

MATCH REPORT

Sat. June 2

V&A v. The NATIONAL THEATRE

A glorious day, with none of the predicted showers, a perfect setting for both the Derby and cricket at Stonor. The ghastly VW rally was, thank God, on Sunday although the tossers in their camper vans were assembling as we played.

Martin Bowden lost the toss and The National Theatre elected to bat, a surprising decision in the light of their being a better bowling side, but possibly influenced by the delayed appearance of their most lethal bowler, the lofty Mike Morris (of which more later).

They started at a sloth's pace, which slowed to a snail's. But they were hampered by a sluggish pitch, humidity that made the ball swing prodigiously and calypso bowling from Jake Warman, who began a devastating spell by bowling gritty opener David Lumsden with an unplayable ball for 2. Truly, it would have bowled Bradman, swinging from well outside off stump to hit middle.

Things got worse for The National Theatre, despite limpet-like determination from the other opener, John Langley. Two balls after Lumsden went, their no. 3 was bowled by Jake with another peach. Jake then trapped their next batsman LBW (after an appeal the ball before was turned down, possibly a better shout). Rico Wilson, at the other end, bowled his medium stuff with the minimum of fuss and the maximum of accuracy – figures of 2 for 15 tell the story. On a hot day it's always a relief when a bowler takes but three paces for his run up.

Dennis came on and bowled their no 5. At which point Martin tactfully changed the bowling to include some slow stuff to encourage a few runs, but when the slow bowlers are as accurate as Robbie and Peter there is not much relief for the batting side. Both picked up a wicket (Linthwaite: 1 for 2!), with James Nixey picking up a brilliant catch off Linthwaite's bowling, standing quite close at cover, his first catch for THREE YEARS, which he reminded us ecstatically as he held the elusive orb. Martin Bowden bowled, it was good to see his trademark inswingers – which went for but 2 an over – after injury and general decrepitude had threatened his bowling career. Nixey is always dangerous, batsman (and bowler) have no idea what the next ball is going to do, hit middle stump or mid-off.

They stuttered to 86, not helped it must be conceded by some generous LBW decisions, particularly the one that sent opener Langley on his way (but John got 10 out of 10 for the dignity of his uncomplaining walk back to the pavilion).

Sarah was again on holiday (again!) and the catering was shared by Lucinda and Bird N. Lucinda's tea was of a quality that seriously threatens Sarah's position as head chef. Lucinda also organised a band of charming National Theatre WAGs in the kitchen, which made the drudgery of washing and clearing a joy (i.e. I didn't do it).

Our innings began badly with veggie Pete out LBW for a duck. He had winged about the surfeit of animal products at lunch and this was his penalty. Tom Bird, back from

Oz where he bumped into Rob Noble at the MCG (is there no escape?) joined Robbie but then rejoined the pavilion after a brisk 11, caught going for the big one. Martin had struck a powerful 4 but succumbed leg before immediately after. Meanwhile Robbie had steered the innings towards victory with classical drives and cuts and when Dennis came in with three wickets down the total was in sight. A marvellous cover drive down the hill, straight from the manual, by Dennis took us within 5 of the runs needed. Robbie climaxed the innings with the most perfect of lofted straight drives for 6 to complete what was a particularly satisfying day – some stupendous bowling (particularly by Jake), excellent fielding, a wonderful catch and a 46 not out by Robbie Lawson that guaranteed victory.

The one query concerning opposition tactics was that Mike Morris was never asked to bowl. He had arrived late – 2 hours or so – and perhaps he was punished for his tardy arrival. If so they shot themselves in the foot. But they are a very agreeable and helpful team and they were unlucky to come up against Jake on a day when the ball swung viciously, and unlucky perhaps to find the V&A on song – even ‘butterfingers’ Nixey. Next time they needn’t be so profligate with LBW decisions nor with catches dropped – 4 or 5 in all...one by Mike Morris was ‘The Miss of the Season’. Even Sarah’s arthritic, gelded dachshund would have snapped it up. It has been captured on camera and for a small sum the negative will be destroyed.

Next week it’s Jessmond Joggers. We stood them up last year because of a communication error, so we want to ensure that we field a proper 11. Please let me or Sarah (back next week) know if you can play. We were gratified upon arrival on Saturday to note that The National Theatre had 5 players as old as Linthwaite, although somewhat butcher. The Joggers are fit and young and heterosexual. Be warned.

One last word on etiquette. Their opener John Langley was put off while batting by constant chatter in the slips about football. He said he did not mind the pretentious shite about Rembrandt, or the usual stuff about anal sex, but discussing football while the bowler was running up – in the cricket season - was too much. Anyway it put him off and he was out. So keep up the good work.

Nicky Bird