

BLEAZARD

15TH TO 22ND MAY 2017 - BLEZ WEEK SPECIAL EDITION
PRODUCED BY "THE HISTORY BOOKS"
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50
16,000
RUNS

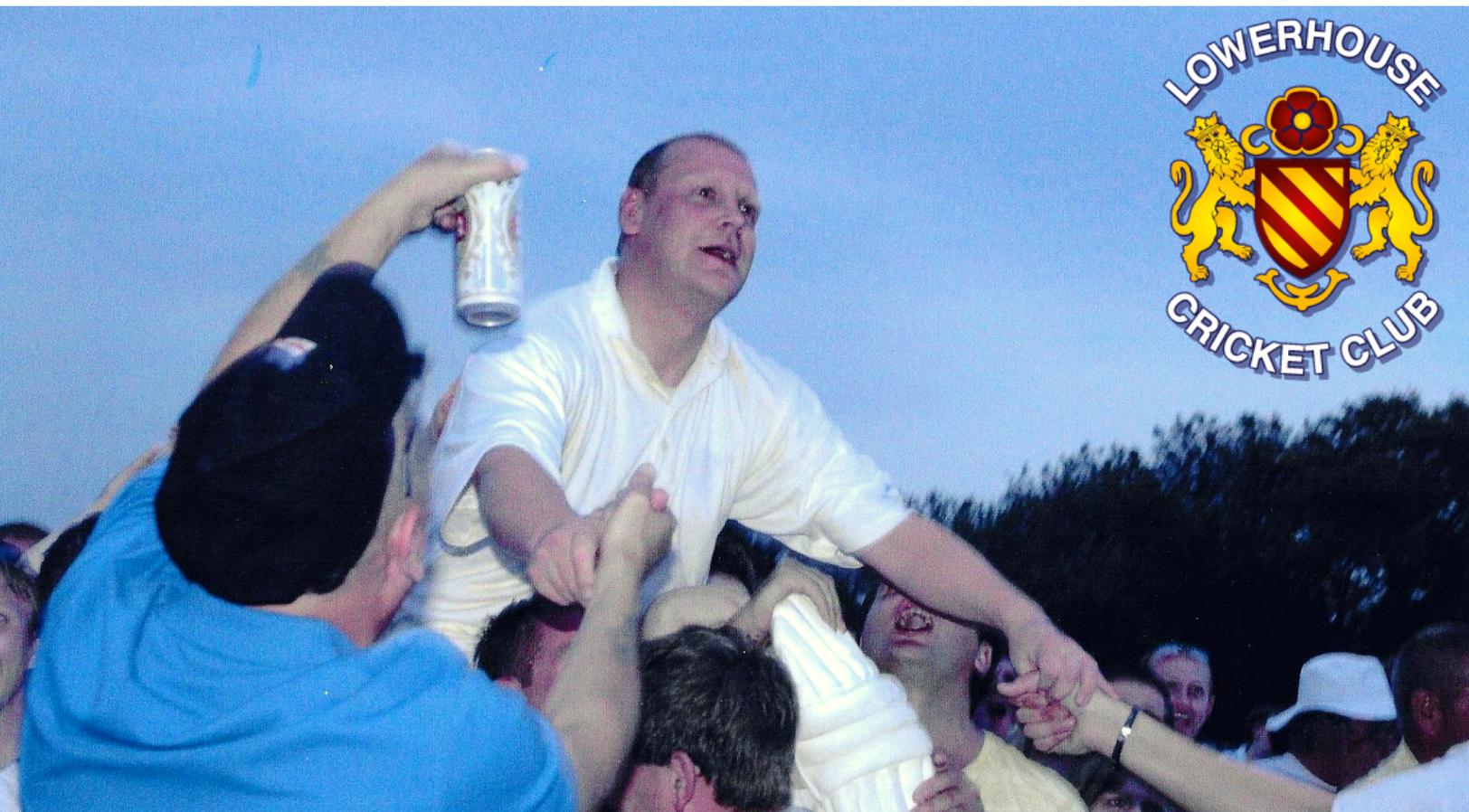
An interview
with Blez

By Paul Hargreaves

Thoughts on
Blez

By former players, professionals
and friends

An Interview with Blez



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Chris Bleazard is without any doubt one of the finest batsmen to grace the famous fields of the Lancashire League in its 125-year history.
Matt Donlan - LET

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This, is a special week for Lowerhouses' all time leading run scorer.

Chris Bleazard. On the 22nd May, Blez turns 50. This week we have dedicated our website to Blez, but thought this publication would be a better way to commemorate Blez's birthday and him hitting the milestone of 16,000 Lancashire League runs, making him the third highest run scorer in League History and only 100 or so runs short of second.

Up the house!

Adam Hope

lowerhousecc.com

An Interview with Blez



For his consistently excellent play, loyalty and longevity, Chris Bleazard is the most influential and important Lowerhouse amateur of his generation. In truth only Tommy Shutt (1893-1925) is in the conversation with Chris for the title of best ever amateur for the Club. Seventeen years would be considered a long Lancashire League career but Blez has achieved that amount of service in two separate centuries (indeed millenniums).

Today to celebrate Chris's 50th birthday we have asked him about his long and distinguished career at Lowerhouse Cricket Club.

1. You made your debut for Lowerhouse first team as a callow 16 year old way back in 1983. Tell us a little about your background in schools and junior cricket?

