

Blackheath Juniors crowned as National Champions!!

The dream became reality for Blackheath Cricket Club's Under 15 team as they overcame Wolverhampton in the final of the Nationwide under 15 National Championship last Thursday.

The match was played at Kibworth Cricket Club in Leicestershire and was the culmination of a tournament that started with a record entry of 1,754 clubs across England, Scotland and Wales. More than 20,000 aspiring young cricketers set out on a path to glory in a tournament that has been previously graced with the likes of Nasser Hussain, Marcus Trescothick and Freddie Flintoff, to name a few who have used the competition as a showcase for their talent.

Blackheath had won through to the National Finals as Southern Regional champions and Champions of Kent and had progressed successfully through nine rounds of challenging and competitive cricket to arrive at Kibworth.

In the morning they played the Northern Champions, Notts Unity against the backdrop of cloudy skies that threatened rain. Losing the toss, Blackheath fielded first and applied the tightest of bowling attacks to the Notts batsmen. Having lost their star batsmen early in the innings, Notts were never able to recover and closed their innings on a total of 75 runs for 9 wickets. Although batting conditions were difficult, the result was never really in doubt as the Blackheath opening pair of Charlie Speller and Dipayan Paul put the Notts bowlers to the sword. 46 runs were scored before Paul was run out. The Blackheath captain Richard Fleming joined Speller and the partnership added another 17 runs before Speller was bowled by the Notts captain. Although 2 more wickets fell cheaply, Fleming and Shojib Ali batted sensibly to see the Kent side home and dry with 6 wickets in hand.

After a lunch that was enhanced by the presence of the Chairman of England selectors, Geoff Miller, the Blackheath team returned to the pitch to face Wolverhampton, who had beaten Bournemouth in the other semi final. The all important toss was overseen by Bill Frindall, the world renowned scorer from the BBC radio programme, Test Match Special. Richard Fleming won the toss and elected to bat.

A masterful innings by Dipayan Paul set the impressive foundation for Blackheath. Although he lost his partner Charlie Speller in the first over, he received great support from skipper Fleming and Alex Price. Displaying an impressive array of shots and playing at a level well beyond his tender years, Paul drove and cut with style and elegance. He even impersonated the England captain, Kevin Pieterman, with a cheeky reverse sweep which earned him 4 runs. Under the rules of the competition Paul had to retire when he reached 50 but he earned the warm and appreciative applause of the crowd and a standing ovation from his team mates. With former England stars Devon Malcolm and Phil de Freitas gracing the occasion, Paul did his future cricket prospects a power of good.

The Blackheath batsmen all contributed to the total and Mamunur Rashid's cameo innings of 15 runs from only 7 deliveries gave the team a final boost as they reached a challenging 124 runs for the loss of 8 wickets.

Wolverhampton made a disastrous start losing their first wicket in the first over, to a low catch by wicket keeper Richard Fleming, standing in for first choice Jason Lambie, who had suffered a broken finger in the morning game. By the end of the fourth over Wolverhampton had lost 3 wickets for only 3 runs and were reeling from the onslaught of the Blackheath bowlers. A stunning pick up and run out by James Carmichael removed the No. 3 bat and Blackheath were well on their way to victory.

Never say never was the phrase for Wolverhampton as the boys from the Midlands fought back and gradually moved their total towards the Blackheath target. Nerves began to creep into the game and as rain fell the Wolverhampton boys showed real fortitude in hauling their side to a score of 75 for 7 with enough overs left to reach victory. The break for rain allowed the Blackheath bowlers to re-charge their batteries for the final onslaught and following the resumption of play, the focussed and targeted bowling of the Blackheath team finally proved too much for the Wolverhampton batsmen who were finally dispatched for a total of 107 runs.

Blackheath thoroughly deserved what proved to be a comfortable victory after their domination of the play. The final followed the pattern of the earlier rounds with the Blackheath boys gaining the upper hand in the early part of the match and forcing the opposition into errors that eventually cost them wickets.

Every member of the Blackheath squad of 12 players contributed to the Semi-Final and Final victories as has been the case all season. The strength in depth of the squad is impressive and bodes well for the development of the senior sides of the Club in years to come. Chairman of Youth Cricket at Blackheath, Chris Swadkin was full of delight at the result: “The boys have worked very hard all season and deserve their success. To win the National Championship is a massive result for Blackheath and these boys have a bright future ahead of them in cricket.”

Team Manager, James Fleming, commented: “There is a great spirit within this team based on mutual respect for each other’s ability. I have been impressed all season at how the boys have risen to the challenge of each game and shown great ambition in their desire to achieve success. The future of cricket for Blackheath is very bright!!

Results:

**Semi-final: Notts Unity 75 for 9 wickets. Blackheath 76 for 4 wickets.
Blackheath won by 6 wickets.**

Final: Blackheath 124 for 8 wickets. (Dipayan Paul 50 not out.) Wolverhampton 107 all out. Blackheath won by 17 runs.

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