

MATCH REPORT
V&A v. THE THEBERTONS
JULY 5, 2008

ONE OF THOSE AWKWARD mornings when it's not nasty enough to cancel, but looking distinctly iffy. As it turned out the sun shone intermittently and rain never threatened. From the cricketing perspective wind and an erratic pitch – its vagaries compounded by a wet summer and haphazard cutting – made batting tricky.

The match started late, partly because Tim Young, the Thebertons' supremo, got stuck in traffic in London and then meandered around the Chilterns without benefit of directions (left in Chiswick). Their captain Paddy balked at V&A skipper Simon Foster's suggestion of a 30 over game and 35 overs was agreed as a compromise. Several of the Thebertons mentioned that they were very strong, as they had been the previous week when they'd 'rolled over' the opposition. They suggested they should bat first to make a day of it. Simon Foster, ever stubborn or perverse, won the toss and elected to bat. Very soon he wished he hadn't.

Nixey, always willing, opened with Rob, thankfully returned from his theatrical peripatetic ways, without seeming noticeably camper. Nixey was soon bowled by the fearsome William Bevan [son of 'Chucker' Bevan]. Although Noble played his anchor role capably, batsmen came and went, defeated by the unpredictable pitch and penetrating bowling from their 4 opening bowlers. Only Fraser dominated of the top order batsmen, until succumbing to a pulled muscle, always a likelihood with his physique, a body so highly toned and taut. The turning point of our innings was Jake Warman's run-out. Rob went for a crazy second run when the ball was in the fielder's hands. The fielder was Simon Foster, our captain, nobly volunteering to substitute field despite his age and lack of match fitness. The stupidity of Rob's call notwithstanding, Foster still had to hit the stumps side-on from square leg. He did. It was an honest throw, prompted by sheepishness at not going for an earlier catch and a misfield, but it rather did for us as wickets tumbled afterwards. Until Richard Woolhouse came in and smacked 62 in no time, aided, it must be said, by generous bowling. The Thebertons were depressed by the thought of two substandard games in a row and offered chances to score. At one point a fielder threw the ball over the boundary to massage the target [eventually 104], which Adam felt a trifle 'humiliating'. However, cricket is unpredictable and I remember giving an opposition 50 runs or so to make a game of it (by bowling Rob) only to be embarrassed when they squeaked past our total. I sat with the opposition in the pub where I felt safe.

Lunch was different. Sarah has been stung by facetious jibes at the predictability of her ham and salami menu and produced very acceptable chicken drumsticks and some sort of pie from a budget store – meat certainly but indeterminate. Andy liked it so much he went up for thirds, perhaps it was the extra weight that buggered his leg.

Jake opened our bowling, very well indeed, despite bowling into the wind. The Thebertons too found conditions tricky and struggled to score. Soon they were losing wickets. Memory is suspect, it was a long time ago, but I think the first wicket was a run-out, in slow motion, with Bird N. rolling the ball gently to the bowler's end with well-judged velocity and accuracy. The next was a caught behind from Jacot's bowling, another (rather better) caught behind off Woolhouse dismissed their

excellent number 5, and two fantastic catches by Proctor and another by Foster made them look vulnerable. But the best wicket, the best of many a year, was a ball by Martin Bowden that swung in, pitched outside off stump, and hit the wicket middle and off, with the mercurial Bevan stranded. He departed with grace and plaudits to the bowler.

When their captain Paddy was bowled by a shooter from Man-of-the-Match Woolhouse they needed 5 runs with last man Tim Young in. He played sensibly, well within his limitations. But with Woolhouse bowling on a length, and swinging it, an unlikely victory (albeit undeserved) seemed possible. A vicious inswinging cutter brought a convincing LBW appeal. Even I appealed, the ball would have hit the wicket, but... The umpire considered his options. And decided that 'not out' was the best one. None of us blamed him, it would have been suicide in the dressing room to do otherwise – AND the batsman was forward (with a suspicion that the ball pitched outside the line but then what do I know about LBW laws...). The last over was bowled by Proctor but one strayed down the leg and was glanced, fortuitously perhaps, for 4 and the match was won, as it should have been, by the Thebertons.

That we came so close somewhat excuses our batting collapse – the pitch is not as true as it has been, the ball shoots and lifts alarmingly. And sometimes just hangs there, inviting the loft to mid-off.

A good day with pleasant company and a thrilling finish, even if orchestrated by a tactful opposition. The kites performed their Stuka tricks, all was much as Rob Noble had left it last year he said, even the conversation (smut, and football in the fifties).

Next Saturday it is the mighty Old Talbotians. Let me know soonest if you can play. We need youth, men – proper men – who can throw overarm and don't need runners. The V&A's youth element has been absent having babies; this sort of indiscipline is to be discouraged.

Nicky Bird