

20 Over Match versus Fishers

Wednesday July 2017

Fishers won...comfortably; or, rather, we Lost.....convincingly

Park Street Cricket Ground (confusingly in Shenley)

The conceit

I met an old man, having repaired to the local boozer to ponder the events of our earlier shambolic cricket match against Fishers; and to add to the 4 or 5 pints post my own contribution. It is not a top-class drinking establishment, but serviceable and not yet a private residence. The Old Man was a strange cove and appeared at my elbow without a word, looking thoughtful, but eyeing me with some interest. He had a long beard, a cloak with a hood and stooped a good deal; but most remarkably he had a scythe casually slung over one shoulder. I'd have said he was about 5' 4" tall, but I've no doubt he might touch 6' if he stood up straight. He looked to be fingering a couple of short, stout sticks in his other hand, which he quickly transferred into his cloak pocket.

"Are you waiting for someone?" I asked, but not rudely.

"I wait for no man," he replied mysteriously, "may I join you?"

He confessed he had been attracted by my flannels and began to enquire after our recent game. I mumbled that we'd taken a sound thrashing from our arch rivals and perhaps he would like to talk about something else.

"Ah, that would imply a series of hard-fought contests over the years....?" He allowed the question to hang in the air.

"Er....not quite, I confessed; I'm afraid we are usually on the receiving end of what might generally be described 'a hiding' from this particular team; I'm afraid we have yet to beat them in 10 long years..."

"Ah, then perhaps they are more your Nemesis, than true rivals. Tell me about your club," he asked.

I explained that our name (SFDWPs) might give him a clue as to the seriousness with which we took our cricket. I also explained that there had been a move in the past to sanitise the thing a touch into DWPs (Dads With Pads), but this threat had been seen off by some of the purists and I felt that with our 10th anniversary fast approaching, or indeed, even past, that the name was safe.

He asked how I would describe our opposition. I considered for a moment and recalled the time I'd been having luncheon with a Sicilian client, about 10 years before. It had been in St John's restaurant and I had, rather ill-advisedly, gone for the 'pig snout and tail'. Anyway, Edgardo ('twas his name) had taken exception to one of the waitresses and had described her in a certain way. With the recollection fresh in my mind, I turned to my guest and said, "They have the collective face of **a nasty bitch!**"

"That sounds harsh," he remarked.

"Ah, you don't know them," I replied glumly "they seem to take no joy from the game; just a grim, relentless grind to victory." They're the sort of team that might bowl you an underarm if you needed a 6 off the last ball" I remarked.

"Ah, like the infamous underarm bowling incident of 1981."

"Yes indeed", I re-joined, "the boy Chappell."

"The BOYS Chappell," he corrected.

"Well, I wasn't really talking about poor old Trevor."

"Anyway," he continued, "enough ancient history; how about some recent history: tell me about the match."

Having replenished our glasses with a couple of foaming jugs of Old Wallop (reminiscent of my own final stroke, I couldn't help thinking) I began the story of the match.

The Scene

Having ignored the lure of several other pitches en route that deserved the name 'London Colney Cricket Club' far more, I kept faith with our match manager, Rupert's, carefully researched co-ordinates and finally alighted on a very nice-looking pitch; complete with an excellent club house and 'scoring booth'. I had wrenched my wife and family away from the St Albans ritual that is the trip to Stevensons and was dropped off before they sped away, back to the shop with my credit card in hand. The sun was shining and there was a faint gathering of familiar and sometime unfamiliar faces. It was always good to see Rupert and he introduced me to his neighbour, Brynn, who seemed a likely sort and up for larks, "I've not played for 20 years", he cheerfully announced.

As an aside, I told the Old Man, this is actually rather useful talking to you, as I'm supposed to be writing the match report; although I rather wish I'd decided this before the game as I might have paid more attention. Additionally, the standard in the past has been generally very high and I was rather concerned about making a complete hash of the thing; although on second thoughts, this would be entirely in keeping with the match. I had considered adopting some conceit to tell the story, but I think a 'straight tell' might be safer..."Very wise" he advised sagely.

