

MATCH REPORT, MAY 31, 2008
V&A v. NATIONAL THEATRE

THIS GRUELLING MATCH was played in a pleasant breeze and sunshine. Skipper Martin Bowden and their captain Joss Buckley agreed on a 20-overs-after-6 game. They were not to know that this would condemn us to 58 overs in the field.

The pitch was soggy so Martin, having won the toss, put them in. This looked a damn good toss to win when they were 45 for 7, and then, after a little wag, 68 for 8. Simon Roche got a lovely early wicket with outswing (pitching outside leg stump and hitting middle and leg), Eddie Holmes nicked the off stump, Martin got two including Mike Morris with a beauty, a trademark inswinger; James Nixey caught a very good catch off Linthwaite with professionally cupped hands at mid-wicket, Guy Seddon picked up two wickets, including an LBW notable for the gay appealing of both bowler and wicket-keeper, a puny and belated squeak which, however unconvincing, managed to produce the raised finger. The umpire was desperately nervous of the batsman's later reaction to his robust response to our weedy call, with reason. Christmas cards may not be exchanged this year. Dennis bowled one that would have flummoxed Bradman, and picked up another, Linthwaite bowled an absolute peach of an off-break to dismiss a very good batsman. Tom Bird bugged his knee in the first over when missing a difficult catch. He gamely struggled on uncomplaining, like Andy Fraser.

But at 68 for 8 Roger from the NT and Graeme (a capable Kiwi) fought back, grindingly slowly at first but their dire position demanded caution. Skipper Martin Bowden had – to ensure a full day – taken the strike bowlers off. But the batsmen deserved their runs. A catch or two went down – one drop by Olly Newton was magnificent in its wholly unexpected incompetence; a tricky one for Dennis may have proved expensive. He was, he said, trying to get his hands out of the way when it hit, and hurt, his palm. Shots skied just over or between fielders. Roger, whose technique is rudimentary but fearless, survived because of a good eye, and when the opening bowlers were brought back at around 90 for 8, his eye was truly in and they couldn't break through.

So the National Theatre crept to 150 or so. In 58 overs. It felt a lot. Towards the end my own morale rather dipped from the high point of 45 for 7 when the early drink beckoned. But their tail performed miracles and are to be commended for sticking to their task and making a game of it.

Sarah did her usual excellent lunch. There was a tea of sorts too. Supporters, old and young, were out in force. Old men like to see young girls in pretty cotton frocks, for aesthetic reasons. I could have showed you photos of Lucinda's nice frock with the sun behind but I forgot my camera. The ground was looking its best, and only the VW rally opposite marred the view. These interlopers in their camper vans are perverse. They come to the country, not for the air and scenery, but to gawp at each others' engines; there is no suggestion even of impropriety, which would at least make sense of the ghastly business. And what really perplexes is that they have on offer, free, and just over the road, top drawer cricket with the National Theatre scoring at a mercurial 2.6 an over, and still they peer into each others' engines.

Bird N. and Guy Seddon opened, and were 40 or so when Guy was out. A few minutes later Bird lofted one wide of deep mid-on but the bugger caught it, and he was out for 23. Bowden and De Caires looked in form as they smacked the ball about, and, although we were going to need 6 an over when the 20 overs were called, it looked feasible. But, as so often happens, they were out when upping the tempo (Bowden equal top-scoring with 23). Simon Roche looked powerful, but succumbed, Nixey got a quick 4 but went soon after, and in the end, with Pete and Jude at the crease we limped to a draw (Linthwaite smacking a quick 13*). 112 or so for 6 or 7, forget which. We ran out of overs, the NT's long innings having rather dictated the draw (due also to their excellent bowling and thus our slow run rate). The long boundary and slow outfield were also factors in the slow run rates. I spotted the ludicrously placed boundary rope position, somewhere near Bix, when I arrived but was too lazy to move it. Bowden and Bird both hit shots that would normally have gone for 4 but only went for 2 or sometimes 1 (old age, obesity...).

Martin had put on some secondary bowling when the NT were up against it, partly to give players who might not bat a chance to bowl. The NT used 6 bowlers in all, also - most sportingly - giving 'squad' bowlers a chance, but frankly they were all so accurate that we struggled to get them away.

Next week I am in Italy and Sarah is away. Martin is getting the team together. Lucinda will kindly cater. We are playing the JESMOND JOGGERS who we once stood up so we want a full team. They have youth on their side, and would not blink or wince at 58 overs in the field, would probably welcome it. Incidentally, I had a tyre burst on the way home so my premature departure after my innings - to ease domestic tensions - came to nought. The tyre burst story, although true, was not immediately believed. The reason I smelt of strong drink was because I had to calm the nerves after the near accident

Nicky Bird