

RAIN SAVES BAR AS WELWYN LEAVE HUGELY DISAPPOINTED

SATURDAY

Potters Bar 136 all out in 48.5 overs

Welwyn Garden City 55 for 1 in 15 overs

Potters Bar are still in with a great chance of winning the league after avoiding a crushing defeat against local rivals Welwyn Garden City at a rain soaked Walk this weekend. Remarkably despite going a month without a league win, Lenny Cooper's team still only trail by 4 points.

On a sunny morning, Bar lost the toss and found themselves put into bat on a surface that was surprisingly hard considering the deluge from the previous day. To be honest after a nervy opening, Bar soon found their stroked and Nesan Jeyaratnam and Mike Palmer were soon taking full advantage of a pretty ordinary opening spell from Jamie Hewitt and ex-Bar boy Nick Lamb.

However some clever captaincy by Martin James saw the introduction of two off-spinners, Ben Frazer and Jamie Southgate and this not only slowed a rocketing scoring rate but brought the Bar batting to its knees.

After putting on 47 in just 69 balls, Nesan Jeyaratnam (22) was the first to go as he offered no shot to a pretty straight delivery from Ben Frazer. Over went the castle and Bar were 1 for 47. Seven balls later and Mike Palmer was also back in the confines of the dressing room as he played half forward and didn't quite kill the turning ball from Southgate. With the ball rolling towards the direction of the stumps, Mike attempted to strike the ball away but only managed to middle the ball right onto the stumps and he was gone bowled for 20.

Next ball and worse was to follow as Gavin Baker was hit high up on the thigh and the umpire adjudged him leg before for a second ball duck, his third on the trot and although it looked a harsh decision, the lack of a shot maybe wasn't the best of choices either as this tends to benefit the bowler more often than not. Then the killer blow as 6 balls later Kash Weeraratne was clean bowled by youngster Jamie Southgate first ball and Bar had gone from 47 for 0 to 50 for 4 in the space of 13 deliveries.

This had now brought skipper Lenny Cooper, fresh from a hundred in the Chess Valley League and the Bar's top league run scorer Jared Norman to the wicket but the latter didn't look happy during his 24 ball stay at the wicket. Like Mike last week at West Herts, I haven't seen Jared play such a hideous shot in the time I've been watching him as he top edged an attempted slog sweep which was comfortably held at deepish mid on. 62 for 5 was soon 72 for 6 as Dean Dass appeared to be the unlucky sod on the wrong end of a decision as he was adjudged leg before for 5, which only just went to heighten the tension up another notch as Welwyn quite rightly sensed an easy win and stop Bar from mounting a title challenge over the final weeks.

There was a brief respite from skipper Lenny Cooper and Matt Webb but again in soft circumstances Lenny gave his wicket away as he weakly struck a pretty poor delivery from Southgate straight to Laraman at short fine leg and Bar were 83 for 7 with 15 minutes left before the lunch break. Dave Breeze joined Matt Webb at the crease and they took the score through to 103 for 7 off of 41 overs with some steady batting and in truth, nothing that shouldn't have been easily capable from any of the other top order batters.

The lunch break came and went and both Matt Webb and Dave Breeze both kept on batting sensibly and the clouds had obviously had enough of circling the ground and thought it best to dump a whole lot of rain on the ground. 60 minutes were lost for rain and with Bar 128 for 7 in the 46th over maybe a total of around 155 / 160 would be competitive.

Despite yours truly and my colleague Richard Hill not being informed by the umpires of how many overs were remaining, we had it right, they had it wrong Bar had 38 more balls of their innings remaining. It should have been 32 but that's by the by.

However with the words ringing in their ears of

“don't give it away now boys etc.”

“Lets see if we can get to 160+”

Matt Webb went 2 balls after the resumption caught behind for a well made and patient 20 of 58 balls and Dave Breeze went for 25 off of 42 balls, caught at short extra cover in an equally soft fashion 2 balls later and Bar were 128 for 9. Despite a cheeky four struck by Mark Taylor, Paul Barker softly gave Ben Frazer his 5th wicket of the innings and Bar had been dismissed for 136 in the 49th over.

For Welwyn, both Ben Frazer 5 for 49 and Jamie Southgate 4 for 39 bowled excellently in conditions that were helping a little but this wasn't the bunsen of a pitch the Bar batters made it look. However, the stats say it all. Of the last 28 wickets Bar have lost in the last three matches, 23 have been from spinners and that stat has to be addressed quickly if we are to halt our dramatic slide.

So Welwyn needed 137 to win from 45 overs, and to be frank the only thing that was going to save the boys was a freakish batting display or the weather.

Bar had to take early wickets and after a cautious start they got a vital breakthrough. Another old Bar boy Daniel Blacktopp was enticed into trying to drive Paul Barker and he prodded nervously and edged to Kash Weeraratne at slip and the visitors were 13 for 1 in the 8th over.

