

Match Report
V&A vs. MCC (Midnight Cricket Club)

Sat. May 3, 2008

IT WAS FINALLY WARM ENOUGH and (just) dry enough for V&A athletes to begin the season. The continued absence of the Club's President prompted rumours. Inevitably there was speculation that he had been tempted by the I.P.L Rupee: however, bidding for his services failed to reach the 30 Rupee 'reserve' price (approx 37p). Calcutta were interested but a spokesman said: "We already have a punkah wallah, and evening games require someone who can stay sober". The explanation is, in fact, entirely innocent: he has been staying with his old friend Max Mosley and reminiscing about the war with various Germans.

We were only 7 by Thursday, but Martin rang around and uncovered 4 more from London Nigerians to give us a full XI. We were put into bat on a soggy wicket (it was under water the previous evening) and struggled until lunch when we were about 80 odd for 5. Almost everyone had got in and got themselves out, usually by playing too early on the soft pitch. Rupert Morris tried to do it the other way around with a pathetic scoop to square leg before he'd scored. However, a feeble one handed attempt at a catch let him off. "I don't know which was more crap: the shot or the drop" said Martin kindly.

We flourished – as so often – after lunch when the sun appeared and the MCC's beer consumption started to do its work. Dennis de Caires and Sam Assilue batted sensibly and put on 75. The slow pitch and outfield took their toll. Dennis is used to whacking boundaries and found Sam's enthusiasm for twos and threes relentless. He took to shouting 'no' almost before he'd hit the ball, and the 'recovery' at the end of each over resembled a scene from 'Casualty' according to an umpire.

Sam got out after reaching fifty, but Dennis carried on (just) and the tail wagged a bit. Dennis finally got the hang of it and clobbered a huge six avoiding the wet out field and – more importantly – the need to run. At that point, Martin declared at 202 for 9 which seemed about par.

Unusual scenes followed; Sam Assilue took the pads/gloves to keep wicket and conducted a 'fielding practice'. This has never happened before and more experienced players (A. Fraser) were found wanting even before taking the field. At which point, Michael Gabbay was missing, only to be spotted RUNNING ALL AROUND THE FIELD without stopping. This is called a "warm up" apparently, but hasn't been seen before and your committee will not sanction it again given Health and Safety legislation.

Things got stranger straight away. Ade Tade bowled a perfect inswinger first ball to york their opener, and with his fourth trapped the other LBW. 1 for 2 at the end of the first over is not what we're used to (especially when the departing batsman had antipodean accents though, to be fair, no obvious criminal antecedents).

Michael bowled steadily from the other end having recovered from his run and also grabbed an early wicket. Ade continued to bowl straight, and before much longer it

was 13 for 7. Yes. 13 runs, 7 wickets. If detail is lacking, it's because (a) we didn't have a scorebook and (b) our elderly correspondent couldn't keep up with it all.

Martin took Ade off after 5 overs. His figures were then 5-0-7-5. Michael had been steady at the other end and his figures were 5-1-6-2. The batsmen were somewhat bewildered. It has to be said our attack was a cut above the usual V&A opening "attack", but hardly Lillee and Thomson. The MCC were extremely sporting: one walked for a catch, and another almost walked for an LBW which was plumb (they had been somewhat unfortunate in the field when a few decisions went against them, including a stumping appeal refused as the umpire [M. Bowden] was looking the other way chatting to the fielder).

Also, they played with only 10 men, so when Dennis picked up a wicket (caught by that V&A rarity a 'diving slip') after it popped up, we had only one more wicket to take and they were 15 for 8.

With only 200 runs to play with, Martin inevitably went on the defensive and removed the slip. The inevitable happened: Sam Assilue bowled a beauty: it floated in to middle and leg, lifted and turned, and any first slip would have caught a simple dolly.

Martin made his next mistake by postponing tea. This was initially kept secret from experienced members (A. Fraser) on the mistaken pretext that the final wicket would fall imminently. It didn't. The complaints from tired fielders (we'd been out there for a full hour) got worse.

We could have got a quick wicket, but their last man – Bowden – was a bloody good bat and came in last as he'd done most of their bowling. "What the fuck's going on, I've just bowled 20 overs" he said charmingly as he arrived at the crease. Martin's captaincy then completed a double whammy. Fraser had been moved from slip on the insulting principle that "we might need to catch some today". As a result, he found himself (without his tea) at mid on when Bowden hammered one at him, shoulder height.

Opinions differ on what happened next. Suffice to say, he got nowhere near it. Some say that he leaped gallantly and narrowly missed. Others that he bottled out completely and "did a Bruno".

As a result they went on hitting us around and got to 40 odd before tea was finally allowed. Thoughts of getting to the pub before mine hostess had taken sustenance were going out the window, and the spectacle of us fielding for a couple of hours watching a gallant last stand loomed large. The president's ghost could be heard requiring strong drink.

We resumed gloomily with Dennis bowling. Now physically wrecked, he cut his run to two paces and bowled rubbish which was duly whacked. But, there is a God! His final ball of the first over after tea was so slow and wide, it went past the batsman's reach and hit the back of the bat. At which point Sam made no mistake (nor had he done all day, much to the admiration of V&A regulars who are not used to high wicket keeping standards). So they were all out for 47: we won by 155 runs, had our picture

taken, and take an unbeaten record into our second match for the first time in years.

© Andy Fraser