We arrived in dribs and drabs, no doubt due to the plethora of nearby cricket clubs to choose from and there being a general scepticism about Mr Evershed's pinpoint accurate coordinates; ha, cynics, I thought! The Corporal had been designated the skipper, everybody else having given the thing the bird and he swiftly appointed me wicket-keeper. This was much to the chagrin of Mr pointer who had lost out to me in the 'who-is-the-least-worst-bowler' competition; plus, I was there first, pressing my case. "You've got my gloves on", Tim remarked gruffly when he arrived out in the field, with obvious bitterness. However, I brushed this off and, as I suspected we hadn't met before, put out a heavily gloved hand in a warm greeting.

We were now pretty much quorum, as their first pair strode out; the sun was (still) shining, it was a beautiful ground and all was right with the world; what could go wrong.....

Their Innings

Shaun opened the bowling and opted to bowl up the hill. It was the usual tidy over from him, but he still went for seven. Marcos then came in with immediate results, with a couple of dot balls, then a wicket; caught by Brynn with a neat bit of work in the field.

Shaun's second over yielded just three runs and we seemed to be in okay shape, as he finished his third over with only 2 runs added. This solid start was continued by WJ, with his deceptively swift and accurate deliveries off virtually no run-up, as he picked up a wicket (bowled) in his first over for only four runs. Alas, Mr Curtis was thumped for 13 off his first over, whilst WG went for 7: although he finished his 3-over spell with another wicket (bowled) for only one run and things were starting to look up....

"Why is he called WG?" the Old Man suddenly interjected, with great interest.

"I'm not sure," I replied, "He *has* got a fine beard." I replied

"The size of a rhododendron, no doubt?" he suggested.

"Mmm, no, not really; it's rather a well-kept affair."

"Perhaps he has the temperament of the late Doctor?" he ventured.

"Oh no, he's the best of fellows" I replied, "perfectly modest, but with a keen wit."

The Old Man merely stroked his own straggly growth in thought.

I continued:

There was a good comeback from Mr Curtis, who leaked only four runs to end his two-over spell. This hadn't quite made up for the two dollies he'd dropped in the field earlier (could that low, summer sun have played a part?); but Fishers were hardly in the ascendancy.

Indeed, their big Saffer (minus his mongoose) fell shortly after, with the ball coming off most of his ample frame to drop onto the stumps to give Gary a wicket; although this was at a cost of 12 for the over. This wasn't helped by my missing a couple of deliveries down the leg-side; but the Greater-Spotted-Evershed, fielding at fine leg, thankfully cleaned these up for only a run a-piece. There was also a disappointing missed stumping opportunity, that would have been sharp work had it been given (I still think it was out), but it was still another chance gone.

It is also possible that Gary was the victim of the worst dolly dropped during the match when he was bowling, which was spilled by the man no doubt wishing he had a large set of gloves on, running in from maybe mid-on, or it might have been mid-off; actually, he looked pretty straight-ish; would that be a sort of 'straight extra cover'? Any which way, Tim was not happy about it, whilst the bowler managed to hide his disappointment far more effectively. There was also a rumour that the Corporal had spilled one or two chances as well; and there was certainly one or two ironic choruses of "Bodies on the line, chaps", as successive balls raced past his right boot at midwicket.

The skipper then joined the bowling attack, with his measured, slow stuff and restricted them to just four runs initially. Gary tightened up a touch and went for seven with a second over, but looked better than his figures suggest. Michael then claimed an excellent wicket, with a delivery that the batsman attacked like a ravenous Bunter eyeing up a pie cooling on the window-sill. Missing the ball by a country-mile, the batsman could probably have had another swipe at the thing, as it continued on its merry way to the middle stump, great stuff!

