away match against Bradley & Colnebridge offered an easier passage than Old Town and the home team asked us to bat first. So we did and how! 157 runs came for the first wicket, Joel making 45 of them whilst Bradley stood proudly on 106 not out. He was well and truly back. Next throw in 54 runs from James. 24 from Jake and 29 from Skipper Rob and the score rocketed rapidly. But what of Bradley? He was second out for 150 with the score on 215-2, his contribution just fifteen 4s and seven 6s had graced his knock to all parts in a titanic 331-5. Ironically on 29<sup>th</sup> June this the team's first score of 50 or more this season. The B & C bowlers figures were seriously damaged. But Bradley hadn't finished yet as four wickets came his way, 4-47 in 11 overs to rub salt into the opposition. The B & C nos 10 and 11 did remain

resolute on 28 no and 16 no to frustrate our bowlers as their team finished on 169-9. a win nevertheless. The final match of the season's first half was also away against Bridgeholme, another team struggling so optimism was again high. After such a batting display, Rob again won the toss but opted to bat. He also surprisingly opted to open the innings but made only 2 as the first to fall. A 64 stand from Joel [32] and Jake got us on track to 79-2. The introduction of Tuffique Butt changed things a little as he garnered 4-34 in 6 exciting overs. Jake had made 51 from 39 balls but the entertainment was heightened yet more by Brannan's 96 not out from just 50 balls. He whacked 8 fours and 9 sixes and deserved a century. We went for tea with 245-8 on the board. Bridgeholme opener Khalid was second out at 100-2 with 53 to his name. Six further double-figure' scores didn't really trouble our attack as Jack once again grabbed 4-15 from 26 balls. But the Brannan Lawn show hadn't ended at tea time as his dessert was a bowling stint of 9 overs which brought him 5-45 and a standing ovation. Bridgeholme tallied 175 all out in a vain but valiant reply. So at the halfway mark we had 6 wins, 3 defeats and 2 abandoned. The defeats to St Peters, Mount and Old Town would all likely have to be reversed if promotion was to be realised.

Outlane at Wide Lane were next up to test our improved form. Inserted by Rob on a day with poor weather a distinct possibility, Outlane recovered from 13-3 and 53-5 thanks to 40 from Stokes [not England Captain] and Westwood [37] to reach 126 all out in the 42<sup>nd</sup> over. Jake, Bradey and Jack had each snaffled 3 victims. But the weather had hit and the Umpire's slide rules came out for the HCL version of Duckworth-Lewis. Oakworth's target was amended to 96 from 29 overs. Joel and Bradley both failed and the task suddenly looked a little less obtainable at 22-2. But the batters tails were now erect and after 27 from James, Jake [46 no] and Dan 17 no saw us to the target inside 20 overs. We had now won four in a row and were challenging in fourth place. Back on our travels we visited the much-described facilities at Mount CC seeking to overturn our 7-run loss from earlier in the campaign. The home side opted to bat. It was a disastrous decision at 49-5. Bradley now back to his best grabbed 4-25 from 14 economical overs to undermine their posting. Out of the headlines for a short while, Thomas was back amongst them with 3-17 as the Mount tally didn't top the three-figure mark at 99 all out. Our revenge was the sweetest as the 100 came up with just 2 down and in in only 16 overs. Joel led the way with 39 no and saw it home with Jake 20 no. Now five in a row.