I attended St. Theodore's school (with Hon. Secretary), we played little competitive cricket but we did get to the final of the Lancs schools U14 competition but lost to LRGS. This run got me noticed by the Lancashire U15 selectors and I played in the same team as Atherton, Speak and Hegg. I played in the junior cup winning side in 1981, with my dad also playing, and I scored a second team hundred at Nelson in the 82 season. I went on three BGS cricket tours (with Shane Higgins) to Somerset as a guest and scored two hundreds on the first tour and was selected in the LHCC first eleven on my return. I didn't play for the U19's Lancs sides due to a falling out with school who didn't nominate me for selection. I played a couple of games as junior for Whalley, where my dad played as he and mum were born and lived in Billington, but we had always lived in Burnley since I was born, so I became a junior at Lowerhouse aged 11.

2. You've now played in over 700 games for Lowerhouse but every journey starts with a single step. What do you remember of that first game at home to Todmorden on July 9th, 1983?

My first game against Todmorden was a typical debut for a youngster. Kirti Azad was the pro, I batted near the end of the innings, scored 9 and they didn't achieve our score I caught a catch and ran someone out (I honestly haven't looked at the scorecard so I may be wrong).

3. You scored your first fifty versus Church in 1985 but because of your University commitments you weren't available for a full season until 1990. How do you compare the cricket at college to Lancashire League and did you play against players who went on to become household names?

Cricket at Uni was a very important part of my life. I struggled being away from home in the first few months at Warwick, but soon as we started netting in the winter I quickly proved my abilities and was picked in an indoor six-a-side comp and became more confident in all aspects of university life, sporting, social and of course academic. In my second year I was selected to play for English Universities Roses in a festival competition. There were plenty of excellent minor counties cricketers in the team, some who played in the BUSA side, that played in the Benson & Hedges cup (with Atherton, Speak, Hussain), in particular Mike Smith who played a test against Australia. The cricket was a very good standard but it did demonstrate that as a captain I was rather limited. I was captain in my third year but I spent too much time putting other players' needs first and not getting the best out of my own ability. I wanted to avoid this at all costs in the future.

An Interview with Blez

4. In that full season of 1990 you quickly established yourself as one of the elite Lancashire League batsmen. You passed Stephen Gee's Club record scoring 857 runs. Did you almost surprise yourself with your form that season? What are your memories about passing Gee's total at Rawtenstall in the last match and are you slightly surprised that Chris Bleazard or others have never surpassed that total?

I don't think I surprised myself, but I had never thought about the record or even knew it really existed. The season followed a tried and tested formula for a high scoring year, a strong start that gives you the confidence that you are in good nick and then consistently making good scores with the odd big score. Towards the end it did become a bit of a millstone but it was great to get over the line in the last game. I think I mentioned in my review of that year that the likes of Vishal, Hassan, Finchy, Will, Ben and Jonny W have the ability to beat the record but so far circumstances have dictated that no one has don't it yet.....watch this space though.

5. You showed there was no fluke in 1990 and followed it up with 788 runs from 3 fewer innings in 1991 scoring your first League century. There was a lot going on in that season with Manoj Probhaker and the exciting games involving sub-pros Robert Haynes and David Capel. Looking back what are your overriding memories of that interesting season?

Scoring the hundred was a real highlight that year but again we got hammered. I remember Manoj asking me how far Kirti would have hit a league legend spinner, so we should do the same. His driving!! (probably worse than my own) after he picked up Proc he drove through junction of Middlesex and Sycamore Avenue without stopping and on a return from Tod he drove through the lay-by just outside Portsmouth again without stopping again. The Haynes and Capel games were fantastic and great insights into how teams with dominant and confident pros can improve teams and inspire title challenges.

6. From 1992 to 2000 you were almost always Lowerhouse's top batsman without quite reaching the dizzy heights of '90-'91. You passed 700 in 1996 and 1999 but had relatively poor seasons in 1994 and especially 1998. How do you assess your game during this period?

The general aim for each season, on a personal level, was to pass 500 runs and contribute to winning as many games as possible. The ups and downs of the season totals were due to the obvious intangibles; form, weather, team performance and pro contribution (I think that most amateur

aggregates improve if you are batting alongside a talented batsmen.) The 1998 season with the rule changes and poor weather was a dreadful season both technically and mentally, being left with no chance of winning, but being able to draw did not sit very well with our cricketing outlook. At these times it was also difficult to work on batting technique during the week due to the practice facilities, perhaps as a team our fielding was much better in those days because that was all we could concentrate on, on Tuesdays and Thursdays.pro contribution (I think that most amateur aggregates improve if you are batting alongside a talented batsmen.) The 1998 season with the rule changes and poor weather was a dreadful season both technically and mentally, being left with no chance of winning, but being able to draw did not sit very well with our cricketing outlook. At these times it was also difficult to work on batting technique during the week due to the practice facilities, perhaps as a team our fielding was much better in those days because that was all we could concentrate on, on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

7. Your nephew has become Lowerhouse captain in 2017 and as something of the born leader about him. Many assumed that you would become the captain but you never did. What is the story there and did you make it plain that it just wasn't a job you would ever fancy?

I was vice-captain for a number of years under Jez and captained a few times but never really got a great deal of pleasure out of it and as I mentioned earlier I had tendency to let it affect my own performance, my concentration wavered and would second guess my thoughts whilst batting. As a result I didn't think being captain would have good for the club or my own performance.

8. You bowled a little for Lowerhouse mainly in the 1990's. There is surely an anomaly that you were good enough to take 5-31 twice but only got 28 League wickets in total. Do you think you could and should have bowled more at this time?

I enjoyed bowling as a youngster but as I moved through the age groups and representative teams I started to bowl less frequently and the same happened when I played in first team, apart from the genuine star all-rounders most people tended to be one or the other. We also had a glut of right arm medium paced outswing bowlers. On my day I could bowl some useful spells, but I lacked the consistency, perhaps due to a combination of limited opportunity and desire. Maybe I should have developed some Jarra style off spin and contributed a few more overs.

