

BAR WIN IN STYLE AS THEY KEEP ON LEADERS TAILS

Saturday

Sawbridgeworth 118 all out off 44.2 overs

Potters Bar 121 for 4 in 44.3 overs

Potters Bar gained a vital win to hang onto the coattails of the leaders West Herts and thanks to Harpenden pulling off the prized scalp of Welwyn Garden City, Bar are now in clear 2nd place 4 points behind the leaders.

After a night of torrential rain, Bar won the toss on a green wicket, a pitch that would have pace and bounce and ideally not the best of choices when Sawbridgeworth contain the pace and hostility of West Indies 'A' bowler Andrew Richardson.

Bar took the field in confident fashion and in the knowledge that the visitors batting isn't their strongest suit and it wasn't long before the ball was doing all sorts and whooping around making the batters resemble Norman Wisdom in his comic capers. Unlike Mr Grimsdale, Bar had Kash Weeraratne bowling and he was simply too good for the Sawbo boys as he yorked Danny Wilson in just the 5th ball of the match.

4 for 1 quickly turned to 24 for 2 as he trapped Ashman plumb in front for 1 and when Rory Coutts was shot out leg before, arguably making up for a run out shout which in fairness the batter himself said he thought he was a gonner, the Bar smelt a quick finish as the visitors were slumped on 26 for 3. To be honest the 40 run partnership between Matt Birch and Joe Rudkin showed that with a mixture of good defence occupation of the crease was possible.

Now I've made fun of young Joe Rudkin on numerous occasions as I and many of the good people at Potters Bar have yet to see him either score a run or hit the ball off the square but he got in behind it and grafted hard for every run he scored. He also played a couple of handsome square drives.

Alas Rudkin lost his partner Birch as he unluckily played on for 20, Burrell played a poor shot and was caught behind and Richardson went to a stunning catch in the gully by Dave Breeze off of the now restored into the attack Kash Weeraratne. Lunch arrived and Sawbo were tottering around on 84 for 6 off of 35 overs. It was now a case of trying to dispose of the tail as quickly as possible as a score of 140 would be a horrid total to chase.

It wasn't too long before the Sawbo batters were disposed of. Rudkin's long resistance was finished as he was clean bowled by Kash. Rudkin batted 97 balls for his 26 but by now Kash had the tail in his sights and wasn't going to let them have anything. The Sri Lankan star farcically omitted from the 30-man Provisional 20/Twenty World Cup Squad forced a weak shot from Simon Greenall first ball and he was caught at short extra cover, Ryan Cunningham played down the wrong line for 4 and Paul Reed was bounced out for a brave 22. Sawbo were dismissed for 118 leaving Bar 65 overs to score 119.

Kash Weeraratne though broke the clubs HCPL bowling record with the amazing figures of 13.3 overs, 7 maidens 8 (e i g h t – that's one for the fans of the old vidiprinter) for 27 runs. This beat Paul Barker's record which was held for just under 4 years. Kashie has now taken 27 wickets this season with 6 matches left to play. Of the other bowlers, Gavin Baker bowled with no luck at all

and his 1 for 40 from 14 overs was a million times better than the figures show. Lenny Cooper nipped in with another wicket, that's 21 for him now.

So Bar had to see off Andrew Richardson who was rightly pumped up. He struck Mike Palmer several times in a hostile opening spell and survived a big shout for leg before. But he and Burrell were seen off and the opening pair who have had great starts in night on all of the games this year, started to eek out the target required.

After playing some sublime cover drives, Nesan Jayaratnam perished for 21 (55 for 1) and when Mike Palmer went with the score on 85 as he was smartly taken at slip off of the excellent Ryan Cunningham for 48, the game was all but won. The batting from Mike Palmer arguably secured the win. His 48 came off a marathon 122 balls, but he saw off the pace and hostility of Richardson and then the guile of Cunningham. With Sawbo scratching their heads the lesser lights came on and that was right up Mike's alley (arf, arf) and this in my view brought the bacon home.

Gavin Baker finally broke his run of 3 successive league ducks with a patient knock of 18 and with 3 to win Bar should have won the game by 8 wickets. Alas with tea on the horizon, Gavin Baker offered catching practice to mid on for 18 and Paul Barker was caught for 22 with 2 runs required and this brought Kash Weeraratne and it needed a slog sweep to secure the 25 points.

So we are just 4 points off the top with the sides left to play where we amazingly managed 5 straight wins against earlier in the season. Now I'm in no way stating that these games are a walk in the park, far from it but if history is to be repeated then we have a seriously good chance to run West Herts all the way to the finish.

The 2s on Saturday managed to gain a draw out of the jaws of defeat with a resolute display against Knebworth Park's second string. The hosts clobbered 243 for 9 off of 53 overs with a parting gift of 7 for 75 from Adjitka Mehta. Addy has now left to return back to India where he has first class trials and he goes with all our best wishes. Alas he left to a duck so not the most auspicious of final innings from the talented all-rounder.

A tumble of early wickets ensured Bar wouldn't have got anywhere near the total but at 102 for 6 the writing was on the wall but 45 from Dave Pett and 42 from Charlie Hodge and some valiant defence from Haydn Rogers 24* and skipper Greg Hodge allowed Bar to finish on a credible 185 for 8. The draw lifts the boys up to 5th in the table, which in itself is an amazing achievement in a season which I and many others would be a season of transition after the years of excellent leadership from Dave Pett.

