

MATCH REPORT

V&A v. JACOBITE CHANCERS

SATURDAY SEPT. 9, 2006, STONOR

WE STRUGGLED to get a team together, as 4 or 5 regulars were away playing for some other tossers. But I did not want to disappoint the Jacobites, as this was their last game of the season and a farewell match for their Kiwi captain, David Macmillan, who was returning to New Zealand for good.

Perseverance paid off and we ended up with a conventional 11 men, although Olly Bett's dad Hugh had to be cajoled on the day, and handed my old cricket shoes that had been condemned in 1967. They did not help his fielding, but a missed catch at deep square leg would have been dropped by most of us; in the event it was a bit harsh of his son to shout abuse at him. Hugh is an antiquarian book dealer, not a professional cricketer. The Bett family provided three players – having also brought along Olly's cousin Hugo Boys – a proper player – plus a willing caterer in Olly's mother Assia. *Grazie...*

I found two chaps from my street, Robert and Andy Taylor, who learnt their cricket at Latymer; Robert bowls tidy, quite speedy off breaks and bats nicely, although he left a ball that kept low and hit middle stump. Andy would have bowled but for a dodgy shoulder.

In a 35-over game we had to field first because many of us had to return to evening engagements. So we could not join the Chancers in the pub, which must have seemed discourteous. Sorry. They started well but at lunch we were still in it, the Jacobites having scored at under 5 an over, although only one wicket had fallen. Thereafter we had a problem. We were not a balanced side, we lacked at least two bowlers; in contrast they had a team of virile men under 30 who could all throw, bat and – apparently – bowl.

We had Hugo and Dennis de Caires as our main attack and they performed very well; Olly bowled his 7 overs more than adequately and got a deserved LBW. But we had to find another 14 overs from occasional bowlers like Rob Noble, Patrick Cobb and Andy Fraser. Andy's one over, and 4 wides, is best forgotten. Patrick did well enough, and Rob did as well as could be expected. Last week Rob dropped a dolly of a catch that Fotherington-Thomas would have snapped up; this time a difficult catch went through his hands at mid-wicket. It was an unfortunate miss as the batsman, their skipper, went on to make 99. He was run out by a superb throw from Robert Taylor. The surplus of old farts in the field could not be disguised, and we leaked boundaries alarmingly. Even Steffen Collings – to whom we are indebted for washing up and Hoovering - managed to watch balls trickle through his legs, and he is far from geriatric. Our wayward fielding was however suddenly – and brilliantly – lit up by a catch by Olly at cover which will surely feature in Channel 4's '10 Best V&A Catches Of All Time'. A shot was whacked with unprecedented venom to the cover

boundary when Olly moved quietly to his right and caught it with becoming nonchalance, merely betraying a whiff of discomfort to his hands.

The Chancers reached 224, with their manager Ed Black, who in happier days played with us, smacking successive boundaries. Our innings started poorly with Rob Noble being bowled for a duck. [He complained of 'concussion', after that fall in the bathroom the week before last...but the replay showed simple incompetence as the cause. For the second week in succession his lovely girlfriend Donna failed to turn up for the usual 'chat' in the car. Perhaps there is underlying sexual tension behind this plethora of missed catches and ducks.] Rob Taylor was bowled for 2. Dennis had just hit the most perfect straight drive when he attempted to cut one that kept low and was bowled for 6. Andy Taylor looked classy and with Andy Fraser started to score. But in trying to push the run rate both got out, Taylor for 16 – a good debut innings – and Fraser for 9. Hugo hit two fine fours before misjudging the line and succumbing. Olly Bett and Patrick Cobb steadied the ship, Olly with some big hits and Patrick with his trademark cover drives along the ground. But we lost the initiative. Their bowling lacked variety – there were no wallies. Every new bowler was a proper one, and Ed Black and their other opener were very fast indeed. Patrick scored a decent 21 and Olly 16. Bird (22) and Collings (8) were not out at the death but their cuts and drives off the openers (now returned) were irrelevant. The game was lost, by a whopping 100 runs or so.

The Chancers are good, very good, but with our best team out we have always had a good close game – one recalls the famous occasion when my antique father and 10-year-old daughter helped us to a last-over victory, and the game which we tied when our wicket-keeper (me) caught their last man off the last ball – a ball that was about to be signalled a 'wide'.

They are a loquacious bunch in the field, more chatty even than the Hermits. But it is not 'sledging', just banter. They are scrupulously fair – they offered to take their quick bowlers off when I was facing them in the evening gloom (I declined the kind offer, not wanting to look the wimp that I am). And they wash up and clear up. But it would be nice if they had a crap bowler or two, and some old men in the field, dribbling and dozing and smelling of wee-wee, like we do.

This Sunday we are playing ROYAL ASCOT away. Please let me or Sarah know if you can play – there are only a couple of places left however. We will send directions to the ground soonest. It is a 1.00 p.m. kick-off with tea only provided. Please note: I am told that ROYAL ASCOT are a respectable team who have high standards of decorum. So substance abuse and misbehaviour in the car must wait until dark.