

## Crabtree Away Game - June 15<sup>th</sup> 2016

This was one of those games where the drama surrounding the game was much greater than the game itself. As match manager I noted a healthy list of 18 available on Doodle and sat back to await the usual pre-match reshuffle resulting in a perfect eleven. Sure enough, the emails began to ping in, each one a sonic prod as I snoozed complacently, feet up, cap forward. But wait, did I not just count 7 pings on the phone? Was that now an eighth! I jolted upright spilling my Pimms and fumbled for my phone in the darkness of my flat cap. Adjusting my cap I could see that indeed the team was now down to ten with no reserves.

Not to worry, I thought, 'the committee' will find someone. It was sometime however before I realized that, in this instance I was 'the committee' and had found no-one. It was now the eleventh hour and desperate measures were needed if we were to retain our Saddo pride. Time to call on Winfield Jnr who understands village cricket well – it's an opportunity to massacre the opposition with balls they cannot see be they hand-delivered or bat-delivered. Perfect, I thought, a kind of secret weapon hidden amongst the youthful good looks of the rest of the team.

Winfield Snr put up very little resistance to the idea, mumbling something about need to revise for GCSEs but clearly immediately realizing such an educational opportunity couldn't be turned down. And so we had our eleven but with no reserves. David Nightingale suggested he might turn up later in lycra, but I had my reserves.

It was at this point on the morning of the match, that I realized we still had not heard back from the opposition. Could it be that they were still too sore from their defeat at our hands only a few weeks ago and were now going to stand us up, like a stropky girlfriend? Were all the efforts of the selection committee in vain? Of course not! A hasty flurry of emails identified the correct Crabtree match manager who thankfully confirmed the game was on and also that they were very keen to put us back in our place...in the most gentlemanly of ways (no, not that Mr Williams).

Meantime, during the meanwhile, Mr Curtis had been keeping a close eye on Carol's damp patches. These were looming very large and threatened to turn the efforts of mortal man into ruins. Arriving at Rothamsted Park cricket square precipitation of some sort seemed almost inevitable. However, Mr Curtis, iPad in hand and rail network open before him, in some kind of yogic pose, communed with Carol, perhaps via the commuter network, and brokered a deal. Carol would keep the wetness to the skirts but a few of the team, including Captain Michael, would arrive a little bit late off the trains.

In the absence of Michael's carefully crafted game plan I found myself making Big Decisions early on. The opposition suggested that we bat first as not all of our team was there yet and theirs was. However, never wanting to just roll over and give the game away we played for time: "Let's toss for it" ...And so we did and won the toss. At which point I suggested we bat first as not all our team members were here yet and theirs were.

I elected to open batting with Shaun at which point Michael turned up and emphasized that we would return to the game plan as soon as possible, but perhaps realizing that disaster had already struck. However, it did not strike immediately and in fact, crept up on us in the form of a slow run rate on our part and a slightly faster one on their part. Therefore I will not dwell on the game other than to flag up highlights and tone down low-points. Harsha's comment afterwards summed it up, "Meh"

### Batting:

Rupert – a high point but hopefully not the peak of my batting career – 35 runs, 3 fours and 2 sixes. However, Crabtree employed a special tactic to knock me out of my zone: an ageing bowler who froze mid-ball as his bad back got the better of him. After three attempts he hobbled off defeated but nevertheless he'd somehow taken my eye off the ball and the wicket was a goner. All downhill from here!

Shaun: a respectable 13 before falling and, likewise, Harsha: 11 but never quite finding the boundary. Simon W plugged away to 18 and, unlike so many was not out, allowing him to gain almost a fifth of all our runs. Michael swung out boldly but never found his eye and the stumps faltered. Glenn's eye was in but thanks to my earlier slogging the field were positioned to take anything short of the boundary, so caught he was. Interestingly, I discovered, while giving his daughter a lift to a cricket match yesterday, he did not choose to share his one run achievement with his family.

By now Crabtree had brought on some pacey bowlers and in particular a fast leg-spinner who dispatched Winfield Snr with only a few runs to his name. Colin resisted a little longer, sneaking a 4 past the field but he too succumbed and we were out of overs leaving Chris, Winfield Jnr and Jonno twiddling their thumbs on the bench.

#### Bowling:

Bowling was respectable with a few quick wickets from the Winfields and a couple of catches off Jonno and Glenn's bowling – one by Simon W and the other by Glenn off his own ball. At this point, we still had a spring in our step as they were now 4 for 20ish. Such was the spring in our step that Chris and I, in practically collided while failing to prevent a ball from crossing the boundary – good material for a Specsavers ad.

However, victory was not to be as the Crabtree stalwarts took to the crease and avoiding any further wickets kept up a healthy run rate, all reaching retirement figures. Unfortunately, we also aided their endeavour by giving away twice as many extra runs as they did. Did I mention that I bowled appalling badly? Let's not mention it again.

Crabtree won by 6 wickets – a deserved win. Credit must go to them for playing the game in the good spirit akin to the Saddoes ethos. Only one of their players who happened to be umpiring during Glenn's bowling didn't quite seem to understand this, giving Glenn a stingy wide and declining to indicate out on a clear wicket declaring, "unless the batsman walked". Personally, I don't think he liked Glenn, or was it just Australians?

Needless to say, the pub, being in Harpenden, was very pleasant and served us up a tasty chilli. I couldn't help noticing however, the dark, angry clouds crossing Colin's face as we stood on perfectly green, un-manicured *fake* turf lawn. Having said that, he'll have his work cut out should he ever try and restore the Rothamstead wicket. It does leave me wondering, given the levels of fitness and skill in the team we put forward, was it really just the pitch that caused us to stumble?

It only remains for me to give the Match Bird Report – I'm sure Dickie Bird would have approved.

Of note were the Ring-necked Parakeets that occasionally and noisily traversed the pitch, their bright green plumage always seeming somewhat garish for the subtle hues of England. However, Rothamsted Park, with its large oak trees, provides plenty of holes for this tree-nesting bird.

Also of note, but not so eye-catching, were the Stock Doves that occasionally flew across – sometimes distracting me from bowling with any kind of proficiency. These humble cousins of the overweight Woodpigeons often go unnoticed but are beautiful in their own right and also nest in tree-holes.

Otherwise, a Song Thrush could be heard belting out his repetitious tunes and a male Chaffinch his summer cascade, both birds intent on maintaining their territories and perhaps getting lucky with a female before the season ends. If only my singing had the same effect.

Resisting the urge to mention some of Richard and Jonno's favourite birds. Afterall, Shags are coastal birds and anyway, you'd hear more Puffin.