

WELWYN BEAT BAR, BUT WE ARE STILL TOP OF THE TREE (JUST)

Saturday

Potters Bar 155 all out in 44.5 overs

Welwyn Garden City 156 for 6 in 50.1 overs

Potters Bar threw away a great chance to beat Welwyn Garden City at the weekend but we didn't quite have enough but thanks to our great start we are still top of the league and in the pound seats.

On what seemed like the first day of the season after a start-stop that's your lot beginning, the sun was out, the ground looked immense, the wicket looked good considering the weather and the visit of a talented bunch of cricketers that would see just how much we as a club have progressed. With the wicket having a bit of grass left on, it was a good toss to lose, but Welwyn skipper Martin James called wrong and Lenny thought it would be a good call to have first use of it.

Ex-pro Aaron Laraman took the new ball and he was soon extracting some movement from the pitch and it was clear to see the wicket that we thought looked a 250 – 260 pitch was nowhere near that total as runs were a real hard struggle and it wasn't long before Bar had lost Ollie Coughlan who was cleaned up by Laraman and just four balls later Scott Fraser was adjudged lbw by Umpire Hall and Bar were looking in a poor position at 2 for 29.

Eight balls later worse was to follow as Mike Palmer was given out in the same fashion and at 33 for 3 in the 13th over, the pre-match optimism was vanishing quickly as in Aaron Laraman they had a guy who bowled a near perfect line and length, at a good pace and on a bowler friendly pitch he was simply ripping the heart out of the Bars batting but step forward Jared Norman and Kash Weeraratne.

Jared had suffered some poor luck to start the season off, but it didn't take him long to re-discover some of last years form as he started to slowly impose himself on Ed Tucker and Laraman. For the first time this year, Kash batted with more visible concentration, determined not to give it away and he slowly started to accumulate.

The pair batted with a fair semblance of class and they saw off the opening bowlers, who Laraman 3 for 38 off of 13 overs did a fine job in warm conditions. The Bar middle order pairing shared a partnership of 56 in 89 balls before when just 15 minutes away from lunch Jared was bowled by Murty Hussain for a well made 34 and although skipper Lenny Cooper was almost run out 5 balls after he'd come into bat, Bar made lunch with the score standing on 114 for 4 with 26 overs left of the 60-over allocation.

My reading of the game was it was 50-50. If Bar batted well after lunch and scored at around 4 ½ runs per over a total of around 230 would take a great deal of getting on a pitch which was now also taking spin. However if the visitors nipped out Kash and or Lenny cheaply after the break then we would do well to make 180. However it was the latter that took place and Bar started to cave in under the web of Hussain who proved that he really is a class act.

Skipper Len Cooper tried to sweep Fraser and lobbed a simple catch to White at short fine leg (118 for 5), Nesan Jeyaratnam was undone in the flight and was stumped for 1 (125 for 6). Dean Dass came in at 8 for his first league game of the season and was soon congratulating Kash on his third consecutive league '50' made in 82 balls and 95 minutes, which contained 8 fours.

Alas with the score at 151 Deano who'd struck Hussain for a handsome 4 and a massive straight 6 in consecutive balls, tried an expansive cut shot and missed and Hussain had his man. Dave Breeze lasted just 7 balls before he played too late and was bowled and Kash was finally dismissed for a fine 63 off 92 balls as he tried another delicate late cut before Frazer fizzed a quicker ball and it hit his off stump. Four balls later Andy Colquhoun was out lbw for 0 and despite Bar being 118 for 4, 151 for 6, Bar had capitulated to a sorry 155 all out. The worse crime of all was the fact that we were bowled out inside 45 overs, gifting Welwyn a further 15 overs to reach their target.

However, the boys came out with a spring in their step and not for the first time they showed they are no easy pushovers. In just the third over Andy Colquhoun trapped Driver plumb in front for 1 and 7 balls later a great stop from Ollie Coughlan at backward point and a direct hit from 30 yards saw the end of Tucker and at 6 for 2 it was game on.

In this crash bang wallop of a game, Welwyn lost a 3rd wicket as Laraman who prodded nervously against some fine tight bowling tried an audacious leg side clip, which flew off the outside edge and Ollie Coughlan took a tricky catch at point and Welwyn were in the sticky stuff at 3 for 14. Welwyn are renowned for their strong batting line-up and next in to join the ex-Herts skipper James was Ben Frazer but after some turgid defence Frazer tried to break the grip but top edged to mid-off where a running catch was excellently held by Dave Breeze and 2 overs later Martin James missed out on a full toss which struck his pad on the full and Umpire Goodfellow raised his digit and with the score at 42 for 5 Bar were in dreamland.

