

BAR CRUISE PAST LETCHWORTH IN FINAL WARM-UP

Saturday

Letchworth 103 all out in 34.3 overs

Potters Bar 105 for 3 in 26.2 overs

Potters Bar used the final warm-up before the new league campaign in positive fashion as they blasted the cobwebs out of their play with a convincing 7-wicket win over Division One side Letchworth.

After winning the toss and inserting the hosts on a lively green surface, Bar with the returning Kash Weeraratne soon tore into the opening line up. However despite a tight and impressive opening burst from Kashie, it was Matt Webb who took the honours with a fine spell of new ball bowling.

Matt cleaned up Cranston for 22, Hilliard for a painstaking 9 and skipper Richard Walsh for 9 and the game was effectively over as Letchworth were 46 for 3 with in fairness little to nothing left in the hutch. Matt Webb's 3 for 22 showed what a good acquisition he will turn out and will certainly give Lenny Cooper another option with the already varied bowling attack.

As Letchworth crawled along in bitterly cold conditions, it was the spin twins of Paul Barker and Nesan Jeyaratnam who ripped the heart out of the middle order. Nesan after a poor year with the ball last year has re-discovered the loop he had when he first arrived at the club and bowled beautifully, finding a bit of turn and bounce, but more so had the control. Nesan accounted for Letchworth's overseas player Donnelly for 22 as he offered Dan Brown catching practice at mid-on and bowled Sharp with a beauty. He finished with 2 for 27 from 10 good overs and Paul Barker wasn't to be left out as he bowled with his usual mixture of subtleties of pace and flight. Baby finished with 2 for 17 from 7 overs.

At 90 for 7 Dan Brown came into the attack and he wiped out the tail with 3 for 10 off just 9 balls, thanks to 2 dolly catches for the now frozen Kash Weeraratne and a soft chance to Mike Palmer at mid-on. Dan has a lovely smooth approach to the wicket and a good action and he should be looking to progress this year as when he has been called on in the main he's improved game after game.

So with just 104 to win, Bar set off with Nesan Jeyaratnam and Mike Palmer to open up and with a 10 over session before tea it was essential Bar managed to see off the tricky session of play. However it didn't go too well as Nesan Jeyaratnam played down the wrong line and was bowled for 10 and Dean Dass 1, drilled a sharp chance to gully where Hilliard took a great low catch. So in came Kash Weearartne for two balls before tea. The first ball was a peach, which he just managed to avoid snicking behind, the second a trademark straight drive which went like a tracer bullet to the fence for four.

43 for 2 at tea and for the next 40 minutes it was like going back in time as Kash eased to 45 off just 48 balls with a mixture of pulls, drives and the punishing of some distinctly average bowling. Kash went with the score at 86 when he played on but the game was finished by this time and the hosts, like the Bar were going through the motions. Skipper Lenny Cooper came in and struck 17 in 15 balls and he and Mike Palmer 26 (63 balls) brought the bacon home for the boys first meaningful win of a less than successful start of the new season.

The 2s started their league campaign with an entertaining encounter against Broxbourne at The Walk on Saturday. After a poor opening spell with the new ball, it was down to Mark Taylor's impressive 4 for 58 off of 20 overs to keep Broxbourne down to a total of 259 when after the first 10 overs a total of 320 looked on the cards.

Due to the 1s finishing early, I was able to watch the last 20-odd overs where the boys were well set to chase the large total down. After a solid start from Matt Evans 31 and Dean Barker 32, both Mark Taylor and Dave Pett were going well and with 26 overs remaining, the boys wanted 160 with 8 wickets remaining.

Mark Taylor perished for 26 after being caught behind but still Dave Pett powered on, following on from his fine 86 against St Albans the week before. He brought up his 50 with a 6 over long on and on 64 and following a fine over, he attempted a pull shot which was just a bit too full and his off stump was struck and put an end to Bars chances. Greg Hodge's boys finished 213 for 7 in reply and a 12 point haul from such a ragged start should be looked at as a positive as they hopefully wont start that badly again.

The 3s (or Dads Army) started with a bore draw on a low and slow surface at Chorleywood. Bar batted first and managed to crawl up to 148 all out with an over left of their 53 over allocation. Neil Oak made 37 and Bob Daley made 35 and with Paul McGee in the attack, along with Rupert Pyrah and Neil Raisborough it was always going to prove too many. Macca nipped in with a '5 for' but the game ended as a damp squib with the Chortleys finishing 118 for 8 in reply. For my money it isn't a bad start at all, considering very few of the boys had played any cricket since the start of September so they will be all the better for the game.

The 4s or Cheeko's Army started with a win and an easy win to boot. They bowled out Chorleywood 3's out for just 103 with Mr J, (Randika Guyantha) 2 for 25, Mr Eppa 2 for 27 and Nick the Greek or Nick Dalakakis to give him his correct name 3 for 6 on an impressive league debut. Chasing a low total was never going to pose many problems and Presh Modessa 37* and Andy Hughes 22 ensured the boys won with plenty of overs and wickets to spare.

Sunday

FIELDING WELL BELOW 'STANDARD' AS BAR ARE EDGED OUT

Osterley 300 for 8 in 50 overs

Potters Bar 294 for 9 in 50 overs

Potters Bar crashed out of the second cup in a week in a tight contest although the result didn't really do justice to the visitors who were a lot better than Bar in all three departments of the game.