An Interview with Blez



9. We'll leave the 1990's with a look at the eventful 1997 season. Jez Hope has stated rightly that he was shocked at the poor standard of Corrie Jordaan's batting and fielding. His brother Matt said eventually you could work out Corrie's dangerous arm ball. It's interesting that he bowled the same number of overs for Rishton in 1998 as he did in '97 for the 'House but took 21 wickets less(79 down from 100) My own view was that there was a one year window of opportunity for Jordaan to be a Lancashire League winning pro' and that was 1997. I think because of personal difficulties between the pro' and amateurs and a lack of self-belief generally, right down to the last game when Lowerhouse had a more than feasible chance of getting it's first silverware, Lowerhouse wasted an opportunity in 1997. Now 20 years on Chris what is your take on that controversial year?

I could never pick his alternate delivery as he bowled so infrequently in the nets and when he did they were usually like cobbled backstreets. Matt and Chippy at slip and wicket keeper, had a good opportunity to see him and both picked him but he was still difficult to play. His batting could have been more effective if he played to his strengths, limited as they were, but he tried to either slog or block. His fielding.....not good. All the fight had been knocked out of the side by the last half dozen games, the wickets we played on at home had become intentionally poor and we rarely scored over a hundred in any innings during the second half of the season. Corrie bowled 23 overs every week and Matt/Jez generally bowled the majority of the remainder. The rest of the players were just making no contributions due to limited opportunity and form. By the time of the last game I don't think anybody thought that if we won the game we had a chance for the league, we were playing for The

Holland Cup in our minds. But as soon as he achieved his 100th wicket Corrie just went through the motions, played the victim and blamed the ultimate defeat on the rest of us. The fallout from the schism was really disappointing, we lost some very passionate and dedicated members and all because Corrie told a version of events that only he recognised as the truth.

10. You had a great season in 2001 scoring over 800 runs at 54 and passed that with 818 runs in 2003. You were clearly back to your peak standards. Of your great seasons of 1990, 1991, 2001 and 2003 which one would you say was the one where you were at your absolute peak? Were there any differences in batting style, scoring areas etc. between the early two years and the latter two?

Having Martin van Jaarsveld as pro, in 1999-2000, really helped me with the technical side of the game. We put in hours of practice into throw downs and discussed who we were playing and how we would approach different situations. I think he was the first pro to really discuss the mental approach to batting and it really helped me with my preparation and positivity. I don't feel that there was much difference in the way I played from earlier in my career but I was definitely more confident and mature which meant I could make bigger scores more regularly. The second half of the 2001 season was probably the greatest run of consistently high scores ever but the 2003 season was probably the most enjoyable. Playing cricket with Ryan was an absolute pleasure from start to premature finish, he was combative, dynamic and a fantastic teammate (and he gave me the bat I used during the 2004 season).

An Interview with Blez



11. Up to 2004 you probably had very few good memories of the Worsley Cup. Lowerhouse had suffered humiliating defeats against an abject Colne team in 1992 and a comprehensive defeat versus Church in the 2002 semi-final. Did you have a here we go again feeling when Enfield put up a 300 plus score in the 2004 semi? Tell us about the brilliant run chase that day?

I can't really remember 1992, but 2002 really stung for a number of reasons some of which will remain in the dressing room or veranda. There was very little we could do about first innings their pro batted extremely well. But we only had 5 bowlers and I bowled 9 overs reasonably well but in my tenth Higgs hit me four times over the stand and into daisy diary and took a single of the last. The mind-set of the batting effort was to try and keep up with run rate right from the start and it proved a disaster, if Gav hadn't scored 60 we would have lost by 250. So when the same thing happened in 2004 we were determined not to be out of the game after 20 overs, even if we were behind on run rate. It proved the right way to tackle the enormous score. The middle overs 20-35 of the game were the turning point but we had no choice, myself and Charlie just tried to launch into their fourth, fifth and sixth bowlers and it came off. Then when we were out Tiffer, Joe and Ben saw us scrape home. It was a fantastic achievement to overcome such a massive total to reach the final. There was a brilliant atmosphere at the ground at the end of the game (a marked contrast to earlier when Alviro was racking up the runs) and we were even more delighted to have a chance to host the final

12. The Worsley Cup final of 2004 is a cherished memory for anybody remotely connected to Lowerhouse Cricket Club. You more than anybody were at the centre of that historical occasion as the team claimed its first silverware. What are your memories of the day and I'm sure you'll give credit to Charlie Cottam's role in the victory? If you had the power to re-live one day in your cricket life, would this be the one?

There weren't many times as a Lowerhouse player that you allowed yourself to dream about how a home cup final would map out, but if you did, it couldn't have gone any better than how the day's events actually happened. Apart from some of the gazebos blowing into Lowerhouse Lane in the morning, a couple of partnerships that threatened to push the Hassy total beyond 250 and the loss of three relatively early wickets the day was spectacular.

Charlie's innings just allowed my own to develop without taking many risks, he attacked every bad ball, ran singles & twos hard and played their pro particularly well. It was just a perfect day, a real reward for the hard work of all the unsung heroes of that day and those who had gone before. The celebrations during that evening were also brilliant and we put a big dent in the fantastic collections that we both received.

To hit the winning runs, bring up my hundred and be there with Ben was the dream come true but it meant just as much to actually win a trophy, eliminate the "never won anything" tag and know that we had made some positive history for the club. It also meant that Jez could finally take some weight of his shattered ankles and retire at the end of the season with the trophy that he so richly deserved.

An Interview with Blez

13. After winning its first silverware Lowerhouse didn't have long to wait for its second trophy when the League title was secured in 2005. There were many great games that special season and I have an abiding memory of you using your goalkeeping skills on the Horsfield boundary to help win an excellent match against Colne. What are your own highlights of that campaign?

