

## **END OF SEASON DRAW ENABLES SECOND PLACE FINISH**

### **Saturday**

**Stevenage 262 all out off 60 overs**

**Potters Bar 164 for 7 off 61 overs**

So the season has finally drawn to a close and Bar managed to grimly hold on for a draw which meant they finished a distant second to champions Welwyn Garden City in a friendly encounter against third place Stevenage.

In really quite chilly and autumnal conditions, Len Cooper won the toss again and he had no hesitation in asking the visitors to bat first on a pitch that had a little grass left on it to hopefully give our seam attack some semblance of assistance. Alas it just meant the Stevenage batters had a bit more pace and bounce to work with and they soon got in their stride and put the runs on the board.

Too many half volleys were served up, as Bar struggled for the line and length needed and the opening partnership of Tanweer Sikandar and Herts starlet Gary Brown tucked in and seemed to book in for bed and breakfast. They put away the bad ball with great execution and it wasn't long before their 50 partnership was reached, 68 balls in fact.

After 12 overs the score had already reached 65 for 0 and this heralded a double change with Paul Barker and Paul McGee, both bowling at ends that they aren't normally accustomed to and this managed to slow up the free scoring batters. It wasn't long before the double change took a wicket and it was the dangerous Sikandar who tried to hit Paul Barker over mid-off and he hold out where Len Cooper held a simple catch. 82 for 1 was soon 92 for 2 as Ashley Bayes was taken smartly at slip by Jared Norman off of Paul McGee for 7.

This brought Nasser Ahmed to the crease and he for the next 108 balls showed what a fine player this man is. Again he played every ball on its merit and when the bad ball arrived he simply put away wherever he deemed fit to. At the other end the prolific Gary Brown eased to his 50 off of 85 balls in 112 minutes. Nasser Ahmed and Gary Brown took the score through to the lunch break to 134 for 2 from 34 overs. Ahmed was sat 32\* and Brown was 52\*.

After lunch Bar needed to strike early but in truth Stevenage started well and Nasser Ahmed took the bull by the horns and quickly reached his 50 in just 55 balls and 44 minutes. His 50 contained 7 fours and a six.

Stevenage lost Gary Brown for 57 with the score on 173 as he found sat at the other end not to his liking and scoring just 6 runs in 27 balls was too much of a pressure for him to cope with. He had a 100 for the taking and all he had to do was sit at one end and play around Ahmed. Thankfully he couldn't do it.

Ali-Kazmi came to the wicket next, the man who bludgeoned Bar to all parts in the first meeting and he and Ahmed carried on and put the attack to the sword. Bar skipper Len Cooper brought on Nesan Jeyaratnam and after a poor start Nesan finally found the right loop and pace to bowl on a pitch that was slowly starting to take spin and this started to check the increasing run rate. Ahmed and Ali-Kazmi sprinted to a 50 run partnership in just 55 balls and with the score sat at 227 for 3 with 9 overs remaining.

It looked like 300 was on the cards but in truth the final 10 overs of the season went well for Bar and Nesan Jeyaratnam got the rewards that he has deserved when he has been sparingly called for.

Nasser Ahmed finally went just 1 run shy of a super 100 as he was caught at short extra cover by Dean Dass of Nesan Jeyaratnam. He faced 108 balls, hit 15 fours and a six and batted quite beautifully. 228 for 4 was next ball 228 for 5 as debutant Barry Hann went in the same manner as Ahmed and the scorecard was looking a little more respectable.

As the overs ticked down, the wickets tumbled.

Ali-Kazmi was next to go for 18 as he picked out Kash Weeraratne at deep square leg to hold a tidy catch and when Dean Dass caught Dave Carr for 6 again off the bowling of Nesan Jeyaratnam the score had gone from 228 for 3 to 247 for 7.

Azhar Ali was then clean bowled by Paul McGee for 5 and Nesan enticed Hayward to dance down the pitch and be beaten all ends up giving a regulation stumping to Guy Thatcher and the innings was completed off the last ball as Afzal was excellently taken at deep midwicket by Paul Barker for 19. Stevenage had been bowled out for 262 and lost their last 7 wickets for just 32 in 49 balls.

Nesan Jeyaratnam finished with 6 for 49 from 10 overs and his best bowling for Potters Bar in a league game. He strangely finished last season with a '5-for' against North Mymms and now must be given more of a bowl next season. This year the wickets as well as the weather were not 'spin friendly'. Maybe next year they will be.

So 263 for victory in a minimum of 50 overs and the start was shocking. 5 balls gone and Nesan Jeyaratnam got a ball which bounced and turned and offered a dolly catch to slip and when Kash Weeraratne went first ball to a ball which again turned and bounced Bar were 0 for 2 from just 7 deliveries.

Dean Dass and Mike Palmer slowly got Bar into double figures but when Mike edged again to slip it was 16 for 3 and for us to keep second spot we needed at least a draw or make 200 and in fairness either target looked a mile away.

Dassy was joined by Jared Norman and both players manoeuvred the strike and the ball around well and started to accumulate relatively easily. The win had gone out of the window as the bowling was tight but Bar had successfully negotiated the poor start. Alas Dean Dass went for 32 as he gave Nasser Ahmed his 3<sup>rd</sup> catch of the innings at slip as Stevenage's slow bowling had Bar struggling for runs. 60 for 4 brought in Gavin Baker and he and Jared Norman managed to see it through to tea at 4 for 70 off of 27 overs. Jared Norman was 20 and Gavin Baker 2.