Back at HQ, Queensbury came calling as we sought our first 'double' of the year. Buoyed by recent batting success, Rob again opted to bat. 63 came from openers Bradley and new signing Noah Thirkill, who wouldn't be 16 for another 20 days. Noah had joined our under-18 side earlier in the year and now decided to up his progress by leaving Keighley for Oakworth. Good choice Noah. He made 16 from 16 balls and looked a fine prospect. Brad made 49 taking the score onto 79-2 with James. James was seventh out at 217 just before the innings close with a personal score of 87 from 112 balls including 12 fours and 3 sixes to register his first half-century of the season. 219-8 was a great score when inserted. Davies and Walker had each picked up 3 of our wickets but without really threatening. Six Queensbury batters made double figures with the top scorer Walker on 35. Rob gave the ball to third change Noah to try his off-spin. He returned an amazing debut 5-34 from 11.4 overs. Queensbury were well beaten by 52 runs on 167 all out. One double achieved and now six wins on the trot and in the top three. The hop over to Leymoor didn't really hold any terrors, but the strugglers surprised us by posting 190 to show nothing can be taken for granted in the HCL. Their top scorer was Andrew Raw with 38 but six others also made double figures. Our key bowler was our home-grown 'offie" Thomas who picked off 6-61 in 11 overs. Almost as pleasingly, Ellis took 3-29 to show his undoubted quality of left arm menace. So our batters would have to work hard to secure a seventh successive win. A golden duck for Joel didn't help much and with Noah out for 11 at 37-2 the gauntlet was down. Last week's batting hero James maintained that form and again registered a score over 80 [84] as the lynch-pin of the reply. 49 from Jake complimented that perfectly as the two former CAGs made hey in a 110-run partnership. Both were out with the score on 147 with 44 runs still required. Ellis and Rob finished the job at 191-5 with just under 9 overs to spare.

Now we were being talked of in the same sentence as the word 'promotion' but there were some really testing matches yet to unfold. And the toughest of them all perhaps, was next up with the Wide Lane visit by Sowerby St Peters. It was to prove a highly entertaining match between two excellent sides. The visitors won the toss and elected to bat on a hard wicket likely to aid the batters. Tom opened the bowling and in

the very first over Grogan went for a suicidal run and was sent back only to see the bails off after just 3 balls. St Peters' skipper joined opener Clarke to pick up the pieces. They added 32 when Tom delivered a brute of a ball to have Clarke caught for 12 by back-in-harness Sam Nettleton who had agreed to forgo work commitments to cover for regular keeper Cawood. Four runs later skipper Green hit a straight one hard back to Bradley who made the hard catch look regulation. His replacement left six balls later also to Tom with the scoreboard still on 37-4. The visitors were nothing but resolute and our bowlers had to work their hardest to get them out. Jack and Jake took over from Brad and Tom but Jake was out of sorts going for 22 from 3 overs. Jack took out no 5 Bruce [15] at 52-5 as we began to assert some ascendancy. But St Peters were not top of the league by accident and Leonard and Baxter combined well to fashion a 54 runs partnership to push on to 106-6 when Baxter was out for 19 caught in the deep by Tom, also off Jack. Then the dangerous Leonard on 31 drove Brannan to cover for Dan to snap up the chance. 108-7 and we were right on top, going for the kill. Helliwell and Watson had to each start on zero with the Oakworth bowlers' tails up. Tough. But they responded superbly well. Watson was dogged in compiling 9 from 20 balls whilst Helliwell stayed for 43 balls making a potential innings saving 29. Watson went at 142-8 bowled by the returning Bradley. Helliwell departed caught by Sam for James at 157-9 to rapturous applause from his team-mates. The innings closed at 162 all out with a third scalp for Bradley who claimed 3-42. Tom's stint had set a great tone as his aggression brought him 2-16 from 7 overs. 163 to win and narrow the gap on the leaders was now the task in hand. It didn't look like happening as the top order disintegrated in a 3-wicket blitz from Jack Rice. At 19-4 the innings was in tatters with Bradley, Noah, James and Jake all watching from the pavilion. But for every Ying there's a Yang and for Oakworth this proved to be Jack and Brannan. Their patient and careful batting just kept the scoreboard rolling at steady rate to approach and pass the 100 mark. In fact they added 92 runs for the fifth wicket to swing things once again towards Oakworth. Brannan copped a low one and was out lbw at 111-5 which then became 111-7 as Dan lasted 3 balls and skipper Joel 2 in a mini-collapse, St Peters now in the driving seat. Jack on 44 no was looking solid and just needed a partner and found one in Sam. The serene batting was resumed. The scoreboard passed 150 and with only 13 required to win the bookies were closing their ledgers. St Peters young bowler Potts returned and Sam was caught in the covers for a terrific 23 [25 balls], the score now on 158-9, still 5 short of the target. Tom came in to a tense arena, watched by a decent crowd but was found right in front of middle stump by another that kept low. His lbw without scoring brought his injured brother Charlie to the crease. Jack was now on 67 and obviously planned to farm the strike as much as he could. Tom's dismissal was on the last ball of the over so Jack was on strike for the 43<sup>rd</sup> over. He took a single off the third ball and left Charlie 3 balls to keep out, which he did to sighs of great relief all round the ground. The next over Jack took a 2 and a single to bring the scores level with Charlie again to face 3 balls. But fear not his first one brought a single and a great win with just 8 balls left. What a great match, what a great result for Oakworth, now in second place in the Division and just one point adrift of St Peters.