There was average fayre from Graham and Rupert took some punishment, going down for 11 off his only over. Brynn looked reasonably tidy but they still managed eight runs off his one over. Tim was given the unenviable task of bowling at 'the death' and was duly carted around the ground for 24 from two overs. There might of been an argument for having a more experienced set of bowlers seeing out their innings at the death; but hey-ho, worse was to come!

There was generally a pretty good standard of fielding, with Brynn looking amongst the sharpest; and Shaun and Gary doing really sterling work on opposite boundaries and being mainly responsible for restricting them to only 7 boundaries. One sobering statistic, however, showed that (setting extras aside), Fishers scored more in their last four overs than we went on to manage in our entire innings!

Our Innings

Although at one stage we looked as though we might restrict Fishers to less than 100, our dropped catches and their acceleration at the death had seen them past 130. But I sensed a confidence in the ranks, as the opening pairs padded up. Indeed, a glance at the club statistics for the season showed a batting average of over 18 for those who were playing (myself and Brynn aside, who hadn't played in 2017 (or this Millenium in Brynn's case!))

Graham and Shaun strode out in a confident fashion, but, needless to say, this was not to last. Graham hit a crisp shot to deep mid-on, which wasn't taken cleanly; but he ran into their bowler, didn't ground his bat and was stranded as the ball hit the top of the stumps with a direct hit. One of our best out for a duck, quack quack. Some wag had written in the scorebook under 'how out' section for Graham: 'Embarrassingly!'

'Uncle' (according to the scorebook) Brynn had already taken stance and was looking good; but Shaun was soon to follow his opening partner, having been taken with the sharp catch for one.

The opening pair had failed, but the cry went up: "Here is Rupert!" Despite his usual modesty, a series of recent in-form performances with the willow-in-hand gave him a certain swagger as he made his way out into the middle to join his neighbour. Trying to chip the covers, however, he merely dollied it up for an easy catch and was soon on his way back to the pavilion, duck in hand. We now suffered the ignominy of being more wickets down than we had runs at 2 for 3!

This brought a minor comedy panic in the ranks as batsmen scrambled to pad up to keep pace with the fall of wickets. Fishers continued to keep a tight ring round the batsmen (oo-er!), which had certainly stood them well thus far.

Gary, new to the Saddos this season, was looking okay and had faced a few, with a couple of runs under his belt, when he was clean bowled.

I jumped up and was met by Brynn half-way to the wicket who cautioned just to 'take it easy' and 'stick around for a bit'. Having not played for the Saddos (or anyone) for a couple of years, I certainly intended to give it a go, with the Skipper's words of "We need a twenty-five off you, Pip" ringing in my ears.

We began to build a reasonable partnership and seemed to have a good understanding, when a bizarre appeal led to Brynn heading off to the pavilion. Me and quizzical WG, umpiring at the bowler's end, could then see that Brynn had brushed his own wicket - curses! Just when he had got himself in, one short of double figures; but we shall see some more of this fellow, I've no doubt.

I remarked to The Corporal as he came out that there wasn't 'much going on' with the current bowlers. Alas, hubris struck: after trying to give a straight one the goods, it kept low and hit my back foot; up came the dreaded finger of WG. Despite my instinctive vigorous shake of the head whenever a ball hits my pads and I hear an appeal, there was no doubting it was plum. Bah!

The Skipper had also remarked, during our pre-partnership chat, that us two had better "hang around as there wasn't much batting to come." Unfortunately, his words were more prophetic than he could have imagined as I headed back for an early beer; and was quickly followed by Tim who also collected the aforementioned aquatic bird, quack quack!

Corporal Skip was soon to follow, after another of his agricultural demonstrations resulted in a slightly harsh LBW. Actually, this was remarkably harsh as their WK had immediately remarked that it was "not out", only to be over-ruled by Gary, the umpire. Ouch! Et tu, Brutus. Note to team: it's only out if it's absolutely definitely out. Bad luck to the Skipper, although we had been treated to a magnificent display of agrarian strokes.

