

## **BAR DOMINATE WELWYN BUT JUST MISS OUT ON VICTORY**

### **Saturday**

**Potters Bar 251 for 7 in 60 overs**

**Welwyn Garden City 201 for 9 wkts in 54 overs**

Potters Bar played all the cricket in a one-sided affair at Digswell but couldn't quite pull off an unlikely victory over championship chasing Welwyn Garden City.

With both sides desperate to win and keep any lingering hopes of promotion and catching Radlett, the toss would prove vital and it was Welwyn Garden who won it and inserted Bar on a wicket that looked more than okay but has a history of getting slower and lower as the game went on. In all truth the decision backfired on the hosts.

Gavin Baker and Mike Palmer opened the innings and disaster struck after just three balls as Mike played on off his pads and middle peg was disturbed and Bar were 1 for 1 and thoughts of last week came swiftly flooding back. However this brought in form Dean Dass to the crease and he fought fire with fire and he set about the Welwyn attack with relish.

Ex-Potters Bar protégé Nick Lamb took some fearful punishment as Dassy pounced on anything short whilst at the other end, 17-year old Middlesex Academy player Gavin Baker saw off the ex Middlesex pro Aaron Laraman with some watchful defence and when the opportunity came, young Gavin didn't waste it as he played with a great deal of maturity against Laraman, who in truth bowled well, but maybe didn't create as many problems as he did earlier on in the year.

Deano still powered on and after seeing Lamb off, he took the attack to both Murty Hussain, who he swept and cut expertly and Ben Frazer who he just waited for the bad ball, which in truth there was always one an over and he put that away with relative ease.

The pair put on the 100-partnership in just 154 balls and Bar were in a powerful position as Welwyn's vocal encouragement had gone and with an over to go before the break we were 130 for 1 with Dean and Gavin playing a fine hand. Alas 2 balls into the last over before the lunch break, Dean lost his balance a little and offered a sharp leg side stumping chance to Tom Pearman, which he gratefully took and Bar had lost a vital wicket and offered Welwyn a slight crumb of comfort as they tucked into the fine spread laid on. For the record, Dassy made a magnificent 92 off 101 balls, containing 17 fours and a lusty pick and mix.

So at lunch Bar were still sat in the driving seat at 130 for 2 and still had 26.4 overs remaining of their 60-over allocation and if Bar could get up to the 260 target, Welwyn were always going to be up against it and with them needing to win they were going to have to bat bloody well to do so.

After lunch Scott Fraser launched Simon White with 2 glorious 4's over mid-on but then in the next over threw his wicket away a little as he top edged a skier to extra cover and Bar were brought down to earth a little at 139 for 3. The good thing was though, Bar still had ample batting left in the hutch and this brought in the leagues leading run scorer Kash Weeraratne to the crease and at the other end, Gavin Baker was well set on 38.

This though brought on a mini-collapse and Bar's good work before lunch had soon subsided as they lost Kash (1) leg before to a ball where all and sundry definitely heard a noise that wasn't that of pad first and then Gavin Baker (49) left the building by guiding a simple catch to short

third man and when Jared Norman (14) was clean bowled to one that kept a little low, Bar had gone from 130 for 1 to 185 for 6 and the large target was still a country mile away.

This however brought skipper Lenny Cooper and Dave Breeze together and with some quality strokes from Lenny and some top notch tip and running from Breezey meant they batted Bar back into the game with a partnership of 44 in just 51 balls and after Lenny had departed for a classy 39, Paul Barker aided Breezey to end 23\* and Bar had set a challenging total of 252 in a minimum of 50 overs.

Welwyn remember had simply got to win and for me, they sent out the wrong signals by not just playing about with their batting order but almost turning it upside down. Now where I was perched I wouldn't be telling any lies by saying the Welwyn skipper Martin James said all we have to do is bat properly and bat through the overs, 140 of the last 20 overs etc. Quite why he himself batted as low as 9 (although he did put down a sharp chance and seemed to have bruised a hand / finger) and Mark Everett who bats 3 normally, came in at 10 and this simply doesn't correspond. However this in my eyes clearly offered the Bar a chance to take the initiative against players who yes play a fine array of shots but give you a great chance of getting their wicket, provided you bowl in the right areas.

With openers Laraman and mainly Ed Tucker, Welwyn started positively and it appeared that spinners Paul McGee and Paul Barker struggled early on to find their lines and the correct pace to bowl on a wicket that was offering turn – albeit slow turn. However after 7 overs of some generous oranges, Paul Barker got the breakthrough as he got a ball to turn off the straight and enticed Aaron Laraman to nibble at it and Scott Fraser took a smart catch. 35 for 1 and still Welwyn took advantage of some attacking fields and some pretty easy runs but still the carrot was being dangled enough.