The main memory of 2005 is the game that clinched the Championship, we went with a realistic expectation of beating Rawtenstall but not to win the league. But as Ramsbottom appeared to be struggling at Nelson the intensity started to increase and it was with enormous pride and glorious relief that we eventually took the title. It was just a great pity that Macca had gone home due to injury and was unable to join in the riotous celebrations that went long into the night.

The run of victories in the last third of the season was brilliant and there were many close games. The game previous to winning the title against Burnley was a particular favourite. We lost 4 quick wickets chasing just less than 200 and Trip came out to bat with me and spooned a relatively easy chance to square leg but was dropped. Trip then got a rapid 50 and I got 80 but we were both out with 30 runs still needed and once again we scraped home with just 1 wicket left.

We played with a lot of sub pros that year but in the middle period Macca was irresistible with bat and more importantly ball, he had such a fantastic cricket brain and used this to demolish team's lower orders.

Also particularly memorable was the game that started the run, the victory at Rammy, where Jonny Russell got 7 wickets and Macca saw us home with the bat. I think it was this game that demonstrated we had enough ability and when we really started to believe that we had a fantastic chance to win the league. However, the overriding memory and the main reason we achieved the title victory for the first time that year was the fact that every single player contributed, at least once, in a truly significant way to win a game when it was needed. Joe at Rishton, Trip at Enfield, Tiff at Colne, Finch all season, the list is too long to mention everybody, but you get the idea!!!

14. In 2008 Lowerhouse signed the promising Tasmanian Brendan Drew as pro' and with Hasan Khan and Will Driver added to the usual suspects, I thought this was potentially Lowerhouse's best ever team. The team never fully recovered from a horrid start. Were you also surprised and disappointed that things didn't work out that season?

The team in 2008 was on paper a very good side but even a talented side cannot necessarily gel quickly as a team. Finchy was captain at the start of the year but job pressure and the effect of the captaincy soon became detrimental to his all-round performance. Also the rumpus at Burnley in the worsley cup didn't help matters. Given another year together we might have made a very strong challenge but Will went to pro and Hassan was finishing his degree course

15. If 2008 was a disappointment you must have been elated and pleasantly surprised in 2011 when Lowerhouse won its second League title?

After the disappointing 2010 season myself and Charlie talked about the best way to nurture the talented youngsters Stan's junior coaching system had started to introduce to the first team. We decided the hardest places to develop batsmen was in lower middle order and that he and I should use our experience to bat in those positions and give Joe, Paddy, Jonny W, Matt W and Fergus opportunities in the prime batting spots, with Finchy, Ben and the pro at the top of the order. At the outset we genuinely thought it would be a season for experience and finding out about the strengths and weaknesses of these young players. Francois had come with reports of excellent economy rates and as a capable batsmen from SA but we didn't know how good a player he would turn out to be. He was just the sort of character the youngsters needed and he consistently took the wickets of the opposition's pro and best batsmen, plus scoring vital runs. It was probably the best achievement for a Lowerhouse side because we performed way above our fledgling ability and expectation. The Championship winning game at Tod was a great example of how the games went that season; we scraped to a par score of 130 on a wet and sticky surface and Francois and Finchy simply bowled magnificently to win by nearly 50 runs.



Thoughts on Blez...

I first came across Chris in an open 5-a- side at Holy Trinity School probably around 1978, the game ended itself ended in a draw Chris saved my penalty to win through to the final, that day he broke my heart.

Over the following 39 years he has repaired that broken heart many times over and more.

I was very fortunate to spend all lunch & break times in the yard watching him bat, and bat and bat (much of the time with my brand new Slazenger Fred Boycott plays bat)

Fortunate that he carried our school side (he will never admit it but that's my memory single handed) to the Harold Bailey Final which allowed us mere school boys in an era where the players were cricket god's to play on the hallowed turf of Old Trafford.

I was also fortunate to witness his debut (from the tally window's) and latter fortunate to get the chance to play and even bat with him, against some fabulous amateur and professional cricketers of the 1980's and 1990's.

I feel privileged to have witnessed most of his 100's including his finest (IMO) the semi and final centuries of 2004 and more recently saw him score his 15,000 run

In the many, many years before the Cinderella Tag was removed I hope and think Chris was happy just to be playing with his mates.

I am sure he had offers to play elsewhere , but preferred the craic and a few beers with his mates.

Many a bowler's nightmares have included Chris Blez, one nearly cried when he came in at 11 the other year.

Club Talisman, Club Legend, Club Record Holder, Good Guy & Friend

Enjoy Blez week

Privileged to call Chris a friend #UTH

Frank Entwistle

Chris Bleazard is without any doubt one of the finest batsmen to grace the famous fields of the Lancashire League in its 125-year history.

In that 125 years there have been some great names from near and afar showing their prowess in the most famous cricket league in the world and Blez, even though as a modest man he would distance himself from such statements, belongs right up there among the select band of true legends.

Classy and destructive, Blez has been dominating beleaguered bowlers for decades and I struggle to think of a more 'celebrated' wicket around the league.

That shows the esteem teams hold Blez in. They know how much his wicket matters. They did 30 years ago, they still do now.

And to make his achievements and career tally of 16,000 league runs even more remarkable is that many of those boundaries and swashbuckling 50s came in what was a struggling side, down at the wrong end of the table for so long.

He stayed loyal to the House when it would have been so easy to chase silverware elsewhere.

So when the Lowerhouse fortunes turned, no-one could begrudge Blez. a home club hero, his moments of glory.

And hopefully there will be a few more great days to come before the great man finally puts his bat away for the final time and gives the bowlers a break.