The challenges were coming thick and fast with a trip to distant Stones CC the next one. Back from holiday Rob won the toss and decided to bat first. Bradley lost the company of Joel [8] at 25-1 and then paired up with Noah [5 days after his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday]. Their partnership fashioned 113 runs before Bradley was run out by Thickett for 88 [73 balls]. Noah was on 26 no and joined by James. Another 52 were added to carry us to 190-3 when James [20] was caught. Noah was now on 65 no in birthday celebratory mood. He was fifth out for 89 adjudged lbw with the score at a welcome 241-5. Finally we tallied 257-8. Only opening bowler Johnson had caused trouble for our boys with his 4-57 in 11 overs. Stones opener Stead chipped in 44 from 59 balls but lost 2 partners in the process towards 14-2. With Thickett [22] another 55 were scored, 2 wickets later at 125-5 the Stones innings was potentially on the wane but the middle order dug in and scored well until Jack came into the attack to leave with 3-27 from 7 overs. At 144-9 the points were all but in the bag. But last man Sutcliffe hung around for 32 balls with Yorkshire Ladies Elicia Pollard who was last out for 23, bowled by Bradley at 184 all out, their last stand adding 40. Win number 9 in a row and consolidated in second place and a great birthday present for Noah.

The third of the three clubs we had lost to in the early season, Old Town were now our visitors at Wide Lane. Again we opted for first knock. At 13-1, shock-horror as Bradley holed out for just 8 to put us at least temporarily on the back foot. 105 runs later Joel and Noah were still at the crease although Joe had been

dropped 3 times and Noah once. Noah was out for a solid 51 [72 balls], 12 runs on Joel was finally out, lbw to Nabeel for 81. The score was a healthy 148-3 and a great platform for further addition. That came from Jake [26], Brannan [14] and Sam [30] who shepherded the tail in style before unsuccessfully attempting a scoop-shot. The final posting was a satisfying 226-7 despite 4-44 for Nabeel. Opener Shaheen had copped a duck in the earlier match but his quality showed through with a smooth 65 from 91 balls. He was stumped attacking Thomas at 102-7 as the rest of his team-mates imploded. No 8 Nabeel added 31 before Brannan trapped him lbw. Khan was left stranded on 20 no at the close on 158 all out. The damage had been done initially by Jake with a miserly 4-8 from 7 overs with all but Tom picking up wickets. So 10 in a row and we were on course for promotion after all 3 defeats had been avenged.

The Southowram side were going to be new to us as the match at Halifax was a weather victim. The visiting skipper won the toss and asked us to bat. Bradley was out for 11 at 39-1 and Noah also departed for a 3-ball duck, both to Neil Eastwood. The Joel 'n Jake show now grabbed the headlines with an 84-run partnership, Joel falling for a solid 70 [102 balls with 12 fours] to the experienced Ian Gledhill. Our progress from there on in was severely hampered by Gledhill but Jake did go on to make 52 [6 fours & 1 six]. We ended our innings on 183-9 with Gledhill grabbing a valuable 4-38. Gledhill opened the batting and looked settled with Sajjad. Their stand ended at 25-1 and then Gledhill [27] was caught again by Cawood for Tom. Decent knocks from Parry [32] and Mahmood [14] took the Southowram response on to 93-4. Jake and Thomas were introduced with success as Crossley, Drage and Harvey fell to leave the visitors at 106-7 and Oakworth sensing an 11<sup>th</sup> victory in their current 'roll'. Then Abshar Hussain took things into his own hands and started an assault on our attack. 43 runs came for the ninth wicket and suddenly the game was wide open. With tailenders, Hussain had opted to try and hit sixes to bridge the gap in scores. He managed four of them as well as three 4s. He was caught in the deep by Akeel for 48 whist going for another big hit. The score was 160-9 and then Bradley made it all 10. It had proved another pressure game and we had passed the test. Jake finished with 4-13 from 8 overs with 2 each for Bradley, Thomas and Tom. Eleven on the bounce, but there was real icing on the cake as news reached us that St Peters had lost to Bradley & Colnebridge and we were now just one solitary point behind them. But more importantly losses for Old Town and Stones had left us 38 points clear of third place and with three matches remaining we were guaranteed promotion to the 2025 First Division.

