

# Sport

Seven pages of sport starts here

Tea, biscuits and Bombay Mix is the order of things down on the greens of Manor Park!



■ Wood you believe it? Plashet's Asian stalwarts (left to right) Ismail Umarji, Mohmed Hanif Munshi, Moosa Patel, Dell Master and Ahmed Bashir Patel

## Plashet enjoy an Indian summer with new boys

### Get Involved

Anyone is welcome to come down to Plashet Park and try a game of bowls.

The green is open every afternoon from 2pm.

New members are welcome, tuition given to novices. Experienced bowlers welcome

For further information contact Secretary Joan Ayre: Tel: 0208 471 3821.

### Bowls Special

by Dave Evans

dave.evans@archant.co.uk

If you go down to Plashet Park these days you may be in for a big surprise. Amid the trees and greenery, the flowers and the park swings there is a revolution going on and it is happening on the bowls green.

Sitting on a bench among five jovial, friendly, bearded Indians it is difficult to imagine how this little group could help to change things in Newham, but they are and with such enthusiasm, they are looking to inspire others.

Del Master looks at me as I ask him how he came to be a part of Plashet Park Bowls Club and he laughs loudly and infectiously as he thinks about his answer.

### Maharajahs

"It was in 2008 and me and a friend were just walking around the park and we saw this game. We had never seen it before," he revealed. "Bowls is played in India, but only by the rich and the Maharajahs!"

He laughs again, his eyes smiling.

"I phoned the council to find out and they told me to go down and talk to club president John Cooper. I told him that I knew nothing about the game, had never seen it before, but he just said, 'don't worry, we will teach you and help you'.

"Ken Carter, Harry and Joan Morley, Peter Chilkes and Cliff Dye

were also so helpful. They taught us the ABCD of this game, they encouraged us, they gave us plenty of space and time and they had so much patience."

Perhaps the significance of this is not quite clear. When Del Master joined, he was the first ever Asian player to come to the club, the first in the area and since those days, Plashet have added many more from the Asian community, while elsewhere an Asian player is as rare as hens' teeth in east London.

Master's long-time friend Bashir Patel is just one of them. His long white beard and his 67 years do not suggest a sportsman, but there is still a twinkle in his eye and in his time at the club he has already managed a clutch of trophies.

### First season

"It took a couple of weeks to learn the game, but it took me about one season to get quite good at it. I was doing quite well in the first season, but I am doing much better now," he said.

"I played cricket, I played volleyball and did athletics as well when I was younger,

but this was completely new to me. We had to learn the rules and the etiquette when we went to away games, but we are really pleased with the whole thing."

A shower of rain has forced us into the clubhouse and the boys get busy with tea, biscuits and Bombay Mix for my delectation.

### Tankaria

They all hail from in and around the village of Tankaria, just under 200 miles from Mumbai, but they have been in Manor Park, Forest Gate and East Ham for nearly 40 years.

It is this game of bowls that has given them a new lease of life as Del explains.

"There are 12 regular Asian players and there are four or five others that come down occasionally," he said. "But we are the pioneers and we come down every day from 3pm to 7pm."

"We are all over 60 and we all have underlying health problems. My doctor told me to walk every day and this certainly helps with that - you can't sit down with the old lady every

day!" Everybody roars with laughter as the tea flows and handfuls of Bombay Mix are greedily swallowed by us all. The atmosphere is jovial and it is clear that the boys feel at home in a place which has been seen as a bastion of the English.

So have they met any resistance from other clubs since they started playing? Apparently not.

"It is a surprise that we haven't seen any other Asian players at all, but everyone has been very welcoming," says Bashir, who seems to be the star player.

"We played a team in the league the other week and we beat them. One of us said to them, we won, but you are still the masters, and they said, we don't want that, we want to be the winners!"

### Rivalry

"There is a good sense of humour, but at the same time we want to win and they want to win and rivalry is what the sport is all about."

In these times of suspicion between different ethnic groups this is something of a breakthrough and for Del he wants to expand things still further.

"All my life here I have worked with English people, so I have good experience, but some of the club members here just haven't had that experience," he explains.

"We now all know each other and we have developed friendships and there is no suspicion.

"When we come here, it serves

the purpose of togetherness and integration." Del is on his soapbox now and there is determination in his voice.

"I would like to promote this game among the Asian community and beyond. They could be Indian, Pakistani, Sikh and also the communities from eastern Europe that are building up here - why not?"

### Security guards

"Use the place, don't abuse it. We look after it, we clean it, we even roll the green and have been security guards because we have seen children jumping the fence and playing cricket on the green.

"We want more people to come here. When people see us play and when they read about us in the paper, they are interested in coming down and playing and that is what I want to see."

Speech over and that familiar smile returns. He and his teammates spring up from their chairs, all belying their advancing years and it is back outside to continue their daily roll up.

Sport is bringing different ethnic groups together once more and without the Indians being here, Plashet Park would struggle to raise teams.

Is this the way to bring the people of Newham together and end all that suspicion?

The sun is shining again as I leave and as they wave goodbye and return to their game, it is clear that these boys are here to stay.



■ Bashir Patel in action