Matt Donlan

I remember when I wasn't too far past my best and Blez came down to the first team indoor nets at around 14 years of age. I started bowling steady away at him and quickly realised this lad could play. I ended up bowling as fast as I possibly could and didn't beat the bat once. That was when I realised what a special talent we had. A year later he was in the first team and as they say the rest is history. Happy 50th birthday to a great lad and congratulations on your magnificent achievements over the years.

Roger Bromley.

One of the best, the father figure in the team with a world of knowledge at his disposal, (especially in the middle calming me down) absolute honour to play alongside him, true legend of a man.

Joe Hawke

My first season I got to Lowerhouse I was told about Blez and wondered how good could a 40 year old really be. How little did I know. Probably one of the best lofted drivers I've played with and against but not just that. He is an example for younger players, with his dedication in training, calm head on the field and being the ultimate team player. It's been a privilege to share a changing room and field with him"

Francois Haasbroek

An Interview with Blez

16. Lowerhouse's best ever season was on its 150th birthday when the 'double' was achieved. What are your memories of that marvellous season?

We obviously had high expectations in 2012 (Hawkey had returned from two years as a pro as a straight swap for the retiring Jonny Russell) however, to complete the double was truly unbelievable. The cup run to the final was relatively straight forward with the side assuming commanding positions very early on in each match. The final against Church would prove to be a much closer game, they had a talented side with some experienced players and talented youngsters, with an exceptional pro. Ben's innings was fantastic and gave him the belief in his ability to become an outstanding batsmen and fulfil his early promise (he was only 16 in 2004). We probably should have pushed to more than 200 but the wicket was damp, so it was a more than competitive score. We squeezed them all through their innings but with Anwar Jnr still in on 70 they had a chance but when Finch winkled him out we had finally done enough to win. I think we were in great position in the league all year but the weather was poor and we got the rough end of some abandoned fixtures in terms of the quality opponents for us and our rivals. The defeat at Burnley brought Accrington back in with a chance with three games to go and the last game against Rammy was a very nervous affair. Jonny batted brilliantly in reply to their total however we needed Joe and Paddy to eventually sneak the bonus points required to win the league and then the game itself. It was a fantastic last day finish to the clubs 150th year celebrations and of course the clubs most successful of all time.

17. In 2014 the Club won its fourth League title. You have 4 medals for winning the League and two for the Worsley Cup. Hopefully that's not the final tally but how much do you like to mention these successes to those who told you to leave Lowerhouse if you ever wanted to win anything?

There were many people who suggested that I would regret staying at the club because we wouldn't win any titles, some were genuine and others for purely mischievous reasons. But I have always viewed cricket as recreation, to play with your pals and enjoy all the incredible friendships that have developed over more than 30 years. Of course I care passionately about my own performances and always endeavoured to improve my own and the teams performances. The titles have been the icing on the cake but sometimes the achievements and victories during the not so glorious years felt just as joyous and memorable.

Also perhaps during the dark days we were more a band of mates, keeping our heads above water when money was non-existent, working the bar for no pay, making the most of poor facilities and celebrating the small victories together. The club now has other issues to contend with, a burgeoning youth set up, quality players wanting to move to us, younger players feeling squeezed out and demanding more opportunities.

Also with success being expected and demanded by members the pressure is very much different since we created the legacy of success. Throughout my career no amateur has ever been paid to play, we have always paid our subs and when victories were rare, even when we came a close (or not so close) second those heartaches affected every player as much if not more than any other member. If we can ensure that every team that represents Lowerhouse in the future feels that way we will have created something more worthy indeed. We need to be careful and remember that long term triumphs are cyclical, titles cannot be guaranteed and we must not become over confident and boorish.

18. With 16000 League runs and approx. 750 games you've put up a commendable battle against Old Father Time. You still have an important, if diminished role in the team, but are you now on a year to year basis on deciding when to draw stumps on your career at Lowerhouse?

I don't approach the forthcoming season thinking will it be my last and I suppose that when I do I will know my time is finally drawing to a close. Inevitably it will arrive or the body will give way but I still think I can contribute as a player and my desire to compete is still very strong. If my form or ability is no longer good enough to make the team, then my choice is irrelevant and I will have to accept the decision. But as with all selections I will know that the judgement has been taken to ensure that the best side takes the field.

19. I suspect sporting competition has been a big part of your life and many will remember you as a goalie with Belvedere as well as a cricketer. Where will you get those kicks after leaving Lowerhouse? Will you follow your good parents as a crown green bowler or will neighbour Joe Beneduce be taking you off for extra golf?

I am sure I will stay involved at the club and I might actually enjoy watching once I finish playing. My golf will have to improve significantly if I am going to give it as much time as Joe puts in. I cannot bare the massive inconsistencies at the moment (the good days being the rarities). I know that Lindsay has plans to make the summer break a more useful(!!!) holiday and eventually take up some offers to visit good cricket friends from overseas.

Thoughts on Blez...

Blez is simply the best batter the Lancashire league has seen and is my favourite player. You do not realise how good a player he is until you play with him. He has been consistent for so many years and adapted his game to fit the team, something I do not think other players have managed to do. To score the quantity of runs he has regardless of the game situation, batting position or opposition has been incredible to watch from the sidelines. Since I have been involved in the 1st team, Blez has maintained a professional outlook to his game and has expected the same from everyone else, he is still the first to arrive and last to leave training; something that the juniors at the club look up to.

I watched him score two consecutive centuries in the semi final and final in 2004; two innings which were incredible to watch. I did not envisage at the time that I would have been able to play in the same team as him for as long as I have. In the that time, the most important thing I have learned from him is not a technical or tactical thing, but simply to love the game; I have not met anyone who enjoys playing as much as he does. His love of the game, makes him the heartbeat of the team - something which is infectious to the rest of us.

Blez is my cricketing hero and I hope he enjoys his birthday. It is a privilege to play in the same team as him.

