

Granta fail to tame Shrewsbury youth

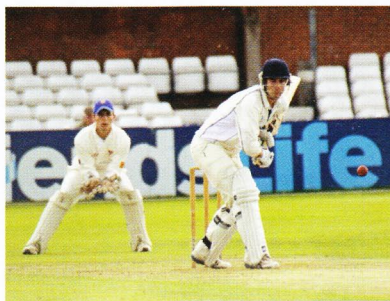
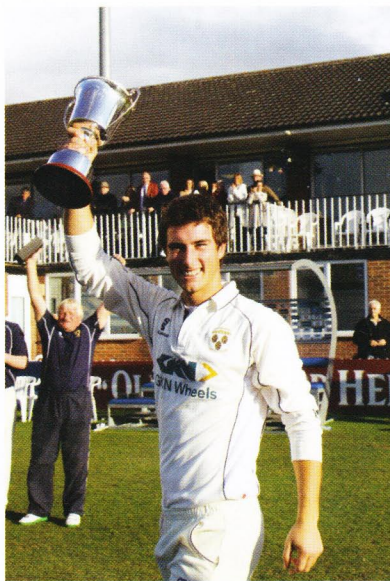
SHREWSBURY kept it in the family when they beat Cambridge Granta by three wickets in the final of the ECB National Club Championship at Derby in mid-September.

The team that won club cricket's most prestigious trophy with just two balls to spare contained three sets of brothers, and the fathers of the two Fosters and three Barnards also played in the Shropshire side that won the competition in 1983.

Man of the match Ed Foster skippered the Birmingham League team and put his big game experience – earned with the Shropshire county side – to good use in making the polished 98 not out that guided his team to victory. Chasing 221 to win, Shrewsbury had lost three late wickets in seven balls before Foster hit 12 runs off the first four balls of Jimmy Handley's final over to win the cup.

“Full credit should go to their skipper who batted brilliantly and kept a cool head,” said Granta captain Jason Coleman, his attitude entirely in keeping with a final which had been played in an exemplary spirit by two teams, neither of which contained a paid player.

Apart from bowling a dozen wides, the East Anglian Premier League side had little with which to reproach



themselves. Alex Fullarton's unbeaten 87 had anchored their innings of 220 for 7 in 45 overs, seven of them bowled by the England Under-15 skipper Ed Barnard.

Indeed, it was a final characterised by the exuberance of youth. Eight of the Granta side were 23 or under while the oldest Shrewsbury player was their 26-year-old captain.

The sides' respective passages to the final were a good guide to their pedigree. Granta had beaten the 2010 runners-up Ealing in the semi-final, while Shrewsbury had overcome a highly-rated Ormskirk team in the last eight, and then a West Indian Cavaliers line-up containing Usman Afzaal, Alex Tudor and Saqlain Mushtaq.

The ECB plan to keep the same format for the national knockout in 2012. Entry will be limited to 256 clubs, although a midweek date for the final is being considered to avoid a clash with the last day of many clubs' league seasons.

“We want this competition to remain at the elite end of club cricket,” said Aaron Campbell, the Competition Executive for Non-First Class Cricket. “The clubs feel the format works and the ECB feels it works, so there's no burning desire to change it.”

Paul Edwards

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