Now in fairness young Mr Blacktopp has improved since his days at PBCC, and is about to represent the County this week at Bishops Stortford. However the Bar have witnessed at least two wicketkeepers who appear to have a claim including Simon Greenall of Sawbridgeworth (deemed good enough to be selected in the Development squad) and Luke Padgett (Bishops Stortford – where the game is taking place) and I wonder why they haven't been asked to pull on the County jumper? Many people believe, myself included, that it is starting to get a little tedious, in that all you have to do to get some sort of County recognition is to play at Digswell Park.

With the loss of Blacktopp for 7, this brought in Nick Lamb, another player off the Bar conveyor belt to the wicket and he and Jamie Hewitt pounced on some friendly fayre and looked in total and utter control. The 50 came up in the 14th over as Lamb effortlessly lofted Paul Barker into the Walk for 6 but it was almost inconsequential as the rain clouds gathered again. This time the rain was heavier and more prolonged than the 60 minutes we lost earlier in the day and an early tea was taken.

As the rain slowly started to stop, there were some ugly scenes as Welwyn clearly thought the ground was good and ready for the cleaning up process to begin. In truth the ground was saturated and whilst the Umpires resided in their dressing room, tensions were at boiling point.

However at 5-40pm, skippers Len Cooper and Martin James called off the game, almost doing away without the need for Umpires and within 5 more minutes, the heavens opened again and made the already saturated outfield resemble a paddy field. Welwyn were rightfully frustrated, angry, disappointed call it what you want at being 86 runs short of a massive win in a competitive league. But fair's fair, yes Welwyn outplayed Potters Bar in every department going and they have a fine, fine team but cricket is meant to be played in conditions that don't require flippers, nor swimming trunks or wet suits and the only winners on the day were the elements and not some of Mr James's comments.

On a lighter note, the 2s managed a fine comeback of a win and gained a vital 30 points, strangely at Welwyn Garden City as we beat their second string. Details are a little sketchy as Bar dismissed the hosts for 142 with the penultimate ball of the innings. The star of the show was undoubtedly Addy Mehta who googled his way to 7 for 35 from 16 overs. Greg Hodge also nipped in with 2 for spit as he found some of the form he showed last year.

With 6 overs lost to rain in the reply, it needed a match winning batting performance from young Dan Brown who struck Bar to victory with a cool headed batting display when all others were losing theirs. The Brown Dog struck the winning runs off the last ball of the game, giving Bar a much needed win and keeps them firmly entrenched in the top half of the table. The Brown Dog has done ever so well this year and when I've seen him, he has shown nothing but a will to do well and this should give him the belief that he merits a place in the side and he continues to both improve and enjoy his cricket.

There were abandonment's for both the 3s and the 5s. The 3s had Watford 127 all out down the school thanks to 6 for 55 from Neil Raisborough and 4 for 30-odd from Haydn Rogers. The rain stopped Johnny Lewis boys from getting back out onto the field for what would surely have been a comfortable run chase. The 5s made 162 for 9 off of their 47 over allocation with Dean Barker 37*, Adam Titmus 36 and Jamie Trust 33 contributing nicely. Alas they were robbed of the chance of having a bowl at Preston as the heavens opened at the same stage of proceedings as the 3s.

However there was a fine, fine win for Cheeko's 4th XI. Despite not being there his able deputy and chairman Ian Breeze managed to bowl out Dunstable 4s for 151. After a whirlwind 52 from Andy Hughes (in around 38 balls) the 4s squeaked home with a 3 wicket win which keeps them firmly in the top four.

Next week sees the 1s have another mammoth weekend of cricket. On Saturday they entertain Sawbridgeworth, who in truth we do seem to have the 'number on' over of late. They do though sit just one place below the Bar and have arguably the best spinner (Ryan Cunningham) in the league. They also have Andrew Richardson who is one of the quickest if not the quickest opening bowler in the Home Counties League. The boys will have to improve greatly if we are to get our season back on track with a win though as Sawbo will not roll over and have their bellies tickled.

Sunday sees the Quarter Final of the County Cup where the 1s take on West Herts who beat us just 2 weeks ago. This will be a hard game to call and they are another highly talented side. All the boys have to remember is last season where we bowled and fielded like demons and dismissed them for just 70 and I couldn't think of a better time or a place to try and replicate that same performance.

Hopefully the sun will shine and a large support will witness the current holders of the cup do battle with the side from Watford with the winners playing at home to wither Knebworth or Hitchin in the middle of August.

The 2s travel to Knebworth who in Jarrod Turner could easily pro for any one of the sides in leagues above. He is a class act and a prized scalp. This is one of many hard matches coming up for Greg Hodge's team and they will need to be at their very best to hold off the challenge from the Knobs.

The 3s travel to face Totteridge 2s who are just a place and a win away in the league, the 4s entertain relegation threatened Northwood 3s and the 5s play at home to the wonderfully named Chiltern 06 who look set for a spell in the basement unless they pull up their socks.

So until next time have a great week and as always

Remember, the futures is bright the future is Potters Bar

Regards
Fred