

MATCH REPORT

V&A v. The Old Talbotians

Sat. July 14, 2007

THE SUN SHONE for most of the day, but it was damp in the morning and captain Bird N. sent the Talbotians in to bat (in a 35 over game), thinking that the pitch would be easier in the afternoon. A reasonable assumption and, as it turned out, correct. But actually the decision was forced on him because we were a quorum to field and they weren't – they mustered 6 or so at the time.

Dino, the T's skipper, had phoned early Friday to say they were only 7 which included a little girl and did we want to cancel. No, was the answer, we could provide subs and anyway having 7 by lunchtime on Friday wasn't too bad by V&A standards.

In the event they were 9 and their little girl played for Middlesex. But she was little. And a girl. Yet she was Adam's nemesis.

We began with Dennis from the Henley end, and Robert Taylor bowling his quick offies from the other. Their openers were soon out, one caught behind off Rob (actually caught in the paunch), and Dino bowled by a beauty from Dennis. Rob bowled their no. 3 with a speedy turner and things looked rather promising, but the damage in previous games (we have been playing them for nearly 20 years) has always been done by their no.s 4 and 5, and so it proved. Inexorably they advanced the score taking no chances but ruthlessly smacking the wayward wide ball or full toss. No chances went down before lunch, when they were 100 or so for 3 off 20 overs. Our bowling plan was quite simple – we had 7 overs from Robert Taylor, Rico, Dennis and Adam which left 7 to be shared by Chris, James and Olly Bett. Our fielding plan was also simple – a deep defensive ring and a hope that someone might catch a skier (which they didn't).

Adam and Rico both bowled well, with Adam bowling 6 very good overs, (eventually bowling their best batsman with a wonderful inswinger). But, as can happen with Adam, he lost his run up in one over, and the umpire shouting 'No ball!' distressed him. He was so upset he said he wouldn't bowl any more. The problem was that his foot was a good 9 inches over the line which the MCC deems is indeed a 'no ball' so the umpire was sort of right. But Adam saw out the over which was good of him.

After lunch, as so often happens, things went a bit wonky. Chris Moore missed a caught and bowled, then a straight forward catch at mid-off (he was a tad sleepy), there was some slipshod fielding, some overthrows, Rob Noble seemed incapable of bending, James Nixey had a couple of overs which his parents, watching from the pavilion, probably didn't mention at tea; a good LBW shout from Rico was turned down (I wouldn't have given it but I would have felt sheepish), Rob Taylor narrowly missed a run-out which would have rivalled last week's, Bird missed a fiendishly difficult caught behind which would have given Rob the 3 wickets he deserved.

Despite never flagging in the field, 4 main bowlers all bowling well, and a defensive perimeter the Talbotians made 215, thanks to a splendid 170 partnership by their 4 and 5.

William Hill were giving odds of 20 to 1 on a V&A victory. This was extended to 200 to 1 when we found ourselves 3 wickets down with a meagre 2 runs on the board (Andy of all people going for a duck). But Rico and Dennis batted superbly to make it 80 for 3 when Dennis was out (for 30 odd) in mildly controversial fashion. He hit a full toss back to the bowler and was caught. He 'walked'. But the umpires thought it was a 'bump ball'. However, they didn't intervene given that Dennis had done the gentlemanly thing. The replay showed it was in fact out.

Enter Adam, in previous games horribly, visibly, out of form. But what a transformation. Of course he played and missed and gave us anxious moments but almost immediately he smashed a 6 off a full toss to leg and then another. He seemed to settle and relish the bowling. The score was moved forward to a respectable 120 for 5 at an acceptable rate. Rico scored a splendid and potentially match-winning 60 or so until caught off a long hop – and then we stuttered. Nixey was given out caught behind off a ball that hit his pads (his parents seem a bit of a jinx). Robert Taylor came in just as his father arrived. His father was not a jinx. Nor did Rob repeat the error of last week and attempt to hit his first ball to Berkshire. He blocked balls on the wicket and hit – venomously – the loose ball, one 6 crashed into the pavilion which has not been done since Andy was in his prime last year. But then the Talbotians, with weasly cunning, put on Florence, the 9 year old girl. Adam cruelly hit her for a couple of 4s, and then a 6. But she was bowling on a length and was undeterred by Adam's insensitive run-fest. She bowled one on the wicket, Adam played across it and – horror of horrors! – the ball hit the wicket. Adam, butch and a top professional had been bowled by a 9 year old GIRL! As Blair will be remembered for Iraq whatever else he achieved (not much) so Adam's marvellous come-back innings of power and concentration may be recalled only for this single humiliation. Such is life. BUT...comfort came in the pub when we learned that Florence was NOT 9 years old but 11! So that was all right then...

A couple of incidents should be noted for the archives. We gave the Talbotians a substitute fielder. Actually more like a Trojan Horse. First Chris Moore stumbled on, promptly dropped a catch and misfielded. Then he was replaced by Olly Bett. I was umpiring at square leg, with Olly supposedly alert beside me, when a ball was hit to his feet. He carried on talking and long leg had to come over to retrieve it. Mid-wicket said something to the effect that Olly was a dozy bastard. Olly said it was my fault for distracting him. Andy Fraser, a combative player and umpire, was officiating at the Pishill end when he warned the bowler for following through on the wicket. The bowler didn't like Andy's manner (nor does his wife on occasions) and indicated as much. He then appeared to get a pretty plumb LBW. Which Andy turned down. The bowler demanded to know why – it would have hit the wicket, he said.

'Yes', said Andy, 'indubitably, but you were impertinent.' I have looked up the Rules and I can find nothing that says an LBW must be rejected if the bowler has been cheeky.

But back to the match. Adam – and Rob Taylor – had seen us reach 175 when Rob had a rush of blood and charged down the pitch prematurely and skied one to an old boy at deep mid-on who – rather surprisingly – caught it. But his 39 had been invaluable. Chris Moore and Olly Bamber, no.s 9 and 10, still needed some 40 runs at 6 an over. They had a modicum of luck, an ill-timed (and ill-judged), lofted drive from Chris just falling short of Florence...but Chris was in his element, as a back-foot player, with their bowlers dropping them short, and Olly batted with the utmost concentration, defending every ball on the wicket and hitting anything loose. One lapse from Olly – a snick for 4 that missed leg stump by a smidgeon - brought us within 2 runs of their total, which was passed by a very proper off drive from Olly to the boundary.

A very good day with very pleasant and generous opposition. 432 runs scored. Sarah came with lunch, washed up – with selfless help from Sophie and Joules – and went home, without payment but applause from the field. Saints are made of such stuff.

If anyone took a picture of Adam being bowled by Florence, he is prepared to pay top dollar for the negative, but the V&A archivist would like a copy before it's sent. If you have a photo of Rob Noble stopping a ball, bending, running or throwing, our archivist would treasure such a record of a unique event.

Nicky Bird