



Barnet, home of women's football

By Jonathan Blackstaffe
Shoot!

Over the past two months Queen Elizabeth Leisure Centre, Barnet, has been hosting a women's football course. The highpoint of this came on 2 February when the football upped goalposts for a tournament held at Whitefield Sport College, Cricklewood, in which 35 schools competed.

The competition was described by Cabinet Member for Culture, Community Engagement and Human Resources, Cllr Katia David, as, "a showcase for young female talent! I was amazed at the skill of the girls." The winning teams were St John's in the Year 6 age group, St James' at Year 7 and 8 and the London Academy for Years 9 to 11.

Pick that out!

In addition, more than thirty girls who attended assessment sessions at Ashmole School have since gone on to a course that could, theoretically, lead to trials with professional London teams. And to progress this far would be anything but unprecedented – Fulham and QPR already have some of our local talent on their books.

Get in there!

Such events are just a few

examples of the many opportunities there are for Barnet girls to play football. With two FA training centres in the borough – at Ashmole School and Compton Leisure Centre – Barnet is taking its ladies' football seriously.

Goal!

In the words of Charlotte Edwards, the Women's and Girls' Football Development Officer at Middlesex County Football Association, "Over the past three years, Barnet has become a leading light in girls' football in Greater London. The council, schools, and youth football clubs offer a large number of opportunities for girls to get involved with the country's fastest growing female sport." So, footballers will have to stop waiting for the fat lady to sing. These days, thanks to the local council's help, she's likely to be too busy playing.

Bowling a maiden over

By Jonathan Blackstaffe

The cricket season looms, like a pink moon on a dark night. In some cultures, a pink moon is seen as a bad omen. And in England, until recently, the start of the cricket season was seen as a very bad omen indeed. It heralded a summer of damp misery when paper tigers dressed in all-white strove to clutch defeat from the jaws of victory.

Now, however, it is all change. The Fat Controller – bearing an uncanny resemblance to Mike Gatting – has reversed the signals. These days we have real heroes, capable of looking defeat in the eyes, winking and then stealing away with victory held in their bulging arms.

All of which is by way of saying, it's time to find the middle again, to remind yourself how to keep your seam

straight, where your centre peg is located and when to tickle one down to fine leg. It's time for a pre-season net.

Back to school

And where better to practise than where the pros do it – at the Middlesex CCC Academy? On East End Road by the North Circular Road overpass, discreetly hidden behind LA Fitness, through a secure door on the east side of the building, the location might not seem propitious.

But don't treat this like a Keith Gillespie slower ball and be deceived. With nets, bowling machines, a hall, coaches and even a modest bar overlooking a soggy oval, there is everything a club cricketer requires. In fact, if the presence of the Middlesex squad is anything to go by, there is enough for even a professional cricketer.

So, stop hovering off the metaphorical square, dig out the coffin, fumigate the rotten, mummified remnants of a once promising sporting career, follow the gym freaks and see if you can perform a resurrection.

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Sippy Azizollah (middle) presents a cheque to Director of Lupus UK Chris Maker (left) and Chair of North London Lupus group Jan Roberts. Photo by John Dearing

Sippy's grand total

By Diana Cormack

Last year regular readers will have been able to follow Sippy Azizollah's progress as she organised a series of events to raise money for Lupus UK/North London Lupus.

Sippy was grateful for the help which had been given to her and decided to do some serious fund raising as a way of saying "thank you" and in the hope that others might benefit from the charity as she had.

At the start of the year Sippy

compiled two written quizzes, which proved to be quite tantalising for the participants. Then an Easter Egg Hunt in Budgen's store followed a Three, Two, One sale at Fairacres on East End Road, where Sippy lives. This was also the venue for a tea and scones event.

In the autumn, with the help of Budgen's staff, she organised a Halloween Hamper competition in their supermarket on the High Road. Not long after, Sippy held her birthday party with a difference in Martin

School Hall, raising over £1,000 on that evening alone.

All in all Sippy raised a magnificent £4,424.50, which she presented in the form of a cheque to Chris Maker, Director of Lupus UK and Jan Roberts of the North London Lupus Group. By now you might think that Sippy would need a rest from fund raising, but you'd be wrong! On Sunday 20 March she has organised a screening of the film *The Goodbye Girl* at the Phoenix in aid of the Barbara Bus Fund.

Making cricket fun

By Jonathan Blackstaffe

Looking for somewhere to play cricket? Well, kids, look no further. Just west along the East End Road from the Middlesex Academy is the Wilf Slack Memorial Ground, a cricket facility aimed specifically at youngsters.

Wilf's legacy

The course was founded in 1989 in honour of the former Middlesex and England batsman Wilf Slack who died, while at the crease, at the age of only 34. Slack was renowned for his youth and charity work, a legacy that the centre takes as its inspiration.

And pretty inspired it has proved. It has even been mentioned in Hansard, the parliamentary journal. How many other amateur cricket grounds can make this claim? I'm stumped if I can think of any.

Getting involved

Starting on the third Tuesday of April, the Wilf Slack is running courses for those between the ages of five and thirteen. Sessions are held from 6 to 8pm. They are organised by a team of qualified coaches and even involve a few matches, some of them evening games, some to be played on weekends.

The aim is to get children involved in cricket, help them to develop fundamentally sound

technique and, above all, to enjoy themselves. This has proved a successful formula. Season after season there are thirty-plus youngsters who, rather like a Malcolm Marshall in-swing, keep coming back.

The boomerang effect is

understandable when the aim, as espoused by the centre's man in the middle, former MCC groundsman, Mark Dorrow, is to make cricket fun. "Otherwise," asks Dorrow, "what's the point?" I couldn't have put it any better myself.

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