The carrot was well and truly bitten by Ed Tucker who tried to launch Paul McGee into the pavilion and ended up skying one to Gavin Baker who took a great catch at a deepish mid-on. In all honesty, Gavin looked as if he was going to do a Mexican wave at one stage but he did extremely well and clung on in fine style. 49 for 2 and it was soon 58 for 3 as Nick Lamb who thought he received some harsh treatment (although I cannot recall the Umpires making a big deal out of it) was enticed into striking the ball to a deep mid-off off Paul McGee and Jared Norman trotted round and held a vital catch. As young Nick came off muttering rather loudly that he'd basically been talked out and how wrong it all was. Personally I didn't think his heart was in it as he was playing against many of the friends he played colts cricket at PB with, but that's one for Nick to decide on.

The game wandered on with Simon White who in truth struggled early on and when Lamb was caught out, White had scored just 1 run in 38 balls. 58 for 3 and Bar were right in the hunt and when Scott Fraser rather fortuitously stumped Murty Hussain for just 4, Bar had got rid of the man who nigh on single-handedly saw Welwyn through to victory in the game at Potters Bar back in late May. 66 for 4 and this brought yet another class strokemaker to the crease in Ben Frazer and if Bar were going to pull off a win, they certainly had to do it the hard way.

Tea came along and Welwyn were in the mire and their game plan just seemed to be of contentment to play the game ball by ball and not at any time try and snatch the game away from the boys from Potters Bar. They were sat at 84 for 4, still needing another 168 for victory from a minimum of 25 overs at a rate nearing 6.75 runs per over. Knowing this though, there didn't seem a massive amount of urgency; full in the knowledge if they drew and Radlett won they too would be as good as dead in the promotion race.

With Paul Barker well and truly in the groove he tempted Frazer to slap one straight to Dean Dass at midwicket for 13 and Matt Walters who played excellently in the first encounter was soon cleaned up as he nervously prodded to first slip where Mike Palmer took the catch. At this point Welwyn were 100 for 6 and there wasn't a cat in hell's chance of a home win and with 20 overs remaining a Bar victory was more than a possibility.

Chances came and went as Paul McGee put down a caught and bowled chance and Mike Palmer taking, what appeared to all, a regulation catch at slip only for it to be not given which caused the start of a frustrating period in the game. Welwyn number four Simon White was beginning to play a nice innings and brought up his 50 in 96 balls and he and Ray Hodge, who in truth defended stubbornly and put the bad ball away, put on a match saving stand of 74 in 103 balls.

However there was still more drama left to unfold. With the introduction of Kash Weeraratne and the new ball, it soon lifted the game up a notch and White's resistance was over as he held out to skipper Lenny Cooper at cover for a well made 55 and when Hodge offered a sharp falling catch to Jared Norman at third slip for 34, Welwyn were looking to save the game at 8 for 189 with just 10 minutes left for play.

In now were experienced pair of Welwyn skipper Martin James and Mark Everett and when James prodded forward he 'appeared' to the fielding side anyway, to get a feather of a touch. Stories are different from both sides and a potentially nasty incident occurred with James turning round and walked to confront Bar keeper Scott Fraser. Whether 'gamesmanship' was involved or Martin James was generally upset at something he heard it's hard to tell (plain "gamesmanship"-Editor). As this is going on, Welwyn keeper Tommy Pearman, a generally nice chap was stood wearing just his shirt and trousers and considering he was next in, it was a tad early to write the game off as a draw.

He was counting down the balls remaining and then with 2 balls remaining Paul Barker bowled skipper Martin James with a pearler to justify he is one of Hertfordshire's premier slow bowlers. This now had Tommy Pearman running round like a man possessed trying to locate pads, box, thigh pad, bat and gloves all for the last ball. With the game as tense in an atmosphere that would make a night out in Turkey for a World Cup qualifier look like a picnic, he just made it before people started to ask for the dreaded 'Timed Out' dismissal. Pearman duly survived and Welwyn scraped home with a draw.

The bowling was dominated by the spinners. Paul McGee took 2 for 92 from 22 overs and Paul Barker justified his claims that he should be one of the first names on the Hertfordshire teamsheet by taking 5 for 65 from 23 overs. Four of the 5 wickets were that of classy players in Aaron Laraman, (current Herts professional) Ben Frazer (current Herts player), Murty Hussain (represented Herts in a 20/20 tournament) and Martin James (ex-Herts skipper). To me and many others is that this alone should see his inclusion but still he is overlooked.

