

MATCH REPORT

V&A v. THE THEBERTONS

JULY 5, 2009

SIMON BARNES of *The Times*, and of the mighty Tewin Irregulars (a team we beat regularly), once quoted me as saying matches are won and lost on the telephone – meaning that the strength of your team is in direct proportion to the time spent on the phone. But, conversely, a game can be lost on the morning of the match in a trice with four phone calls from chaps crying off (for good and bad reasons), which happened on Sunday. There was a suspicion that drink had played a part in a couple of cases.

We missed the batting of Andrew Taylor and the batting and – particularly – the bowling - of Jake Warman. What a difference 10 overs from Jake would have made, he rarely goes for more than 3 an over and would have picked up wickets. Father Alaster is a great asset but does not share his son's youthful virility. Any more.

We were a meagre eight players - Richard Woolhouse [captain], Nicky Bird, Alaster Warman, Peter Linthwaite, Rob Noble, Peter Holmes, Freddie Motley and Bruno Wollheim, returning for his first game of the year and looking fit[ish]. Richard lost the toss and they elected to bat in a 20-overs-after-5.45 game. A hot day with a nice breeze, a few drops of rain before we played did not dampen a dry and easy wicket. Richard and Freddie opened the bowling and did well, both picking up a wicket or two with straight deliveries. Peter Holmes bowled a very good batsman with a beauty. Rob Noble bowled, but we will leave it at that. Peter Linthwaite was unlucky not to get a wicket. Alaster Warman lured their other top scorer into a quicksilver stumping. But then there was a hundred partnership, Thebertons' captain Neal scoring freely to reach 60 odd. They declared on 217 [I think, we didn't put the score in our book].

Our fielding varied from the acceptable – Freddie – to the pathetic. What is very strange is that the likes of Bruno and Rob Noble are fearless opening batsmen but are completely without bottle in the field. Rob shied away from a quite simple catch, and then missed an easier one, treating the ball as if it were a live grenade. Bruno's performance was *déjà vu* all over again, a reminder of his judicious caution in the field, where his artistic hands are kept away from cricket balls if they are moving. Only Richard caught a catch. It was to his credit that he played at all, his missus is about to give birth any minute.

Lunch was provided by Bird N. in the absence of Sarah. It was predictable. So was tea. Someone said they preferred the way Sarah does the tomato salad, with basil, and that her potatoes were cooked *al dente* which he liked rather than mine which were cooked *al soggy* which he didn't. I was obliged, reluctantly, to tell him to fuck off.

We started our innings rather well, their two excellent opening batsman coming up against the seasoned old pros of Bruno and Rob. But eventually they found a way through and though Richard hit a beautiful boundary he was out immediately afterwards. Enter Freddie who promptly offered a couple of dolly catches which were generously dropped. He was joined by a swashbuckling Peter Holmes whose score, if

I remember rightly went like this – 4,4,4,2,4,4,4...and included three classic cover drives. It was a crap ball that got him out, as they do. Bird N. came in and stayed for 17 or so, and then Linthwaite came in and out. In the meantime Freddie had batted superbly with ferocious hitting *à la* Viv Richards, all forearms. He scored an invaluable 60 something. Alister rolled back the years with elegant drives and cuts for a languid 15 or so [I think]. Our sub from The Thebertons looked handy but went cheaply and then Bruno and Peter Linthwaite returned to bat again [the two lowest scorers], and this time Bruno looked very much his old self, with the technique to defy the good ball and to straight drive the half-volley. We were all out a mere 20 or 30 short of their target but the result was never really in doubt and in truth, it would have been embarrassing to have won, given our paucity of players.

But a nice day, with agreeable opposition who are the epitome of tact and helpfulness. There was a mix-up over which pub we would go to, Alaster, Bruno and Linthwaite went to Pishill and probably the others went to Christmas Common. Fortunately, both Peter and Alaster had seen Bruno's BBC film on Hockney last Monday, so could pour a little (justified) flattery over him in return for Brakspears Special. Peter suggested Bruno's next film should be about village cricket, the sort we play, with perhaps Stuart Broad as a stand-in for P. Linthwaite. Broad seems too tall and butch, Graham Norton is about right.

Nicky Bird