**14 Years of Northumberland County Under 16’s Football**

**by Owen Aiston**

The beginning of the 1994 -95 season brought change following the ESFA AGM when the National Inter-Counties Competition was to be played at Under 16 level instead of Under 15 level. Changes to team management were confirmed with the appointment of Malcolm Denham at Under 16 level assisted by Owen Aiston and Bob Hamil. There followed fourteen enjoyable and successful seasons with the County Under 16 side. During this time we were fortunate enough to be in charge of teams who won no less than seven North- East Premier League titles, four Northern Counties Championships and two National ESFA Premier League Under 16 titles.

Being able to select from, and work with, a wide range of talent from across the associations has always been a marvellous factor when it comes to running a county squad. In our first squad I was so happy to have both David Tremble and Mark Maley who had been with me since they were U12’s in my Newcastle Schools F.A. representative side. They were joined by Michael Carrick of Burnside School and now of Manchester United F.C.To win the National Title with these lads was such pleasure. Mark then went on to represent England Schools at Under 16 level that year

The 1999/2000 Northern Counties Championship winning side contained a talented crop of young players notably goalkeeper Carl Bell from Haydon Bridge H.S. and defender Peter Ramage from Whitley Bay H.S. plus mid-fielder Chris Moore and striker Michael Chopra, both from Gosforth H.S.

The 2003/04 side was probably the team I enjoyed most working with – winning the Northern Counties Championship again, defeating our closest rivals Durham in the final but eventually losing out to Nottinghamshire away after extra- time in the semi-finals of the Inter Counties National Championship. Goalkeeper Fraser Forster, from RGS, was part of a formidable defensive line which included Craig Bryce of Cramlington and Chris Gillespie of Marden High. This, coupled with the scoring feats of Jamie Sinclair of Duchess High and fellow striker Jamie Mole of Kenton ensured that was one of the most successful county Under 16 teams ever to compete at this level.

In the 2007/08 season, goals from striker Mark Cullen of Ashington H.S. propelled the team to the Inter Counties National Semi-Final and the Northern Counties Championship Final, losing out however to Leicestershire and Lancashire respectively.

From my 14 years involvement with the County Under 16 team I have tried, with great difficulty it has to be said, to pick a select XI plus reserves from all the boys who represented the team during that period. Apologies to those boys who feel they should have made the XI – but this is my own personal choice:

# Owen Aiston’s Northumberland County Under 16 Select XI

1995 – 2009

Goalkeeper Fraser Forster RGS 2003/04

Right Back Kris Gates Heaton Manor 2000/01 Left Back Andy Ferrell Kenton 1999/2000

Centre Back Peter Ramage Whitley Bay HS 1996/9

Centre Back Mark Maley St. Cuthbert’s 1999/2000

Right Midfield Martin Brittain Cramlington HS 1999/2000

Centre Midfield Shaun Hutchinson Gosforth HS 2000/01

Centre Midfield Michael Carrick Burnside 1996/97

Left Midfield Chris Moore Gosforth HS 2006/07

Forward Jamie Sinclair Duchess High 2003/04

Forward Mark Cullen Ashington HS 2007/08

Substitutes

GK Carl Bell Haydon Bridge 1999/2000

D Craig Bryce Cramlington HS 2003/04

D Chris Gillespie Marden High 2003/04

M Eddie Dines Gosforth HS 2004/05

M Graeme Cairns Astley HS 2003/04

F Jamie Mole Kenton 2003/04

F Lee Novak St. Cuthbert’s 2004/05