This then brought a period of play of despite Hussain striking Paul McGee for 2 large sixes in consecutive deliveries where apart from those blows, there were just 10 runs in 11 overs and I didn't really understand what sort of game plan Welwyn were trying to achieve as the tea break was still an hour away.

The big wicket of Simon White for just 5 meant Welwyn were 66 for 6 and Bar had a minimum of still 39 overs to try and winkle the last four out. Still though Welwyn had Murty Hussain at the wicket and as tea was finally taken after a mammoth 130 minute session at 95 for 6 the boys were still in sight for the maximum 25 points. Alas the visitors had other ideas and they slowly started to chip away at the 61 runs required and Bar started to run out of ideas. Thanks to a match winning 90 run unbeaten stand off 140 balls, Welwyn snuck home by a 4 wicket margin and left many in the Potters Bar camp scratching their heads at just how they didn't win the game.

First of all, I believe they fell into the trap of not trying to get Hussain out. For large parts they tried to stop him from making boundaries which in turn gave him some easy runs. At the other end Matt Walters who batted with a good deal more application than his peers up the order, gained confidence as his vigil went on and the main reason was that the wicket flattened out. Yes, people could say that the slow bowlers could have bowled more overs but in all truth they were not beating the bat with the regularity of the Welwyn spinners. I don't think we bowled to a set plan and the game drifted which is a disappointment as the boys were brilliant in the field and reduced the strongest batting line-up to a quivering wreck.

But this is not all doom and gloom. We pushed a side that expect to win the league all the way and they know full well they got out of jail thanks to a majestic performance by one man Murtaza Hussain. Unlike Hertford, we will not moan and say how unfair it is. He is a fine player, a real coup for the league and a match winning 117 ball innings of 71*. The 8 points gained in the afternoon though means we go into next weeks clash, the middle of June, top of the league and that mustn't be forgotten.

There was brighter news though as the 2s, 3s, 4s and 6s all won.

Petty's 2nd XI team got their first league win of the season as they crushed Old Finchleians by a massive 116 run margin. Bar racked up 224 for 5 thanks in the main to 85 from the returning Adjitka Mehta and 41 from Tom Coughlan. With runs on the board for the first time this season, Dave Pett could afford to experiment to get the 10 wickets required and this came in the sight of 9 bowlers being used, but thanks to Greg Hodge 4 for 25 and his brother Charlie 3 for 14 meant the boys had skittled their hosts for just 108.

The 3s bandwagon just keeps rolling on and in bowler Neil Raisborough, the wickets suit him down to the ground and his figures of 6 for 8 prove that and this in chief accounted for Preston 2's poor 63 all out total. Rocky's men lost wickets early on but scraped over the winning line losing 6 wickets in the process, thanks to Ajith Walallawita's 26*. Third place now for the boys and thoughts of another promotion can not just be thought of as a pipedream.

Ian Breeze's 4th XI finally won a league game as they annihilated Broxbourne 3s by 8 wickets. A long stint from Dean Barker meant he returned with 4 for 40 and Hayden Rogers 4 for 30 meant a target of just 111 was required. Prolific John Lewis powered his way to another 70* and he was assisted by a patient 35 from Matt Hart.

The 6s beat Waltham Cross Rosedale 4s by just 2 wickets chasing 100 as Graham Taylor rolled back the years with a miserly 4 for 14 from his spell.

Alas the 5s seem to go from bad to worse as they still sit 2nd from bottom as they capitulated to Letchworth 5s and have yet to avoid defeat this season. I cannot understand what is going on as last year after a dodgy start the boys were beating all-comers and this year, despite fielding stronger sides, they have yet to get out of first gear. Come on fellas – I know you are all better than this.

Next week sees the 1s travel to Hemel Hempstead in a game where they will fancy their chances. The wicket was poor last year and a lot will depend on the weather and the toss of a coin. The wicket normally turns and this will be music to the spinners' ears as hopefully the sorely missed Paul Barker will return from injury.

The 2s entertain old adversaries from last year Northwood Town where both sides were evenly matched and the game could have ended up in any one of the three possible results with 2 overs remaining. The 3s travel to league leaders Watton-at-Stone minus a few players and the 4s and 5s also travel to Leverstock Green 3s and Hatfield 3s respectively. On Sunday at this moment in time there is only one fixture, which is at home to Herts League 1 side Hitchin.

I'm now off on a much deserved 2-week holiday where the sun will be warm and the beer will be plentiful and with a bit of luck when I return the 1s will still be top of the league and the 2s, 3s, 4s and 5s all continue to keep the club on a high. Not only that England should still be in the World Cup long enough for me to see a game on home soil rather than watch it in a Caribbean bar at 10 in the morning which will mean yours truly will just have to go on a Leo Sayer!

Until next time have a good couple of weeks, remember the futures bright, the futures Potters Bar

Regards
Fred