Joe Martin

Whenever I talk to someone about Lowerhouse Cricket Club, the first person they seem to ask about is Chris Bleazard and whether he's still active in the team. He has made an incredible impact during his time at the club while remaining one of the most humble and decent people I've had the pleasure of spending time with. Here's to you Blez, hope you still have a couple of years left in you!!!

Stuart Gaynor

Blez, where do you start....Lowerhouse Cricket Club absolute legend, Lancashire league legend, true gentleman, ferocious competitor, exemplary example of how to conduct yourself on and off the cricket field, by far the most talented amateur batter in the league throughout my era and it's an absolute honour to have played my 20 years of first team cricket with you at the one and only cricket club #UTH

I'd like to wish you a very happy 50th birthday Blez. I still struggle to believe that you're soon to be 50 years old, your fitness is a credit to how you continue to train but it's the way that you can still communicate and have 'banter' with both young and old, your patience with the younger players breaking through into the first team truly amazes me and I am one of so many lucky players that have benefited hugely from your continued coaching and support win, lose or draw at Lowerhouse Cricket Club.

Blez and I have become very close friends over the years, I always know that you are at the end of the phone (if it's turned on!) even at times when we have been in different parts of the world or you will be waiting at the bar with a pint for me when I need your advise, whether it be about cricket or life in general and for that I'd like to thank you.

Blez has been a huge influence in the success of the club over recent years, we share the same passion for cricket and also the same passion for Lowerhouse Cricket Club; something that seems to be a dying trend. Hopefully we still have a few years left playing together.

Happy birthday mate. **Charlie Cottam**

Blez is far more than just the best batter the league has ever seen. He is someone who encompasses the ethos of the cricket club, he only ever wants the best for his club. Blez has obviously been in the team since I began playing, providing a constant source of advice over technique and tactics, as well as a sounding board for help with the more difficult times you endure playing the game.

I cannot thank Blez enough for everything he has done, not just the ways in which he has helped me, but also helped the club. The fact that I have yet to hear a bad word spoken about him speaks volumes of his character, he is always there for the young players to look up to and admire and see how it should be done.

Myself and Mark Whitehead have often discussed his dedication, and how shocked we have been on the odd occasion that he has missed, just showing his dedication to the cricket club. Although living 1 minute away may also help.

It's been a real privilege playing with Blez, but getting to know him and see his dedication has been even better.

Paddy Martin

Blez is the perfect balance of talent and modesty. He was an honour to play alongside and I know for certain I personally wouldn't have achieved what I have without him

Matt Walker

An Interview with Blez



20. What do you think of the Lancashire League changes in 2017? The consensus is that they are necessary but there must be a tinge of sadness that they are considered necessary?

I think the League is right to try and put itself in a stronger position, the league is facing pressures from those who are running the game and those who are taking part and watching. I would like to see our best players to be able to play in a strong competitive league, at a local club and that they can identify a clear pathway to the County set up without having to join the merry-go-round of leagues in the area. I know that changes are being made with the best of intentions and we can only hope that they prove successful.

21. How do you assess the standard of the Lancashire League in 2017 compared with 1983?

I think the one major difference between the leagues now is the profile of the pros available for the league. Before the arrival of T20 leagues star quality players who weren't involved in the English county game could make relatively decent money playing in the league, even if it was just for one or two years. Holding, Roberts, Richards, Harper, Donald, Astle, Harris (NZ), Kapil Dev, Azharuddin, Prabahakar, Waugh, Warne, Reiffel, Harris, Clarke, Macdonald would all be impossible now. (The work permit rules have been also responsible for the lack of young Aussie talent.)

In terms of amateur players perhaps there is a little less depth to more sides now but weak sides have always existed. There have been good and great sides throughout the 30 years and the best sides from each era with comparable pros would have given each other a real test.

22. I've stated that because of their lack of patience and attention, millennials and then the children of millennials will turn local cricket into a 20-20 competition in the fullness of time. You're a teacher and better placed than me, am I too pessimistic as a 50 over fuddy duddy?

I think the cricket day is too long now. If a game plays its full 50 overs, it will mean a player is at the cricket from 11:30 til 20:00 (with shower) which is fine for the cricket obsessive with little other pressure from home or friends. (At this point I must fully acknowledge Lindsay's patience and understanding and our privileged position as teachers with long summer holidays). With at least 10 double header weekends with cup competitions and 5 being triple headers with T20, the time commitment for players, spouses and families during the summer months is extraordinary. It is little wonder that some teams find it difficult to put the same team on the field during double headed weekends and that some good league cricketers walk away from the game. Playing less (league restructure) and more competitive games (two divisions) is essential in the modern era. Would the games be much different if they were 45 or 40 overs per side? I tend to think not and you would possibly save at least an hour of match time.

As for T20 itself, it is quicker and given the weather a good spectacle. But it tends to be able to be dominated by pros or the star amateurs without allowing younger players to contribute or develop their skills. It has its place but I wouldn't like to see it as the main part of the fixture list for that reason alone.

An Interview with Blez



23. Right Chris just a couple of questions left. You've scored 7 League hundreds and 99 fifties. Is there one of those centuries and one of those fifties that really stand out above the others?

I think the hundred in the 2004 WC final would have to be the standout innings for so many reasons is the most memorable but winning that first piece of silverware after nearly 150 years was an incredible feeling and hitting the winning runs to bring up the hundred, unreal.....

As for memorable 50's (quite appropriate) the two in a season against Alan Donald are a special memory but you can't really beat home half centuries against Burnley that contribute to winning games. I have already previously mentioned one in 2005, but 2010 and 2012 are also special. I remember the 2010 innings because Joe has a photo of him and I walking off the ground after sealing a victory with an over to spare when we needed about 35 off three overs. But perhaps the most memorable was the 50 in the first innings in 2012 when we were around 30 for 6, we were batting against their pro Adnan Rasool on a turning track and I managed to survive for 30 or so overs before being able to push our score up to 140 with Ferg and Joe. I think we then managed to bowl them out for 80 with Frankie demolishing their top order.