I am not quite sure how selection for Hertfordshire works but here we have young man who has now taken 26 league wickets at around 20 runs per wicket. It appears he is not good enough for Hertfordshire, who are second from bottom in this years Minor County Championship and face a wooden spoon match towards the end of the month up at Cumberland, oh well. From this view point a sad story and one that should probably be looked at.

There were some sad scenes at the end of an enthralling game of cricket where it was plain for all to see not every Welwyn player shook Paul Barker's hand at the end of the game. Yes, the game was played in a competitive spirit but it's a sad day that people cannot shake hands at the end and deliberately go out of your way not to do it. Baby then came off to abuse from both male and female members from Welwyn which has left a sour taste in the mouth for all concerned. Again I stress the game was played competitively, at no times were the umpires called upon to sort any 'hassle' out and if Welwyn feel hard done by then may I cast their minds back to last year at The Walk when they overstepped the line.

Moving on, (thank Christ for that) the 2s beat Preston in a comfortable manner as there was a welcome return for Mark Ilott who hadn't played for over a year. Ramble rolled back the years as on a flat wicket, he took 7 for 32 and reduced Preston to just 139. Mark bowled sensibly and the Preston boys simply had no answer to deliveries that were constantly asking searching questions of their techniques.

Addy Mehta set about the visitors bowling with gusto and smashed 77 (out of 89) in next to no time and the game was done and dusted. Although there were a few wickets that went at the end, Bar eased their way back to winning ways and a position plumb in the middle of the table. I heard from a source that Preston were a little disappointed that Mark played and bowled but lets have it right – Ramble has helped Dave Pett out and it's the first time he has played in over 12 months. He freely made the choice to not play as he wasn't enjoying it. Its not as if Mark has just retired from County Cricket – it must be nigh on 5 years and I'm sure Mark will correct me if I am wrong

It wasn't a good day at the office for the 3s as they suffered their worst defeat since black and white television was the height of fashion as they succumbed by 9 wickets to the now leaders of Division 6, Southgate Compton.

Rocky's boys were skittled out for just 90 which is a fine effort considering they were 68 for 9. The hosts took no time in tapping the 91 runs off and the dream of three promotions on the trot now has gone and the boys mustn't get complacent as they aren't too far off the relegation places in a hideously tight division. With Captain Rock now ruining games of football, the boys must get back to competing and it's going to be a tight call as they have some very hard games on the horizon.

The success of the weekend had to be at Hertingfordbury, where the 4s chased 243 for victory and got them with 18 balls left for play. The hosts clocked up 242 for 2 on a dream of a pitch and a fast outfield and again Julian Brauer 58 took a great deal of the plaudits in an 8<sup>th</sup> win in their last 9 matches. The hosts will be disappointed with the 47 extras conceded – the last time I saw that many extras was in Ben Hur – boom-boom.

The 5s despite a convincing win missed out on promotion as all of the teams above them won and despite bowling out Chiltern for 120 and the boys got them for 3 it was somewhat immaterial. The wickets yet again went to Mr J who took another 6 for and runs were shared around although John Wedge 38 and Jamie Trust 31 scored the lions share.

Next week sees the 1s entertain Hemel Hempstead and nothing short of a home win will be the order of the day. Hemel have struggled in truth this season but are slowly starting to get it right and they like ourselves have reached the last four of the Becker so they cannot be written off easily.

The 2s minus Dave Pett and Mark Ilott travel to Flitwick who by all accounts look like dropping down a division. The boys will be skippered by Greg Hodge and may I be the first to wish him all the best as its his first time babysitting the 2s and hope the other 10 fellas rally behind him and give him a performance to be proud of.

The 3s, who must return to winning ways sooner rather than later travel to old Albanian 2s who are having a great season and are looking to win Division 6. With Rocky absent through refereeing, I'm not sure who is taking the Lombardi baton, but they have to watch their backs as this is undoubtedly one of the tightest divisions in the Saracens League.

Finally, the 4s entertain Hertford 4s in another big game for the fellas and they must again have to do without skipper Ian Breeze who is away at a wedding. Stand-in skip Cheeko takes the reins and will be looking to make it 9 wins out of 10 and still after that run of form they sit proud in 3<sup>rd</sup> place. You have to take your hats off to the top 2 as they must have a hell of a record to top that of the 4s.

Before I go, I must say a well done to Luke McGee who played his first senior game for the club as he took the new ball for the 1s at Kenton in the Chess Valley League on Sunday. Luke, who has recently along with Harrison Palmer represented Middlesex U10's took 1 for 47 and scored 9 runs and won a £5 off of Bertie Anderson who claimed he'd score more runs than Lukey boy. Hard luck Bertie ole son, easy come, easy go.

To the 44 fellas who represent the club next week, lets have a right old go and remember, the futures bright, the futures Potters Bar

Regards  
Fred