



13 June 2023, SFDWP vs Crabtree, Venue: Clarence Park Crabtree won by 3 wickets

With the mercury hitting 30 degrees on the day of the match, the outfield at Clarence Park was starting to resemble that of the golden plains of the Serengeti. And with the same testosterone levels as eleven randy bull elephants, the Saddoes strutted out onto the sacred turf at HQ to face Crabtree CC (who had migrated north for the evening from the low lying grasslands of Harpenden)

Having come so close to an unlikely victory in the previous match against Fishers, the 'Sad Bastards' (as one of the oppo was overheard referring to us as) were determined to reverse their fortunes.

The fact that we had fielded a team was a minor miracle in itself. Twenty four hours prior to the match, team availability had plummeted quicker than the population of Ugandan Mountain Gorillas and an SOS call went out on the WhatsApp group. As the numbers crept back up to 10, two options presented themselves for the last pick

- Option 1: A young, fit, athletic male from a local Maasai tribe aka Rupert's daughter's boyfriend
- Option 2: A mysterious, wise old Shamen going by the name of 'Pearly' who was offered up by the North Mimms CC tribe to help heal the wounds from the aforementioned Fishers defeat.

The Match Manager opted for experience over youth and before long it proved to be an inspired choice as the new recruit used his magical bowling spells to torment an attacking Crabtree batting side (more on this to follow)

Captain Winners won the spin of the bat (no-one had a coin to toss!) and elected to bat first. The top order was strategically selected from 'those that had not had chance to bat much this season' thus Marcos and the lesser spotted Graham 'the Leopard' Peel padded up. Those that turned up to watch, we're treated to other sightings of the 'big 5' throughout the course of the innings.

The openers were forced into defensive mode from the start of the innings with the Crabtree opening bowlers spearing the first dozen balls at the stumps with great accuracy. However, the batsmen felt their way back into the game and soon started to play some nice shots. After a wonderful straight drive was sent back over the bowlers head for four, Tembras was bowled rather unluckily for 11.

Big Dan 'the Buffalo' Lewis came in at number three and was clearly out to find a mate, dressed head to toe in brand new kit that he'd purchased from the Sports Direct Outlet in January. In his first outing of the season, he was slightly tentative (not wanting to get any of his new kit dirty) but got off the mark with a nice single to break in his virgin blade. However, not known for their agility 'the Buffalo' was run out a short while later for one.

Cue Anupam 'the Lion' Mukherjee who walked out full of confidence after his previous not out innings had ended in retirement. Runs were proving difficult to come by with Peely struggling for rhythm at the other end due to some inconsistent bowling. However, Anupam soon started to hunt down the weaker bowlers with some huge hitting to get the scoreboard ticking over again.

Contrary to popular belief, Rupert 'the Elephant' Evershed had not forgotten his team mates this season and was also making his season debut, replacing Peelers who retired having ground out 30 runs. Waving his bat around in a manner reminiscent of Dumbo taking to the skies, Sheddners made a quick fire 8 before being bowled by a bloke called Geoff. Skipper Winfield was equally as elusive out in the middle matching Sheddners' score and method of dismissal.

This bought Richard 'the Rhino' Williams into bat with the score well below par – quick runs were going to be needed to post a defendable target. Despite a stocky body, short neck and stumpy legs 'the Rhino' showed occasional explosive outbursts, timing the ball sweetly to hit a boundary and a maximum over square leg. Just as poachers pose a threat in the wild, the Rhino seems equally at risk of self-harm and retired himself on fifteen after pulling a muscle.

After further single figure contributions from Pearly, Church and Wilson F, the Saddoes finished up on 125 for 6. With its lightning quick outfield, a local guide suggested a par score on this pitch was 150, meaning we would have to bowl well to stand a chance of victory.

Trotting in like Pumbaa the Warthog, Andy Noble bowled a great opening over from the safari lodge end and was awarded with a wicket after finding a thick edge which looped the ball up into the air for 'the Shamen' to grab it with an unworldly serenity. Clearly impressed with what he saw, Captain Winners chucked the ball to the Pearly to bowl the next over.

Strolling into the crease, the 'wise one' released his first delivery which flew down the other end like an African Eagle to take out middle stump. Having already taken a catch and claimed a wicket with his first ever ball for the Saddoes, Pearly bought an aura of confidence to the rest of the team. Could this gift from the cricketing gods help deliver a much sought after victory? The next two overs remained tight and included another clean bowled dismissal at the hands of the new recruit.

The change of bowlers from the Sads helped end the run drought for Crabtree as the scoreboard started to tick over. Tembras bowled nicely and got a deserved wicket but Wilson F was again particularly wild. However with his final delivery, he trapped the batsmen on the back foot unleashing a lionessque roar of 'howzaaaaaat' that could be heard across the entire Hertfordshire subcontinent. Fearing for his life, the Umpire raised his finger triggering wild celebrations from the relieved bowler who had finally contributed something with the ball!

Further mixed bowling continued from the Sads but it was the glovework from Richard 'the Rhino' Williams that impressed. Driven by the desire to 'show Paggers how sh!t he really is' and despite his poor eyesight, the Rhino made repeated reaction stops and served up two brilliant stumpings off the skillful bowling of Church and Pearly.

Crabtree at this point were rapidly approaching their target, forcing the Skipper to bring back Anupam and Pearly into the attack. However, despite claiming his fourth wicket of the innings, the Shamen could not conjure up any more magic and the opposition reached their target with two overs remaining.

Post-match, the Sads retired to the lodge to swoop like vultures into the awaiting chips, curry sauce and beers. Noble led a rousing rendition of the club anthem to lift the spirits and remind everyone of our wonderful ideology...Hakuna Matata!