Having qualified from a Home elimination tournament in June, Our 20-20 squad took their place on Finals Day in competition for the Vocation Brewery T20 Plate. In the first semi-final we took on Southowram who ironically we had defeated the previous day in a League Match. We won the toss and asked the Rams to bat. Their openers put on 14 before danger-man Abshar Hussain was bowled by Saturday hero Jake for 2. Opening partner Thomas got in on the act with an lbw decision against the other opener Sajjad for 13 at 22-2. The Rams struck back through Parry and Mahmood with a further 30 runs as their tally started to mount, Parry was third out to an lbw for Jack D at 50-3. His dismissal brought in Harvey but Mahmood was skittled by young Tom R for 24 at 58-4. A telling stand of 41 runs ensued for Harvey and Drage and the Rams tally boosted to 99-5 with more in prospect after the dismissal of Drage for 24 by a smart run out by keeper Sam at 102-6. but just 17 more were added as Brad returned to pick up two more scalps and Ellis another in his 2 overs. The 120 total at a run a ball was our target after all our 6 bowlers had each picked up at least one wicket. In our Saturday league win our batting heroes were Gal and Kezza and so it proved in the T20. After Brad was dismissed for 5 the dynamic duo took the Rams apart with Jake first to accelerate to his 50 from just 41 balls and then Gal reached his 50 [54 balls] with the winning hit at 12-1 with 20 balls to spare. The second semi-final saw Mytholmroyd blitz Old Town with a 212 score in their 20 overs. Old Town made just 109 all out in response. Mytholmroyd are a First Division outfit and the 15-overs Final was likely to prove a real challenge for our boys. Rob won the toss and bravely elected to bat. With our score on 18 we lost a second wicket with Gal bowled for 7 following the loss of Brad for 6. A tough start. Jack D and Rob each accompanied Kezza for 9 and 4 respectively but he too fell with our score on 63-4 after 11 overs. Kezza had carried on from the semi in serene style reaching 34 from just 22 balls when he was trapped lbw to leave us on 64-5 and when Sam was sixth out for just 3 at 75-6 we were

slightly on the back foot. But Brannan took the attack to the 'Royd and his 22 from 17 balls proved a great catalyst for Ellis to pair up and add another 9 into the equation. Their 28 stand had enabled us to reach 103-6 feeling we had maybe under-performed. When Scholefield and Cowens bashed 18 from the first two overs of the Mytholmroyd reply, the task became a great deal harder. Scholefield was out at 31 and immediately followed by a duck for Gawthorpe we were quickly back in it. The breakthroughs had come from Thomas and Brads and 17 runs later two more batters were back in the hutch at 49-4 thanks to the same two bowlers. Game on. Mytholmroyd lost a third scalp straight away to Thomas who finished with 3-18 from 3



overs. Our tails were up but no 7 Travis had a say in matters, belting 15 from just 11 balls. But introduction of left-arm angles from Ellis had him snapped up by Sam at 70-6 and we sensed victory. The remaining four batters could add only 12 runs as further wickets went to Ellis [2], Kezza and Jack D. Mytholmroyd were all out for 82 and we had won the Vocation Brewery T20 Plate by 21 runs with almost 7 overs in hand.

