

UNDERCOOKED BAR ROASTED BY STORTFORD

Sunday

Potters Bar 184 for 9 in 45 overs

Bishops Stortford 186 for 2 in 41.4 overs

Potters Bar bowed out of the Cockspar Cup with a lacklustre performance against Herts Division 1 side Bishops Stortford at Cricketfield Lane.

Bar skipper Len Cooper won the toss on a wicket that would be slow and had cracks in it that were loose and the initial thoughts were that it would deteriorate as the game went on, hence the toss was important to win, however nothing further could be done from the truth.

After a slow start, Bar started to get to grips with the surface but the loss of three quick wickets set the tone for the afternoon. Mike Palmer was first to go, getting adjudged leg. Then Jared Norman went back to a ball which kept a little low and was plumb in front and then Nesan Jeyaratnam who played nicely for his 24 offered a soft catch to short extra cover and Bar from being 29 for 0 were now in the brown sticky stuff at 3 for 37. What made it worse was the fact that the colourful character Kevin 'Banger' Walls had snaffled all three.

Bar then made a semblance of a recovery as Lenny Cooper took advantage of the attacking fields set and Paul Barker nudged and nudged Bar into a relatively comfortable position of 89 for 3. However Bar's batting was not that of a team who were in full control and Bar slipped from a comfortable position to one of panic stations when Lenny Cooper top-edged a skier down to long leg, where in truth I thought he'd picked the fielder, alas Ollie Williams, held a fine catch.

Mark Taylor then came in and started in whirlwind fashion, striking a fine slog-sweep for six and then powerfully swept the next ball for four but injured a thigh muscle in doing so. What then followed was a piece of cricketing suicide as Paul Barker took a tight single, despite knowing Sir George had gone 'lame' only for George to be stranded some 18 yards short of his ground. 89 for 3 was now 105 for 5 and Paul Barker now had to knuckle down and try to bat through.

With Dean Barker joining his brother Paul at the wicket, the calling wasn't the best, but they managed to eek out a few runs against some decent bowling, but Paul Barker perished as he offered catching practice to the bowler and Bar were staring down the barrel at 119 for 6 with just 14 overs remaining.

In came ex-Uni graduate Matt Webb, who looks a fine capture and he and Dean Barker batted sensibly and with a combination of some good running and patience and taking a ball at a time, their 50 partnership came in 61 balls and although there was a late flurry of wickets, Bar managed to post 184 for 9 off of their 45 over allocation. Matthew ended with 43* off of 50 balls and although young Dean Barker took 55 balls to make 19, he batted well and made sure our overs were batted out and halted a 135 all out scenario.

With confidence high at the halfway stage, Bar opened with skipper Len Cooper and Mark Taylor and despite countless bowling changes, Bar although keeping it relatively tight, never in truth looked like breaking through the talented Stortford opening pair of Padgett and McConnell as they quietly accumulated with ease. The pair notched their 50 partnership in 99 balls and then the 100-run stand had been posted in 154 balls and Bar looked a beaten and tired team.

Bar did manage a double breakthrough as Simon McConnell (58) was brilliantly run out by a combination of Nesan Jeyaratnam and Len Cooper and 124 for 1 was soon 128 for 2 as Sandy Barnard was out trying to sweep off middle stump from Paul Barker for 2 and Bar had the bit between their teeth, but in truth it was never likely to trigger a collapse as Luke Padgett was almost immovable to an attack which didn't beat the bat enough and didn't create any real pressure.

Stortford coasted home, winning by 8 wickets with 20 balls to spare as Luke Padgett ended 78* and Anthony Brown, another young player who had time to spare made 24*. As for Bar, the truth of the matter was that not enough players had made themselves available, the ones who had played hadn't played enough cricket and looked a shadow of the team that lifted the Becker Cup in September. Yes, you could say it's a build up for the real stuff in a couple of weeks, but last year we hit the ground running and that's the reason we started well. This year has been a shambles from Day One and a strong side selected both for Saturday and Sunday should ensure the boys can start to improve quickly as believe you me they have to otherwise the season will be over before its even started.

On Saturday, another under-strengthened side took on St Albans who despite giving the makeshift Bar a good hiding, aren't the force they like to think they are anymore.

On a road of a pitch and with players in ridiculously short supply, skipper Greg Hodge offered St Albans the chance to rack up some early season runs and in truth they did. Ian McKinlay 85, skipper Martin Jones 64*, overseas professional Zeeshan Butt 59 and Matt Howeson 47 enabled the visitors to score 287 for 4 in 45 overs. One comical moment was ex-Herts player Nick Gilbert refusing to walk after he literally punched the ball through to the keeper and then moaned when he received some encouragement to leave the proceedings.

Bars reply started brightly, Mike Palmer and Dave Pett posted a 50 run stand, but Mike Palmer went clipping the ball to square leg for 15 and the Bar reply never really recovered after that. Davey Pett batted beautifully and backed up my calls for him not only to be the highest run scorer in the 2s but one of the highest in the Division with a fine 86. There were also notable contributions from Andy Colquhoun 24, Mark Taylor 26 and young Tom Pett made a brave 19* to show that he has a talented future with the bat. Tom plays very straight, he's brave and for a lad of his size and stature he hits the ball cleanly and played a beautiful on-drive off Zeeshan Butt which was arguably the shot of the day. For my money, Tom has a fine future as a batter and maybe now is the time that he concentrates solely on this rather than the leg breaks.

Bars 207 for 7 in 45 overs was 80 runs short, but the good thing was the fact that a full strength St Albans team couldn't bowl out a scratched team with 2 first-teamers, 5 second teamers and the rest, bar 1, third team players. A notable word has to go out to 10 year old Dan Pett who pulled off a remarkable diving stop at cover where the ball was shelled to him by Ian McKinlay. Here's hoping Dad John and Uncle Dave will be knocking at his door soon trying to find out the secret of fine fielding!

Next week the league season starts for the 2s, 3s and 4s. Greg Hodge starts his league skippering season at home to Broxbourne. The 3s travel to Chorleywood to face their 2s and the 4s entertain Chorleywood's 3rd eleven. A message of best of luck goes out to Hodgey, Johnny Lewis and his troops as well as Cheeko's band of merry men and I hope they start the season with positive results.

The 1s travel to Letchworth in a friendly and are sending the strongest possible side in a way to stop the slide and actually start the season with some sort of momentum. The Evening Standard starts on Sunday; with the Bar now entertaining Osterley after the game was switched due to the fact that their new ground wasn't quite ready to host a game of this ilk.

There is also a match on Bank Holiday Monday, where the 2s entertain Leverstock Green.

Finally a word to the fillies as their season starts in earnest with a friendly home game against Tring Park which providing their visitors could start early then they should be able to get in a full game before the Osterley match starts at 1pm.

Hopefully this time next week will see a more positive report so until next time have a good week and remember the futures bright, the futures Potters Bar

Regards
Fred