

MATCH REPORT

V&A v. THE HERMITS

Sunday Aug. 17, 2008

HEAVY RAIN in the night had drenched the pitch and it was generous of groundsman Tony Fisher to let us play. Terry Blake, captaining the Hermits as always (N. Bird was the V&A's skip), won the toss and elected to bat (!). An odd decision considering the sodden outfield and muddy crease. We played a 35 over game, with an option to reduce to 32 if the rains came (they did, but only when the match was just won and lost).

The wet pitch dictated our bowling order. Our key weapon was Jake Warman, but it would have been wasteful to open with him as his speed and accuracy need dry footing and ball. So Nixey opened for 3 overs with Shaun bowling his accurate medium pace the other end. Nixey nearly got Terry Blake out third ball when he skied a short one (or long hop) to Dennis at fly slip. But Dennis spilled it. You would have bet your missus that a player of his calibre would have palmed it, but no, such is cricket (and the effects of a late night?). A few balls later Rob Noble at first slip missed one, then another – the latter being a hardish but direct snick that any competent, and unwindy, cricketer should hold with ease. But Rob has got Bruno's disease, a crippling lack of bottle. When he was moved to the outfield the same problem arose, balls were treated like grenades – to be avoided, and only returned to the bowler or wicket-keeper after careful consideration when the ball was stationary.

The Terry dropped catch proved expensive – he went on to score 49. But the opening bowlers – and subsequently Martin, Dennis, Chris, Jay and Adam – all bowled tightly. They were 20 after 8 overs, and never hit a run rate of 4 an over. Martin bowled a beauty that pitched outside off stump and hit middle and off. Shaun and Dennis picked up a wicket each (I think, I haven't got the scorebook), and there was a neat run out. The field was unashamedly defensive – as it must be for an overs game.

But the star bowler was Jake. In a devastating 5 overs he got 5 wickets – all bowled, *three* middle stump, with the stump spinning out of the ground and landing near Pishill. He came on when the pitch was dry and how he relished the conditions. Bowling with speed and accuracy his pace was too much for even such an accomplished batsman as Terry Blake. Of particular note was his capture of their tall ringer William Buckland's wicket (author of *Pommies*, £10 from Amazon). Buckland addressed every ball in the same fashion, charging down the pitch and whacking it. After one or two successes he skied one to Jake at long off, who dropped it. So it was particularly satisfying to bowl him middle and leg next over. Jake still had an over to go when I took him off, diplomacy dictating his rest. But the game looked won by his brilliance. The Hermits struggled at the end, their last 4 overs going for a measly 8 runs or so, and they reached the rather paltry total of 116.

Our innings started badly. Rob was bowled just after cutting a beautiful 4 (he has no bottle problem batting), and then William Buckland came on from the Henley end and his height, pace and accuracy found our technique wanting – Shaun, Martin and Jake were out in quick succession. Players must get forward. Adam holed out after a promising start and a powerful boundary, and we were 31 for 5 after 14 overs. Not

good. But enter Dennis and Andy Fraser, two old pros who know how to bat in a crisis. Andy's second strike was a six to mid-wicket, but in the main he secured his end with careful and stylish nudges and cuts and pulls, while Dennis did the butch stuff, walloping it straight over the bowler. Theirs was a 50 partnership and a potential match-winning one. Dennis was eventually caught in the deep by Terry (good catch) and Andy was run out when his runner, James Nixey, got a rush of blood and called for a run when the fielder had the ball in his hand (Andy was audibly displeased). It is the sort of craziness that occurs with runners. Incidentally, do not ask Andy about his groin, he might show it to you.

But the game was not yet won. Although their main bowlers were now bowled out there were still 25 runs to get. But Nixey and Jay swatted and snicked and ran frantically to and fro and the total was neared, aided by byes (12 in total) and wides (8, 5 of which came in the last three overs). With two overs to go Jay smacked one through the covers for 4 and the game was won. An exciting end to a good day.

Sarah Jenkins returned to catering duties. We saw the resurgence of that ham or pork pie (the jury's out) last seen in June, that was rejected then. No doubt it will be refrozen and emerge in 2009.

The next game is on September 6th and is against the young and virile Jacobite Chancers. It is at TURVILLE HEATH. Let us know if you can play.

A final word about the HERMITS. They are actually called the HEMINGFORD HERMITS after a pub in North London where they drank 60 years ago. It is our oldest fixture, our first game being, we think, in 1976 or 7. We used to beat them with casual ease but then they brought in venomous bowlers and hitters like William Bevan (son of 'Chucker') and made a game of it. In efforts to win they recruited completely unknown Aussies and Kiwis. But always the core of their side, like ours, is old men who play the game as we do, for fun. However, they have grown fat and rich over the decades – in fields as diverse as car parking, stone masonry and gutter journalism – as we have not, Martin Bowden aside. Teams wanting to know the secret of our success with bat and ball should look no further than Rob Noble, Adam Jacot and Andy Fraser, agile players swift of foot, keen to extend their careers into their sixth decade by remaining at peak fitness through moderation in all things and clean living.

Nicky Bird