Our next match was a visit to neighbouring Cullingworth, which we had expected to be in contention at the start but who had slipped to mid-table. Rob inserted them. Openers Dennison and Barton [R] fell along with Harrison and R Elphee to leave them on 59-4, two each to Bradley and Jake. But the youthful partnership of Elliot Robinson and Charlie Smith really blossomed as the seven bowlers we used failed to halt their progress. Each of them rattled off 11 fours and 3 sixes in a rip-roaring 161 stand. Robinson scored 79 whilst Smith ended on 91no. The Cullingworth total was substantial at 253-6 Bradley returned 4-72 and Jake 2-42. With only the match to lose Bradley and Joel went for it from the off bringing up the fifty in just over 4 pulsating overs! They both fell for 37 and 21 respectively. Thereafter wickets tumbled regularly with only Brannan on 32 no contributing significantly. Our final tally was 156 all out after only 166 balls. We had the speed but not the staying power against a team well predicted as a potential banana skin. Needless to say St Peters won to re-establish their lead. Two home fixtures versus Bradley & Colnebridge and Bridgeholme now remained of the season.

Without speedy Tom, our bowling attack still stifled a very poor batting effort from visitors Bradley & Colnebridge. Only opener and Captain Saeed Mohammed scoring 31 of the team total of 56, offered any resistance. But he did take 70 balls to do it. There were 7 ducks as Bradley ran riot with 5-23 after Jake had started the rot with 2 for 4. James finished the 22.3 overs innings with 2-26. After Bradley edged a peach, Joel [24] and James [26] wrapped things up in 6 overs at 60-1 and another 12-point haul in just 3 hours [inc Tea] was the reward. Next week's opponents Bridgeholme are one place lower [bottom] than B & C and the season looks likely to end with the 15<sup>th</sup> win as we forecast would be needed for promotion.

Bottom club Bridgeholme arrived as our final match opponents for 2024 and found the weather sunny and a decent crowd in attendance. Rob chose to bat. 23-2 was a little unexpected but then James and Jake got to work to carry us on to 85-3 at a run-a-ball. James made 24 before his stumps were struck by Abbass. Jake looked serene and in complete command of his innings. Brannan joined him to take the tally to 122-4 when he was caught for 19 to leave Jake not out on 43. Jack D soon upped the ante with 3 fours and 3 sixes and hey presto the board now read 216 when he was out for 52 from 44 balls. Jake stood on 84 needing another 16 for a deserved 'ton' to end his season. The overs were ticking down but no worries as he claimed 17 of then next 19 runs to sail past the milestone and our eventual total of 236-6 was posted with the 18-year old on 101 not out [112 balls]. The Bridgeholme reply was bogged down by our accurate bowling. Opener Khalid scored 28 and no 9 Iqbal a further 25 but the rest proved ineffectual against our pace and Thomas' twirlers. They were all out for 88 in 26.2 overs with Bradley 3-37, Thomas 3-13 and Tom 3-17 doing what they do best. A final 12 pointer took us on to 211 points but as expected St Peters comfortably saw off Mount to take the Championship ahead of us by 9 points.

## Out-turn

Of the scheduled 22 fixtures, 20 were completed and provided us with 15 wins, 1 winning draw, and 4 losses. 211 points were garnered [176 in 2023], 9 fewer than Champions Sowerby St Peters, with whom we are promoted to the First Division for 2025, as are third-placed Stones CC. Our dominance over our opponents averaged at 39%, up from 15% in 2023.

Run scoring was lower than in 2023 but that was the case across the HCL. Our boys totalled 3,180 runs [down 252 from 2023] and lost just 135 wickets to produce a form guide of 23.6, 1.0 higher than in 2023. But our impact on opponents was markedly improved as they scored 2,796 runs but conceded 195 wickets. And a form guide of 14.3, fully 9.3 adrift of our efforts.

Our average score was 159, down 28 from 187 whereas our opponents managed 140, down 41 from 181.

## Fortress Wide Lane

At Wide Lane our form was exceptional. Ten of the 11 fixtures were won with all opponents suffering the loss of all 10 wickets. They tallied just 1,380 runs at 12.6 runs per wicket as our bowling attack stacked up the 110 wickets on offer, a new OCC record for a 22-match season. Their 12.6 form is the lowest at Wide Lane for 23 years, since 2001. Batting second 7 times, our batters backed up the superb bowlers to knock off the totals. In the four where we batted first we racked up 219 [v Queensbury], 226 [v Old Town], 183 [v Southowram] and 236 [v Bridgeholme]. Only Mount CC managed to lower our colours at Wide Lane and that in the 4<sup>th</sup> May first Home match of the season on a soft wicket and by just a 7-run margin following an untypical collapse from 78-3 to 127 all out.

