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Picturesque: The home of Eastbourne Cricket Club where their first team, inset, were so victorious last year

BEWARE THE BEAST FROM EASTBOURNE!

James Ayles discovers a club wanting to find the path to success again having reigned in Sussex for all of the Nineties

Eastbourne Cricket Club are looking to the past to inspire the future. A young Eastbourne side stormed to National Cup victory in 1997, and many of that team helped the Sussex side to the final again in 2000.

The majority of that victorious side progressed through the club's colts section, including Roger Myall and current youth coach Paul Hacker, while former England assistant coach Richard Halsall made a telling contribution.

Now the club's vice-chairman, Myall believes that success can provide the blueprint for the club once again, having last season achieved promotion from Sussex Premier Cricket League Division Two into the Premier Division.

Myall said: "That period in the 90s we dominated Sussex league cricket because the majority of the team had grown through the colts team.

"We weren't great cricketers, but then we had some special players like Richard Halsall, who would come in and raise the bar.

"Winning it was such a special occasion for us as a team and a club.

"That whole ethos of having a group of young cricketers who grow up together and enjoy playing cricket together is what we had in the 90s and lost in the 00s.

"That's now the decision we have taken, that we are much better off having a group of people who enjoy spending time together and that's the way we want to take the club forward.

He added: "The aim last year was to turn around the outlook of the first team, we had a situation where the atmosphere wasn't as great as we wanted it to be.

"We wanted people to have fun playing cricket. The aim was to turn it around and if we start winning games

great, and if not and it takes five years to get the right ethos at the club then so be it."

First team captain Jacob Smith, just 21, highlighted team spirit as crucial to the club's development on and off the field over recent seasons.

He said: "The club as a whole are looking to focus on the club spirit, we are really trying to build that up.

"It's the case at a lot of clubs, there can be some separation between teams, clubs form within clubs without realising. That is something we have suffered from before.

"Going forward, there will be lots of socials, and barbecues on Sundays to build that spirit. Hosting the county game here last year helped towards that. That was a massive effort with loads of volunteers."

Eastbourne has established a strong bond with Sussex County Cricket Club over the years, and has recently started hosting county games again after an extended break.

Numerous Sussex players have also turned out for Eastbourne, including

Peter Moores, Oli Rayner, Ed Giddings, and recently Sussex captain Ben Brown.

Former England head coach Andy Flower also turned out for the club back in the mid-1990s.

And Myall admitted the club took pride in its close connections with the county.

He said: "County cricket was a big part of growing up at Eastbourne, we had it all through the 1980s which was great to watch.

"It stopped in 2001 when the model for out-grounds changed a lot and the emphasis switched from the county taking the financial risk to the host taking the risk.



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Jacob Smith, First XI captain

"We started it again last year as a county out-ground when we decided we would take the risk for a One-Day Cup game, and we want to do more going forward.

"We are very proud of our association with the county."

For Myall, it is important the club continues to build on the positive momentum of the past season.

In particular, he sees the women's section developing over the next few years. As winners of the Sussex Cup last year, he feels the team can continue to build on the recent popularity of the ladies' game.

Myall said: "With the women's World Cup last year, the sport is definitely growing. It is massive and it will be massive, it's a decent standard now and it is one area we are keen to grow

"Ideally we would like to have a girls' team that play every week. "We have two girls who play in our men's third team and when we get enough for a Saturday fourth team it will have three or four girls in it which is a really positive thing."