Blez is the perfect balance of talent and modesty. He was an honour to play alongside and I know for certain I personally wouldn't have achieved what I have without him

Matt Walker

24. Lastly I'll get you out of here on this. I think it would be unfair to rate and judge your fellow Lowerhouse amateurs and friends but I'd like you to name , in no particular order, the 5 best Lowerhouse pros you've played with, the 5 toughest pros you've played against and the 5 best amateurs from opposition Clubs.

LHCC Pros - In chronological order

1. Kirti Azad
2. Martin Van Jaarsveld
3. Ryan Harris
4. Andrew Macdonald
5. Francois Haasbroek

Opposition Pros - In no particular order

1. Roger Harper
2. Chris Harris
3. Sean Young
4. Shane Warne
5. Alan Donald

The last two international star names being the criteria. Didn't play against Viv Richards or Steve Waugh.

Opposition Amateurs - all-rounders and bowlers in no order

1. Jack Simpson WK/batsmen
2. Dave Pearson WK/batsmen
3. Steve Dearden
4. Jon Fielding
5. Dibber and Kes - Bowlers

I found it difficult to judge batsmen objectively (as I didn't bowl enough to find them tough) and there were too many choices. So I took the easy route and limited my selection to all-rounders & bowlers.

Thoughts on Blez...

Congratulations to Chris on his 16,000 runs (and rising) and in his 50th year on this earth.

A double tribute to Chris's undoubted ability and his longevity. Chris is the finest amateur batting talent I have ever seen and indeed in the unassuming way in which he has conducted himself.

Whilst Chris is single minded and fully focused in his approach , he is the ultimate team player. Not many will know that Chris could have been a genuine all rounder but allowed others the opportunity to bowl before him. Similarly we can all see how he stands aside now to give younger batsmen a chance to blossom . What say 20,000 runs had Chris been more selfish. I had the privilege of playing alongside Chris from his debut to my retirement. It wasn't a smooth start for Chris , as he was run out in 3 near successive games whilst batting with me . Chris was of course quick on the uptake, and soon learnt to modify his calling for quick singles and he has rarely been run out since.

I knew Chris would be a great talent after the church game when in his early days, he knocked a quick twenty not out off 2 overs to win the game ... as i stood and admired at the other end .. 80 plus not out ... 10 plus overs left ...on the cusp of a maiden Lancs League century.

Chris of course went on of course to record numerous centuries and who will ever forget his innings in the 2004 semi final and final to bring us our first trophy.

I can't claim any influence on Chris's career, although i do take some pride in how he too has become a great long leg and third man. I am also very pleased to see how he helps the younger players in the first team at training and on match days.

As and when the 16,000 run mark is met and the 50th birthday ticks by, we will all raise a glass and salute a Lancashire league, Lowerhouse and cricketing legend And whilst having the privilege and honour to be his friend .

Stan Heaton

"Nothing much more I can add to say about Blez but other than he's a legend. Away from Lowerhouse obviously he's my uncle and I was always worried as 13/14 year old that I might not ever get to play with him in in the same side so to have been along side him now for the last 14 years or so has been fantastic.

A true gent and I've never heard a bad word said about him. I'm just glad the club has had some success that he's managed to be apart of."

Ben Heap

Only one word to describe Blez.....Old!

He is also a Top Bloke! A proper legend! Cricketing achievements to one side, I have a lot to thank the great man for....stopping me following a £5 note on a string one monday night down Yorke House, bailing me out when I bid for a horse at a race night, generally funding my youth, a gazillion collections...never a chore to go round with the collection box for Blez & I particularly remember collecting for a 50 (which went on to be a 100+ not out) & his 10000th run at Accy. A great mate!! Cheers Blez!

Jonny Russell

Blez is what i hope to be if not better when im his age, a league legend, a record holder, a humble man, successful and still class at the game, never gives up, and after all these years he has just as much love if not more for the game, his team mates and the club more importantly, pleasure playing with him throughout my upbringing at LHCC, UTH

Jonny Whitehead

Well where do I start on this bloke, easily the nicest bloke I've had the pleasure of taking the field with. To score 16000 runs in league cricket is some accomplishment but when you see the uncomplicated manner at which he goes about his business it's certainly no surprise. The knock he played in the Worsley Cup final vs Haslingden I still rate as one of the best I seen.

You're an absolute diamond Blez, it's been an absolute pleasure getting to know you over the years and watching you score many of those 16000 runs.

All my best wishes pal

Tif (Chris Benbow)

Many happy returns Blez, not just a Lowerhouse legend but a league cricket legend. A ridiculous amount of runs scored,all for one club and against some of the best pro's to ever grace league cricket. Honoured to have shared a cricket field with you, all the best.