Our batting form increased from 20.06 to 22.53, a 12% improvement which was all that was required. Our batters lost their wickets 73 times in a home season of dominance [44%] on tracks that began to offer bounce as the wet weather relented.

## On our bikes

Travelling across the HCL, we maintained our dominance [39%] with 5 wins [1 more than in 2023] along with 3 losses and 1 winning draw. The matches at Outlane and Southowram were washouts. The losses all came when chasing, at Sowerby St Peters [by 56 runs], Old Town [by 40 runs] and Cullingworth [by 97 runs]. However all three were avenged in the matches at Home. The batting totalled 1,535 runs for the loss of 62 wickets whilst our hosts picked up 1,416 for the loss of 94. Our 62 wickets lost was the lowest since our last CDCL Championship year, 9 years ago in 2015.

Year	OAKWORTH				OPPOSITION				OAKWORTH			
	HOME		AWAY		HOME		AWAY		HOME		AWAY	
	Runs	Wkts lost	Runs	Wkts lost	conceded	wkts taken	conceded	wkts taken	Av bat	Av bowl	Av bat	Av bowl
2024	1645	73	1535	62	1380	110	1416	85	22.53	12.55	24.76	16.65
2023	1745	87	1687	65	1486	90	1786	81	20.06	16.51	25.95	22.05
Change	-100	-14	-152	-3	-106	+20	-370	+4	+2.47	-3.96	-1.19	-5.40

So, what do the seasons stats tell us about our tremendous progress in 2024?

## Batting

For all clubs, batting proved a tortuous experience in 2024 following a wet winter and an even wetter spring/early summer. The TLC applied by Eric and his new machine did enable a transition from soft and slow to hard and bouncy wickets without impairing our batters productivity. Visitors to Wide Lane found their tallies falling from 16.5 to 12.6 runs per wicket [23% fall] whilst losing every one of their wickets [110]. Our loss of 73 wickets at Wide Lane equated to 7.3 per innings, comparable with 2023 when we lost 7.2.

But away from home our batters more or less maintained 2023 form with 24.8, down just 1.2, 5% whilst our bowlers carried their form with them reducing the hosts out-turn from 22.1 to 15.1, a fall of over 30%. To underline that level of superiority on away strips, our 62 wickets lost came at 6.9 per innings, down 0.8 or an improvement of 10%

### **Bowling**

Our varied bowling attack captured all 110 wickets in the 11 HCL matches at Wide Lane. On our travels we bowled 9 times and captured 85, ie 9.4 per match, the 5 not captured were 1 at Bradley & Colnebridge and 4 at Cullingworth. Overall we captured 195 at 9.8 per match, up from 9.0, ie 9% improvement.

Let's look at what those wickets cost in terms of runs. At home each wicket we took was at the expense of 12.6 runs for each one, in comparison to 2023 of 16.5 runs for each scalp, aa a whopping 32% progress. Across other HCL Division Two grounds, our wickets came at a cost of 17 runs each, improved from 22 in 2023, better by 5, a staggering 22%.

### **Overall**

Looking at our opponents at Wide Lane this year they failed miserably to match our own wicket taking as they grabbed 73 to our 110. They took them at a cost of 23 runs each, whilst our boys conceded just 13 for each wicket. Away from home our opponents bowlers took 62 wickets at 25 whilst our attack claimed 85 victims at 17 apiece.

The season's picture is one of continued all-round dominance at Wide Lane, by both batters and bowlers whilst away from home our bowlers out-performed our hosts, bringing 5 outright wins and only 3 defeats.

A second-place finish was a fantastic out-turn, only 9 points behind Champions Sowerby St Peters with 15 wins and 4 defeats and a 39% dominance over the rest of the division, leading to promotion to Division One for 2025. The Home match with St Peters was a humdinger with a narrow 1 wicket win for our lads.

