

## MATCH REPORT

V&A v. NATIONAL THEATRE, Sat. May 30, 2009

A GLORIOUS DAY, cloudless, with the VW rally in Stonor Park on the Sunday, thankfully, so set to ruin Stonor C.C.'s day and not ours.

The National Theatre fixture goes back 20 years, and is a game Martin Bowden captains with relish, as – being a cricketing tart – he plays for them when off V&A duty, and enjoys the competitive edge with their captain Mike Morris and organiser John Langley.

Martin and Mike agreed a 20-overs-after-6 game, which disheartened the elderly Andy Fraser and those who need whisky at 6.15. Martin won the toss and elected to bat in the comparative cool of the morning. Incidentally, the NT had all arrived at 11.15 while we swanned in at 12, apart from Olly Bett and his mates, who were keenly practising in the nets when Andy and I arrived at 11.20.

We started well, openers Richard Woolhouse and Sunil [from the Old Talbotians] scoring briskly - off undemanding bowling it has to be said [the NT were a stronger batting side]. With the score on 33, Sunil was eventually caught for 16, having scored almost all his runs in twos. All our dismissals were caught, everyone being lured into hoicks by tempting long hops or full tosses.

But there was no collapse, the run rate remained at 5 an over, Martin Bowden whacked the ball around for 33, Freddie Motley batted superbly with Richard, who was eventually out for 39 – having been dropped earlier. When Richard was out Dennis and Olly Bett both swished boundaries before going rather cheaply. Andy came in and was his usual elegant self, pulling, cutting and driving until an indecisive off drive saw him depart for a quick 24. Bird N. came in and joined Freddie. Captain Bowden shouted 'Cut loose!' or something similar and Freddie responded by hitting the ball all over the ground for an invaluable 65 and Bird responded with 33\*, 15 off the last few balls allowing Martin to declare on 248 off 45 overs. We might have scored even more but for the NT's very fine catching, including a brilliant caught and bowled to dismiss a rampant Martin. He was as disciplined as ever and eschewed substance abuse until the match was over. There was some controversy when he might have been LBW first ball with Dennis umpiring. The bowler, a New Zealander, was visibly displeased with the verdict of 'not out'. So upset was he that he went for an impossible catch next ball and dislocated his finger. Dennis' reasons for turning down the appeal, one of two he turned down to save Martin's bacon, were – 'Martin is my captain, he's just come in, and he's a friend.' I have looked up the Rules and I don't think this is legitimate justification for refusing an appeal, but there was a remote possibility that the ball would have missed leg stump, although the bowler said it would have hit middle and off. But nobody would ever accuse Dennis of ungentlemanly conduct, to his face.

Lunch was reassuringly familiar and agreeable. Sarah came, laid out the organic fare, cleared up, washed up, made tea, washed up and buggered off. A saint. Her husband says a mug. Her reward will be another tea towel for *V&A Tea Lady of the Year 2009*.

The NT opened rather slowly. Or to put it another way, too slowly. Although they reached about 40 without loss, a combination of accurate bowling from Dennis, Olly, Richard and Martin restricted their rate to about 3 an over. They were thus looking less and less like reaching the target. David Lumsden is not a run-chaser by nature and when his captain sent out a message to go for it he bravely swiped some fours – all to leg as is his wont – but was then stumped just short of his 50. John Langley tried to score quickly as did others but wickets fell to good balls from Martin, Dennis and Peter – two in an over – with excellent catches by Sunil and Freddie (at cow corner with the sun in his eyes).

It is to their credit that the NT never stopped going for it, even when losing wickets. But the slow start had rather hampered their attempt, and perhaps their batting order was at fault. Mike Morris is a splendid, fearless hitter who made an immediate impact when he came in, scoring a succession of sixes off Linthwaite, and should have advanced himself up the order. At the end he was batting with a proper batsman who had all the strokes and had the correct qualifications – manly, classical, antipodean. Why did he not come in sooner? The clock was past drinks time and with 6 overs to go and 70 or so to win, with perhaps 5 wickets down (I don't remember, it was a long time ago), there were murmurs from the field of offering the draw, as some were flagging and the pub beckoned. Our team is inclusive, we have the correct combination of young, gay, fit, overweight and elderly and it is the latter that seem to prefer the limited-overs game because at least you know how long you may have to suffer in the heat of the field. And you get a result.

As I was trotting, or tottering, to the pavilion for a replacement ball for yet another lost in the long grass, I turned to see everyone walking off. The draw had been agreed as there was no likelihood of our dismissing the NT or their getting the runs. Not very satisfactory, John Langley went further and thought it was a 'mockery'.

But there was some sense in it. If the NT had not got bogged down at the start, if their batting order had been different, if we had declared earlier, we might have had a close game but these things are difficult to judge. Captains look a charley if they declare too soon, or if they encourage wild abandon at the beginning of an innings.

Anyway, a day spent with the thespians of the National Theatre is always a delight. Mike Morris is just the sort of captain that makes the day fun – he gives everyone who wants to a bowl, goes for the win, doesn't complain about the lack of cucumber sandwiches...my only complaint is that he himself decides to bowl, from a height of 8 feet, at quivering tailenders like me, instead of butch old pros like Martin, Richard, Dennis and Andy.

Next week is the Catchiteers, Richard Woolhouse is skipper. Let us know if you can play, there is room for a couple more. The V&A's Rob Noble is their captain, our *Duff Fielder of the Year 2008*. Let us hope he is on his usual form.