Will Driver

Bleazard in Numbers

League only

BLEZ vs His Opponents									
Opponent	Matches	Inns	Not Out	Runs	HS	Ave	100	50	Ct
Rishton	58	52	3	1653	105	33.73	1	14	23
Enfield	53	47	10	1396	100	37.72	1	10	15
Colne	58	51	8	1353	110*	31.46	1	9	17
Burnley	56	53	7	1290	80	28.04	0	10	22
Church	54	50	12	1258	67*	33.1	0	7	26
Rawtenstall	57	50	8	1258	119	29.95	1	8	16
Haslingden	58	55	11	1242	106*	28.22	2	3	25
Accrington	56	52	10	1226	106*	29.19	1	8	26
Ramsbottom	60	56	10	1131	87*	24.58	0	6	15
East Lancashire	57	50	2	1095	81	22.81	0	6	16
Nelson	57	51	8	1094	85*	25.44	0	10	12
Bacup	57	50	9	1020	71	24.87	0	5	20
Todmorden	60	58	9	978	69	19.95	0	3	23

BLEZ by Ground									
Ground	Matches	Inns	Not	Runs	HS	Ave	100	50	Ct
Liverpool Road, Lowerhouse	373	342	48	7613	100	25.89	1	46	130
Blackburn Road, Rishton	31	27	3	981	105	40.87	1	8	11
Thorneyholme Road, Accrington	30	26	4	629	106*	28.59	1	4	15
The Horsfield, Colne	30	27	4	872	110*	37.91	1	7	4
Centre Vale, Todmorden	29	28	5	473	64	20.56	0	1	9
The Worswick Memorial Ground, Rawtenstall	29	26	5	774	119	36.85	1	6	8
Alexandra Meadows, Blackburn	29	24	2	445	81	20.22	0	3	9
Lanehead, Bacup	28	24	3	510	71	24.28	0	2	11
Acre Bottom, Ramsbottom	28	26	7	581	85	30.57	0	2	9
Turf Moor, Burnley	28	26	3	511	71	22.21	0	3	10
Bentgate, Haslingden	28	27	6	597	106*	28.42	2	1	14
Dill Hall Lane, Enfield	27	24	7	823	90*	48.41	0	7	7
Seedhill, Nelson	26	24	5	609	85*	32.05	0	6	8
Blackburn Road, Oswaldtwistle	25	24	5	576	64	30.31	0	3	11

Two words that describe Chris Bleazard the best according to me is the following. Absolute gentleman!

I had the privilege of playing 2 season with Blez and he definitely made a massive impact in the way I see Cricket and how it should be played.

He is definitely the best club man and completely unselfish cricketer I have ever come across. I personally feel that if he batted in the top 5, where he should ♦♦... he would have been past 20 000 Lancashire League runs already.

Thanks for the great cricketer, friend and role model you are to so many of us around!

Happy Birthday and congratulations on a special achievement!

Cobus Pienaar

Bleazard in Numbers

BLEZ by Season

Season	Matches	Inns	Not Out	Runs	HS	Ave	100	50	Ct
1983	6	5	1	54	25*	13.5	0	0	4
1984	19	17	4	222	33	17.07	0	0	8
1985	22	22	4	358	64	19.88	0	1	9
1986	14	14	1	254	49	19.53	0	0	0
1987	9	9	2	242	69*	34.57	0	2	2
1988	15	15	2	176	34*	13.53	0	0	1
1989	12	12	2	166	30*	16.6	0	0	4
1990	26	26	3	857	90*	37.26	0	6	13
1991	23	23	4	788	101*	41.47	1	7	9
1992	24	24	2	615	87	27.95	0	6	12
1993	25	25	3	630	75	28.63	0	4	5
1994	24	24	1	462	45	20.08	0	0	6
1995	24	24	3	675	87*	32.14	0	7	14
1996	25	24	3	704	110*	33.52	1	5	0
1997	26	26	3	641	73*	27.86	0	6	2
1998	23	20	2	279	52	15.5	0	1	12
1999	26	26	4	728	88	33.09	0	6	14
2000	26	25	1	512	66	21.33	0	1	4
2001	23	22	7	812	83*	54.13	0	8	8
2002	25	22	2	603	63	30.15	0	4	11
2003	26	26	3	818	106*	35.56	1	7	13
2004	26	26	8	657	106*	36.5	1	5	12
2005	22	20	2	598	80	33.22	0	4	6
2006	24	22	1	643	105	30.61	1	3	7
2007	14	12	2	218	68	21.8	0	1	5
2008	25	21	3	327	53	18.16	0	3	6
2009	24	22	2	594	119	29.7	1	2	10
2010	22	20	2	367	64	20.38	0	3	6
2011	23	17	2	239	58	15.93	0	1	14
2012	25	17	3	384	56	27.42	0	1	9
2013	24	22	10	648	100	54	1	4	8
2014	21	16	4	308	49	25.66	0	0	7
2015	22	13	4	202	32	22.44	0	0	8
2016	25	16	7	213	50*	23.66	0	1	7

Chris is undoubtedly the best batter Lowerhouse has ever seen and many including me, the best the league has ever seen. The fact he played in some average sides during his time is testament to his ability. In his day an outstanding fielder and half decent bowler apart from his fingers weren't warm enough to bowl against Michael Bevan one game. An all round top man who I class as a good friend and a true Lowerhouse legend, given the amount of opportunities he must have had to move to another club as pro or amateur in his time. He always stayed loyal to the club that served him as a junior wish more would follow his lead. Have a great birthday Blez
Matt Hope

As a youngster, working the tins, Blez was among my true sporting hero's. He shared this mantle with Clarets star John Deary and Lancs and England cricketer Michael Atherton!

Not many adults can say that they have one of their childhood hero's as a true friend and somebody that they enjoy spending time with both at home and abroad.

Chris is undoubtedly the best cricketer to have played as an amateur for Lowerhouse and among the very best in the history of the Lancashire League. His record speaks for itself. A classy batsmen who is great to watch and fielder who can catch anything.

Chris stuck with Lowerhouse through the darkest of days and it was fitting that he was the man that score heroic centuries in both the semi final and final as the club secured their first Worsley Cup triumph in 2004. The memory of him being chaired from the field after that final will stay with everybody present forever.

In recent times some of Chris' cameo innings have been a joy to watch with trademark flicks off his legs and drives over long off into the park! All the best on your 50th birthday and here's to many more years and many more trophies as a Lowerhouse player!

Matt Stansfield



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