We had our all-time sixth highest team score of 331 vs Bradley & Colnebridge, whilst only Cullingworth managed to breach the 200 barrier [253-6] against our boys. The highest score we conceded at Home was 167 by Queensbury at the end of July.

### **Batters**

In a year of almost unprecedented progress, our leading run-scorer Jake Keslinke the 2024 season was once again a prolific one, facing 606 balls and totalling 514 runs in a consistent 19 innings at 34.27 [SR 86], with a top-score of 101 no against Bridgeholme in September. His pinnacle came in the T20 Plate victory with scores of 58no and 34. In second place was evergreen former skipper Joel Gallagher, enjoying an Indian summer with the bat. He tallied 453 runs at a cracking 26.65 average. His strike rate of 66 from 689 balls faced and top score of 81 [vs Old Town] carried him to a season of consistent contributions in his 19 innings at the head of the order. Joel now lies seventh on the All-time appearances list with 384 since his 2004 debut, behind only Michael, Wilf, Jeff Inman, Barry Sayer, David Greenwood and Cyril Pegg. Joel has 6,729 runs to his name, sixth on the All-time scoring list.

Bradley Powell has 401 runs boosted by his amazing 150 at Bradley & Colnebridge and 88 at Stones in typical aggressive fashion revealed by his yet again increased strike rate at a brilliant 129. His June return to Oakworth allowed him 12 innings for his runs which came at a brilliant average of 33.42. Not far behind was half-cousin James who tallied 399 runs after a purple patch in July. More of a classic batsman, James runs nevertheless came from 567 balls off a 70 strike-rate and average of 26.60. His top score was 87 against Queensbury.

Off a similar number of balls, 564, Jack Davison betted mid-innings usually and tallied 283 runs but as a finisher with 6 not outs his average rocketed to 50.18. His top score was a rearguard 71 effort which brought the narrowest of wins against Champions Sowerby St Peters. Tucked in behind Jack on 249 runs [304 balls] is Brannan Lawn from his 10 appearances, curtailed by child-minding responsibilities. His solo



effort at Bridgeholme with the first '50 & 5 Double' for 11 years [Gareth Marshall in 2013] as he scored 96 not out from 50 balls and then took 5-45 from 9 overs to take the points almost single-handed. He was yet another consistent performer holding the middle order together, averaging 31.13.

From 8 appearances Noah Thirkill, the youngest in the side, made immediate impact in the team and has clearly strengthened the batting line up. He tallied 174 runs [251 balls] at average 24.86. His all-round talent has brought him already 2 fifties and a five-for. Watch this space. The skipper Robert, in his 4th season at the helm has guided the team to promotion and lifted the T20 Plate trophy and will pick up the Lindley Moor Trophy. It's a season he can take immense pride in. But this has arguably come at the expense of his own batting form which has plummeted to 119 runs [131 balls] at average of just 8.50. His highest knock was 29 vs Leymoor. For 2023 recruit Dan Pummel his 110 runs [234 balls] at just 10.00 was equally disappointing but he has found renewed form and confidence in the Second XI at the tail end of the season.

Batting in the lower middle-order, Ellis Marshall has recovered his promise and form albeit with infrequent and brief opportunities. His 85 runs came at 21.25 average which contributed highly to team progress. Sam Nettleton made three late-season appearances and his innings vs St Peters greatly assisted Jack in leading us to that narrow win. He racked up 67 runs from 75 balls. The two Toms, Fothergill and Raby as bowlers generally came in late in the piece along with keeper Jack Cawood. Second XI players Akeel, Charlie R, Matty and Rob G all assisted on occasions.

### **Bowlers**

Top bowler in 2024 with 38 wickets was off-spinner Thomas. A best of 6-61 vs Leymoor again shows Tom's threat to all batters and his wickets came off 681 balls, at average 15.21, SR 19 and Economy of 81, all excellent figures. He failed to take a wicket on only 4 occasions and remains the go-to partnership breaker. On 35 wickets, opening speedster Bradley is always a threat which his league top ten 12.91 average reveals. His combination of a 22 Strike-Rate and economy of 58 play a major part in removing the top order. His best of 5-23 helped demolish Bradley & Colnebridge for a miserable 56 at Wide Lane.