With Welwyn safely sewn up the title it was essential Bar held out for a draw and stopped Stevenage from winning and leapfrogging us. There was plenty of stout defence but few runs. Jared Norman was running the ball around nicely as he pounced on anything too full and he was batting nicely.

Gavin Baker went to a pearler from Ali-Kazmi for just 4 and Bar were 90 for 5 with around 75 minutes left to play. Skipper Len Cooper joined Jared at the wicket and arguably for the first time in the league this season batted sensibly, didn't give his wicket away and batted akin to the situation of the game.

Jared Norman brought up his 4<sup>th</sup> '50' of the season in an over that he struck 3 fours. It came up in 96 balls, 97 minutes and contained 6 fours but the game was still far from safe. The 50 partnership was reached in 84 balls and with time starting to run out for the visitors the sun came up and Bar sailed into the calmer waters of a drawn match.

Still though Jared Norman went caught behind for a fine 72 to a ball that bounced a little more and Luke Owers making his league debut went caught bat pad for a 12 ball duck and Bar were 158 for 7 but with a matter of 10 minutes remaining it was pretty much inconsequential.

Bar ended 164 for 7 from an amazing 61 overs which is credit to both sides. 121 overs in a shade over 6 hours playing time shows just what can be achieved. Lenny Cooper ended 24 not out from a marathon 80 ball, 74 minute stay at the wicket his longest stay at the crease by some considerable way all season and this rearguard action secured second spot and a deserved final placing after a seasons hard toil.

The 2s ended in great fashion as they again ended the highest placed second eleven in the competition with a narrow 2 wicket success over Division 3 bound Northwood Town. On a bowler friendly pitch, Matt Webb 5-69 and skipper Greg Hodge 3-34 broke the backbone of the hosts and bowled them out for a pitiful 119 in just 28 overs. It was a fine display by Webby whose first 3 overs disappeared for 40 and made leaving t'Leeds at 5am to play justifiable.

Needing 120 for victory in 72 overs Bar crept their way to victory thanks to Dave Pett making 41 and the fast improving Dan Brown bringing home the bacon for the third time this season 17\*. For the teams Greg has had at his disposal and to finish 6<sup>th</sup> in a good standard of cricket is a great effort

The 3s needed just a point from their final league match of the season against title challengers Northchurch 2s and amazingly like last week beat the team at the top. Johnny Lewis in his last game as skipper made 63\* and was ably assisted by Rob Daley who made 41 in a total of 165 for 8. With the game heading for a Northchurch win it took an inspired spell of bowling from young Neil Oak who took 5 for 14 and the 3s had snuck home, winning by 24 runs and a lower mid table finish.

The 4s can get the champagne out as they beat third place Old Elizabethans by 5 wickets meaning the Lizzies missed out on promotion because of the defeat. Bar bowled them out for 133 with Spencer Randon taking 4 wickets. I'm afraid the accumulation of Becks got the better of me and I cannot remember anything else about this game. But again the 4s have gained successive promotions and it's a great achievement and Division 9 cricket will be their level next year.

So that's it for another year. A year of dreadful weather some good performances but the weather has made it a stop start season. You can count the number of lovely Saturday afternoons on one hand and this always makes cricket a better spectacle, rather than watching, playing or officiating in the rain freezing ones knackers off.

The 1s finished second and will be disappointed they didn't win the league despite bring 15 points clear with about 5 games left. However we didn't beat Welwyn, West Herts or Stevenage in 6 attempts and thus I don't think we can say we deserved to win the league. We arguably should have beaten both Welwyn and West Herts away from home but it wasn't to be. Next year should see some new faces join the club and this has to happen if we are to progress.

The 2s finished in 6<sup>th</sup> place and the top placed 2<sup>nd</sup> eleven in the whole competition which for what players Greg had at his disposal is a credit to everyone who played. To lose your overseas player with 7 / 8 matches to go is a kick in the nuts but various players all stepped up to the plate. They have also brought Luke Owers to the forefront and he made his 1<sup>st</sup> eleven league debut Saturday.

The 3s had a poor season but managed to keep their Division 6 status but if anyone needs a shot in the arm, they need an influx of players. Whether they change their game plan remains to be seen but it's a good standard of cricket they play in and they for the good of the club need to compete at this level as it gives whatever kids come though from lower down a good platform to improve their cricket against decent opposition.

The 4s as stated are promoted again and Division 9 beckons and as with the 5s who got promotion about 3 weeks ago have done the club proud. Hopefully the boys can continue improving and start the supply for the elevens further up the club.

So that's about it. I have to say well done to Welwyn Garden City and I emailed one of their players this morning to congratulate them on promotion into the Premier League. To Welwyn I say well done and go and do Herts cricket proud next year.

Hopefully we can emulate their league season next year and join both them and Radlett in 2009. To Kashie have a safe flight and I look forward to seeing you fit and well in May next year and to everyone whose read my ramblings thanks its been great fun as ever and remember, have a great week and remember the futures bright the futures Potters Bar

Fred