Winning the toss, Len Cooper asked the 'hosts' as they were on the day to bat first and bat first they certainly did. Laeeq Ahmed blasted the attack to all parts of The Walk as he made 59 off of just 78 balls as Bars attack wilted and the fielding in warm conditions looked ragged. At the drinks period (25 overs – the halfway stage) Osterley were well placed at 105 for 1 and on a batsmans dream of a pitch a decent total was certainly in the offing.

Greg Hodge accounted for Laeeq Ahmed for 59 and this brought to the wicket Abid Ahmed who made one of the best 100's I've seen in any cricket. He struck 16 fours and 3 sixes in a 68 ball stay for his 113 which took the game away from the Bar as he made monkeys of the bowlers and tried his luck with the fielding which was at best poor. Its not often you see Bar run out of ideas but on this occasion we looked a tired team. Catches were going down, simple ground fielding wasn't being carried out and yes, the ball was drilled all around the park but first eleven cricket should ensure decent fielding at least.

Ahmed was well supported throughout the card with quick cameos and Osterley completed their 50 overs sat on 300 for 8. There were only 2 positives to take from the effort in the field. Keeper Guy Thatcher who's getting better and better as the rust is falling off in large chunks took four catches, (all stood up) as well as a regulation stumping and Greg Hodge got some decent overs under his belt as he took 4 for 59 from 8 overs.

So Bar needed to score at 6 an over from the outset and got off at a crawl and the loss of regular wickets ensured it wasn't to be an easy chase. Mike Palmer went for 6 as he was crazily run out by Charlie Hodge and Charlie went in equally farcical fashion, this time Jared Norman claiming the assist for a slow 22. Bar were 47 for 2 when skipper Len Cooper got to the crease and he cracked a sublime 4 to make Bar 51 for 3 off of the first 13 overs.

Osterley's opening bowlers were tiring Bar stepped on the gas as Jared Norman, who had his first meaningful innings of the season found his timing and Lenny Cooper was pouncing on anything short. Alas Lenny perished to a magnificent catch at deep mid-on and at 98 for 3 the chase looked over. Thankfully, Jared Norman and Paul Barker had other ideas as they batted sensibly and got Bar back in the game with a fine partnership of 111 in 120 balls.

Paul started off slowly at first but ran well and worked the ball into the vast open spaces. Jared reached his 50 off of 61 balls but the turning point was the fact that both Jared and Paul went in successive balls. Paul Barker was first to go for 60 caught at long-on in a 62 ball stay which contained 5 fours and a six and Jared Norman went for 77 in a 97 ball stay which contained 7 boundaries.

So with Bar 231 for 6 wanting 70 from 8.2 overs it was left to Dean Barker and Matt Webb to take up the fight. Webby went for 8 taking on the throw from long-off and Guy Thatcher went for 13 off just 9 balls as he was out stumped by about 2 yards when the game was a lost cause. One positive was Dean Barker who again came in and batted sensibly and made 26* at better than a run a ball but the fielding had cost Bar a second round match with Esher.

As for Osterley I thought batting wise were fantastic, a team who gave it the full gun from the start. Their fielding at times was also of the highest standard, although the excessive appealing will not win them any friends. However, one thing was bizarre was the fact that one of their players openly stated that he used to play with our overseas player Kash Weeraratne in Sri Lanka. When told that there is a no overseas player rule (a 2-year constant stay in the UK the maximum you can get away with as we found to our cost last year) he shrieked in a Homer Simpson style and legged it out of sight. Ill leave you to draw your own conclusion on that one. Good luck to them though as they entertained me greatly throughout the afternoon even though I am currently suffering from RSI after the excessive times the strings in the scoreboard were pulled.

Next week sees the 1s in Home Counties League action against newly relegated West Herts who are many peoples favourites, mine one of them to return to the top flight. They are a highly talented team and with the amount of top players on show it may be an idea for the kids to fetch along their autograph books as their side resembles a 70's re-run of Celebrity Squares or more-so Blankety Blank. Availabilty isn't the best to start with but with a turn in the weather expected, Id be surprised if the wicket was as batsman friendly as it has been so far at Potters Bar. The major pro and negative is that the last time the two sides met Bar made mincemeat of West Herts by bowling them out for 73 in the Becker Semi Final. The negative is that they beat us twice by 10 and 9 wickets the season before and will be all-out to avenge that Becker defeat. It's up to Lenny Cooper and whoever takes the field to do their utmost as always.

The 2s have it all to do as well as they travel to newly promoted Radlett 2s who will be strong as they have a had a large influx of new players as their 1s make a return to the Premier Division. Again Greg Hodge will be short of a few as they take the field but this only gives opportunities to others and it will be a welcome return to Ollie Coughlan who is as talented a batter as we have and he should be looking forward to making a real impression and rekindle his passion for the game.

The 3s entertain Hitchin 2s down the school where they will be looking to build on their opening day draw and the 4s travel to the brilliantly named Harpenden Dolphins where I for one hope tuna isn't served at tea time and Berties band of men make their opening bow of the season as they travel to Parkfield & Headstone.

Sunday sees no game for the 1s as they have a break and on Sunday there is a friendly at The Walk for the 2s as they entertain Southgate Adelaide.

Finally, at last it was nice to see the ladies in action and by the celebrations I presume they won and it's a nice sight seeing so many people up at the club early on a Sunday morning and not all bleary eyed after a night on the p.....sauce.

Until next time have a good week and remember the futures bright, the futures Potters Bar

Regards
Fred