On 30 and 29 wickets respectively, Jake and Jack D are totally different bowlers. Jack sometimes defies description with his capability of getting bounce as well as spin either way. His all-round ability is a pivot around which the team revolves, his average a marvellous 8.69. Throw in his catching prowess and leadership skills he is invaluable. Jake is a burly medium-fast bowler who bowls an awkward length, striking frequently [SR 25] at a terrific average of 11.27 impacted by fabulous economy of just 45. At 18 years of age his bowling remains restricted by the fast-bowling directive but this barely troubles his productiveness. His best this year is 4-8 vs Old Town.

Tom Raby at just 16 years of age was accelerated into the First XI as his rapid left arm deliveries had brought some great performances in the Second XI. He transferred that outcome into the first XI in May with successive 7-fors against Queensbury and Leymoor. He has 27 wickets at 16.67. There is room for improvement in his Strike Rate but his pace gives him excellent economy of 56. The best is yet to come with youth on his side.

These front-line bowlers have generally done the business throughout 2024 but when others were called on we have not been let down with 12 wickets from Brannan, 11 from James and 6 from Noah. Barely used Ellis and Charlie when selected are also excellent bowlers but to some extent missing out but with 10 bowlers it's inevitable that someone would miss out. Their progress pathway needs review prior to 2025.

### **Fielding**

Rob has led the catchers in 2024 with 11 from Dan and James [9]. Wicket-Keeper Jack C excelled behind the timbers as always with 16 victims with Sam, Jake, Brannan and Rob G standing in when required.

## **2025 and beyond**

The 3-year plan remains on track with the promotion to the First Division for 2025. The success comes with our squad intact and newcomer Noah Thirkill integrated into our systems and culture. Hopes are high that Sam Nettleton will return fully and there is prospect that Liam Humphreys may again be able to play, he is certainly keen enough to do so, as is his partner. So that the squad continues to mature and challenge all opponents gives us confidence that external recruitment is not a priority. Second XI players Subhaan, Matty, Liam, Akeel and Charlie R all offer quality options if required.

So how might the teams line up in 2025? Robert, Joel and Jack C remain experienced mentors for the younger players and all may again be available. Thomas and Jack D have dabbled with captaincy and at some point no doubt may assume full control. The wicket-keeping resources at the club are healthy numbers-wise with Jack C, Sam, Liam H [if he returns] and Brannan all highly capable without having to draw on Matty or Rob G from the Second XI. The batting is well served with high quality from one to eight. Bowling-wise our squad still has all the variations but now Tom R has settled fully with the squad, it has the side-effect that fellow-leftie Ellis' use as a bowler has been limited. His form has returned but he really needs to bat *and* bowl more often and the Second team might be the best opportunity for him. The batting line-up is such that experiments with week-by-week order can be accommodated.

Much focus has also been on restoration of the playing square and outfield to eventually meet HCL Premier League standards. The 3-year plan for the square is under-way and confidence is growing at earlier than expected improvement. The outfield issues with moss will require a patchwork approach and likely become a regular 'filler' job. The net facility has been refurbished and the scoreboard will soon follow once finalised plans for improved security are implemented. The dominoes are falling into place.

So tackling Division One will again bring some known quantities into opposition but also some un-met previously. The Division will line up with Luddendenfoot [if they retain two teams], Sowerby Bridge, Gt Horton Chapel, Blackley, Mytholmroyd, Low Moor HT, Greetland, Sowerby St Peters, Stones, and possibly Cullingworth and Queensbury and of course Oakworth. Only Mytholmroyd, St Peters, Stones, Old Town and Southowram are so far familiar to us.

But familiar or not, we surely go into Division One holding no fears in light of our terrific progress this year as the squad matures yet further. It's time for the other sides to now be concerned; about the rise of Oakworth. The return of Bilaal Khan to the club late in the season is another promising development. With Joe Powell and Logan Scarborough progressing well in the Second XI the immediate future looks very bright for the two-tone blue boys!