

4s PROMOTED, 1s NOT AT THE RACES AS MINDS WANDER TOWARDS SHENLEY

Saturday

Potters Bar 199 for 9 in 60 overs

Stevenage 203 for 2 in 45 overs

After a pretty abject performance on Saturday it looks like Potters Bar will have to settle for fourth place in the HCPL Division 2 East as they were simply outplayed in all departments by Championship chasing Stevenage.

On a filthy morning of drizzle and wind, it came as a great surprise that we got underway on time and losing despite the toss, Bar set off aiming to set a challenging total at a healthy scoring rate. Due to a groin injury, Stevenage overseas star Gareth Berg was unable to take the new ball, so Gary Brown and ex-Pakistani cricketer (although I couldn't find any record of him playing) Sikandar started up and Mike Palmer started off in good touch, regularly finding the boundary boards, taking advantage of the short pitched friendly fodder served up.

Despite losing Gavin Baker for just 2, Mike Palmer and Jared Norman tucked into the attack, so much so that the injured Berg was forced to enter the attack as early as the 11th over with the score at 55 for 1. Both Mike Palmer and Jared Norman looked in fine form as they pounced on anything wide and full and with the weather starting to brighten up a bit, Bar looked in control as Mike Palmer scored his third '50' of the season in 82 balls from 90 minutes but you could now visibly see his back starting to cramp up and with that his rapid scoring start had now been restricted to a crawl.

The loss of Jared Norman for a tidy knock of 41 had the score sat at 98 for 2 but by now, Stevenage had finally cottoned on to what was needed and had their two slow left arm spinners in the attack and they were to provide more problems in the first few balls, than the four seamers did in the previous 19 overs.

Lunch arrived and it proved the last action for Mike as he was forced to retire hurt on 59 with a back injury and Scott Fraser had started in his normal positive manner as he was on 10 and despite bring on the wrong end of the toss of the coin. Bar were sitting pretty at 114 for 2 off of 33 overs. During the lunch interval, Stevenage were a little bemused that Mike had retired hurt as they were under the impression that Mike had come into the game with the injury. Yes, Mike had to retire injured on Sunday but in all fairness that was 6 days ago and how long does an injury have to last before it becomes null and void? Not only that but a bad back is completely different to a thigh strain or a broken finger as it can be fine one moment and next you're crippled up like a pensioner who is having a bad day.

However with the loss of Mike, brought in Kash Weeraratne and he was tied down by the Stevenage two slow left-armers and they bowled beautifully after lunch and they turned the screw on Bar and the pressure told as Bar threw away wickets at a rapid rate.

Scott Fraser (21) went leg before trying to shovel the ball around the corner, which in fairness is a shot where he gets an awful lot of his runs, Kash Weeraratne (6) was beaten by a beauty by Azhar Ali and the so far prolific Dean Dass was adjudged leg before to one that shot a little for just 8 and Bar had gone from being 130 for 2 to 139 for 5.

This brought in skipper Lenny Cooper and he batted sensibly as there were still the best part of 18 overs remaining and we had to bat them out. Lenny nudged and nurdled along with Dave Breeze and put on 28 before Dave Breeze (9) lofted a half volley straight down deep square legs throat. This now brought in Paul Barker who has been in great touch of late with the bat, in fact his last 7 innings he has an average of 75.

Lenny Cooper and Paul Barker still batted on and their bright and breezy partnership of 27 was ended as Paul Barker (11) struck the ball high and handsomely to wide long on where Ashley Bayes took a great catch as the wind was now starting to resemble that of a mild typhoon.

Bar then lost Nesan Jeyaratnam ran out in a piece of cricket that children under the age of 5 would have been embarrassed about and then Paul McGee was out stumped for 0 first ball as he didn't appear to know what was going on. I checked to see if Brian Rix was coming in next as our batting had been reduced to one of his infamous farces. Out then came the sad figure of Mike who was now clearly doubled up and looked in a great deal of discomfort managed to add 2 runs to his 59 he got before the back went and Bar's overs had run out with the score sat at 199 for 9. To think that with 16 balls left we were 194 for 6, to not get 200 and another point was criminal.

A quick turnaround and a heated argument as to whether Bar could have the sub-fielder on the field, saw Bar take the old ball and try and bowl the visitors out. The game was certain to finish in a result as the clouds were high and with Welwyn and Radlett possibly not playing the game for both sides offered a chance of remaining in the title race.

For whatever reason, Bar didn't bowl with any real conviction, the fielding, although nothing was mis-fielded or chances put down, didn't have the intensity of previous matches and for the first time in a long time it looked as if the boys were going through the motions.

To be fair the Stevenage openers batted excellently. Gary Brown racked up his 600th league run of the season and at the other end Sikandar batted as if we were bowling with a tennis ball. Both batters pounced on any bad ball as you would expect at this level of cricket but they simply punished it.

The 50 partnership came up in the 16th over and although Bar were racing through their overs (22.4 in the first hour) it came as no comfort as the Stevenage batters were well set. The slow bowling of Paul Barker, Nesan Jeyaratnam and Paul McGee had no answers to the openers and it took the new ball to finally break the 103 run opening stand as Kash Weeraratne bounced out Brown where Gavin Baker held the straight forward catch at long leg.