Meanwhile, Curtis had materialised and I heard someone remark that his ungainly style could be just the thing to unsettle Fishers.

At this point I'd started to lose track a bit, particularly as I was making the most of not driving; and had also bumped into an old school friend (the ground-keeper) I'd not seen for about 30 years. It had taken me 3 rounds to recognise him and it made me feel deuced old. Anyway, at some stage WG had gone out and had managed to end up at the same end as Curtis, who summarily sent him back to the other end; no doubt with a careful eye on his average! Was he out that time? I'm not sure; but if he wasn't, he should have been; and soon was for the same crime, in any case. It is possible, that WG had also, at some stage, been sent out as a runner for Marcos and it was nice to see us sending out our youngest and fittest for this job.

Marcos had managed a few, but by this time we were really on a hiding to nothing. Curtis carried his bat as the final wicket fell, with a useful 5 being added to his average for no cost. The scoreboard told a sorry tale: 51 all out; with extras the top-scorer and only one of us reaching double figures.

It wasn't what you would describe as a party-atmosphere on the verandah, but a number of us were well into sampling the local ales and were in no mood to make a wake of the thing.

There was some self-indulgent stuff in the club-house, as one of their number announced he'd been at the weddings of both one of ours and their team some 20 years ago, but it was nice to toast WG on reaching this fine mile-stone.

Some excellent home-made curry arrived (chicken, tofu and a large chapatti). It was very tasty and Brynn remarked the heat was just right. That said, there could certainly have been more of the stuff. Indeed, Rupert swiftly went hunting for some pudding; no doubt hoping for a large helping of spotted dick and custard or similar, but no such luck.

Several of the chaps seemed to drift off without the customary farewells; no doubt slinking off in shame! But I managed to grab a birth home with Marcos and we chatted pleasantly on the way back about how the game could have gone a different way if we'd taken our chances and not batted like a bunch of royal arses - hardly the best preparation for the eagerly anticipated tour at the weekend. We certainly didn't do ourselves any favours with the numerous dropped catches and sloppy batting, although there had been some comedy dismissals on both sides to enjoy!

The Old Man tugged at his beard thoughtfully, then eventually enquired,

"So, no real bright spots, then?"

"Well," I ventured, "at least I finally got my new hat." And I touched the thing, resplendent in West Indies maroon; and proudly displaying the proud, stout, middle-aged man that is so typical of our number, chopping the cherry away to the boundary in fine fashion.....or more likely missing the damned thing, as it travels merrily onto the stumps.

This must of proved the last straw for my long-suffering guest, for when I turned round he had gone.

"What an eccentric performance", I remarked to no-one in particular and slowly made my way home, muttering about how it was damnably tricky to stay positive after such an abject display.....

Their Innings

Batsman	How Out	Bowler	Total
C. Hoskins	Not Out	N/A	25
M. King	Caught (Bryn)	Marcos	2
M. Boughton	Bowled	WG	1
A. Watson	Bowled	Gary	12
B. Walia	Bowled	WG	0
J. Tatlock	Not Out	N/A	25
S. Nurse	Bowled	Michael	3
D. Boxer	Not Out		22
T. Hargreaves	Not Out		6
J. Wormsley	DNB		
I. Hazon	DNB		

Our Innings

Batsman	How Out	Bowler	Total
Peel	Run out		0 (faced 6)
Cooper	Caught	Hazon	1 (2)
Uncle Brynn	Hit Wicket	Nurse	9 (14)
Evershed	Caught	Wormsley	0 (1)
Gary	Bowled	Hazon	2 (8)
Phillip	LBW	Nurse	12 (13)
Michael	LBW	Walia	4 (9)
Pointer	Run Out		0 (2)
Curtis	Not Out		5 (9)
WG	Bowled	Walia	0 (1)
Marcos	Bowled	Boxer	3 (5)
		Total	36
		Extras	15
		TOTAL	51