Sikander looked a class act and reached his 50 in 71 balls and then hit Gavin Baker for 26 runs in 9 balls as the visitors went into tea break at 129 for 1 and coasting to victory.

The Stevenage opener Sikandar finally went to a regulation catch behind off skipper Lenny Cooper for a majestic 96 off of 125 balls in an innings that contained 2 sixes and 15 fours and he single handedly took the game by the scruff of the neck and wrestled it well away from the grasp of the Bar.

Kazmi and Ahmed tapped off the remaining 36 runs with no alarms whatsoever and gave the visitors and deserved victory in a game that Bar from the outset didn't look 'up' for. Whether it was the weather, the wicket flattening out (which in truth it did), the Becker game next week I'm not sure but I don't think any of the boys could say that we were playing at full pelt.

Radlett won their game and although Stevenage have the slightest of glimmers of a title shout, with just a draw required for the league leaders I can confidently say that we will be playing Stevenage next season, but fair play to them they hammered us and hopefully it will give the boys the wake-up call ready for next weeks action.

The 2s were called off at Northchurch which meant it was up to the 3s and the 4s to being home the bacon for the club.

The 3s entertained bottom side Hexton at the school and bowled them out for a creditable 202 in the 51st over. Luke Owers took the plaudits as he took 5 for 45 and with a strong top order the boys would have been extremely confident of tapping the runs off. They did in some style. Sri Lankan Ajith Walallawita struck a fine 86 not out and he was aided with Cheery Bob Daley's 36 and Roy Metselaar's entertaining 30. The 3s raced to victory with just under 10 overs and 6 wickets left in the hutch.

However the top awards go to the 4th eleven as they achieved their goal by clinching promotion in a great game of cricket at Shenley Village. The boys batted first and smashed 269 for 5 from 50 overs. John Lewis struck a beautiful 125 not out and he was supported again by the run machine Julian Brauer who made 70-odd. With the required points already in the bag and the promotion clinched, the boys could 'relax' in the field but still came up trumps thanks to Neil Oak's 3 for 57 and Julian Brauer's 3 for 12 still bowled the promotion chasing Villagers out for 198.

I must offer my congratulations to Ian Breeze and all his players as well as his good lady wife who does a great job scoring week in week out in questionable surroundings as they have again brought a breath of fresh air to the club. They have deservedly achieved promotion and now face trips to hopefully better grounds with nicer facilities and that's what normally happens when you go up a tier.

Next week sees the last set of league matches and of course the Becker Cup Final and the last time we will be seeing Kashie (hopefully not for the last time either) before he jets off home on Monday. Saturday night saw his going away party, a Sri Lankan evening which in truth was a raging success and left me and no doubt many more with a raging hangover (I blame the Lion lager myself.) I exited stage left at gone midnight and god knows what time people finally left the scene and drifted off into the night. It was a great sight seeing the club rocking to the sounds of Sri Lanka and it seemed that half of Columbo, Galle and Dumbulla had come to wish Kashie farewell.

Firstly the 1s travel to local rivals North Mymms in a meaningless league match, although three points will ensure we finish fourth and leave Mymms below us. The 2s entertain the relegated Leverstock Green and the boys must be looking to win the game which could in truth leave them in the top six and the highest placed 2nd eleven side in the competition. That in itself is a great achievement in what is going to be the last time Dave Pett skippers the side. Since taking over from Neil Raisborough some 10 years ago, Dave has worked miracles at times and has overseen the rapid rise of the boys and for him to bow out of the captaincy, I for one will think it a fitting moment to go out on a high and leave the boys the best second eleven side in the league.

The 3s travel to Boxmoor where there is something written into the clubs constitution that people have to pop in the Steam Coach boozer over the road and sample a beer or two and a win would keep the boys sat 6th in the league, which again is an amazing effort considering their rapid rise through the divisions.

The 4s can relax now having achieved promotion but can still claim the title with a win at West Herts 3s who themselves aren't out of the promotion shake-up. This is of course on the proviso that Offley lose at middle of the table Leverstock Green 3s. In fairness, Offley have been top all season but they have only lost once in 17 matches, that being against the 4s who taught them some cricketing manners on that particular day.

Sunday arguably sees the highlight of Potters Bar Cricket Club's illustrious history and the Becker Cup Final, the last one before it changes its name and possibly the last time it will be held at the picturesque Shenley venue.

The start time has been put back to 11-30am and I hope the players and everyone connected really enjoys the occasion as to be honest it is the counties showpiece event, I know I will. Win, lose or draw I would expect a big night for everyone when we arrive back at the club. It's a great achievement for everyone and just hope the players can make us all proud of them and for the masses to enjoy the day, have a good drink, the weather to be shining on us and hopefully this time next week we will be all talking about Potters Bar being the new and final holders of the Becker Cup.

Have a great week and as always

Remember, the future is bright the future is Potters Bar

Regards
Fred