The 3s stumble closer to the relegation zone however as they were humiliated by Totteridge 2nd XI as they were dismissed in bizarre circumstances for just 98 in under 22 overs. Thankfully Ajith Walallawita's 58 allowed the bowlers the merest of crumbs to bowl at, but the hosts scampered to victory with 48 overs remaining for the loss of just 3 wickets.

The 4s had a comfortable win over Northwood 3rd eleven. The side from the western edge of the county were bowled out for just 114 thanks to Isaac Moore's 4 for 20 and 2 wickets a piece for both Alex Whitehouse and Spencer Randon. The runs were tapped off in some cavalier manner as Andy Hughes massacred the Northwood attack and ended 85*, this after last week's 50-odd in double quick time. Well done Hughesie!

The 5s beat Chiltern 06 although in truth they played like Chiltern FM, (washing your bits whilst losing wickets). The DJ's were bowled out for just 38 and praise must be handed out to young Tommy Rowlands who took the last 3 wickets in the 4 balls he was able to bowl. It took under 5 overs for the boys to tap off the runs required and promotion is now a case of when rather than if which must be a great sight for the re-cooperating Bertie Anderson.

BAR STRANGLE WEST HERTS AND MAKE THE LAST FOUR

Sunday

Potters Bar 220 for 8 off 50 overs

West Herts 182 all out in 46.4 overs

Potters Bar, the defending holders of the artist formerly known as the Becker Cup are through to the Semi Finals after an enthralling, tension filled quarter final against current HCPL Division 2 East leaders West Herts.

With the wicket having flattened out a touch from the previous day and after a night of incessant rain, Bar won the toss and batted and for me, I thought this would be a decision that would bite us on the arse. Alas we batted well and when we were struggling we kept wickets in hand and used the overs and it's surprising with what that can do to both the total and confidence.

It didn't start well though. Mike Palmer was dismissed 5th ball for 2 as he was caught at gully and after some fine off drives and positive running, Nesan Jeyaratnam went to the part-time bowling of New Zealand starlet Neal Parlane for 22 and Nesan bless him knew he'd thrown away a great chance of going on and making a good total. Once he breaks through the 20's / 30's someone, believe you me is going to cop a big one.

So at 30 for 2 Bars two big run scorers at the wicket, Jared Norman and Kash Weeraratne saw a period of play where runs were hard to come by. So hard in fact Jared scored just 3 runs in 39 balls and at the other end Kashie was also being watchful and rightfully so. The off-spin from Matt Smith was excellent, rarely a bad ball but in truth the Herts spinner did notch 5 for 2 weeks ago against us and followed it up with a performance best of 9 for 56 the previous day.

With wickets in hand, Bar could still up the rate. Kash Weeraratne completed his 50 off of 63 balls but as good as his innings was he chucked it away after whacking the ball to long on where an easy catch was taken. This was the ball after giving catching practice to long off, who refused as the sun came out to spare Kash his blushes.

122 for 3 was soon 123 for 4 as Jared Norman was caught behind off of the even more part-time, almost voluntary work bowling of Spencer Fan for 42 and it was now up to skipper Lenny Cooper to stick with the middle order and ensure they had a total to bowl at. With the middle order starting to run hard, the rate increased, but after losing Gavin Baker and Dave Breeze both for 9 it took an 18-ball 26 from Paul Barker (2 sixes and 2 fours) as well as an entertaining 46 off 51 balls from Len Cooper to get the Bar past 200 and set the visitors 221 for the place in the semi finals.

I didn't think it was enough and early on I was proved right as West Herts openers came out with a mind set that I've not seen from them before. Quite frankly they made our bowling look impotent and look like we were bowling with a football.

Neal Parlane and John Gulson made monkeys of the bowling and field placing and there were more changes in the field than in the process to get the 2012 Olympic emblem. Bar were quite rightly panicking as West Herts 50 came up in just 58 balls and Neal Parlane completed a quite brilliant, almost breathtaking 50 in 23 balls. In his 53 he struck 8 fours and 2 sixes but as brilliant his innings was, and believe you me I've not seen batting like that for a very long time, the way he got out was bordering on criminal.

Paul Barker floated up another delivery, a touch slower, bit more loop and Parlane drilled a catch to mid off which 'Edward Bucket Hands' Kash Weeraratne held onto. So it was 72 for 1 in the 10th over. Five balls later it was 72 for 2 as Gulson again picked out Kash Weeraratne this time off Paul McGee and when the ex-Leicester pro Steve Clark, off the back of a league 100 the day before tamely lofted McGee to a waiting Len Cooper at mid-off the game was well and truly in the balance at 3 for 81 and still the fielding restrictions were in place.

With the spinners working their magic and the fielding intense, the game was starting to slowly tilt towards the hosts. Batting now was Matt Smith and ex-Herts opener Spencer Fan who has been struggling for runs like Freddie Starr has been for TV work. Fan it was who went for 11 as he was brilliantly stumped by Guy Thatcher, a piece of work that for me won the game. Still though Matt Smith, the West Herts skipper was batting well but there was a stranglehold on the visitors. The three pronged spin attack and to a man they bowled with great control and posed numerous threats though and with the rate raising the pressure almost the infamous sleeper hold was being applied.

The prized wicket of Matt Smith came as Paul McGee yorked himself for 38 and with that the backbone of them had been broken. Soon after Shaun Farrell was clean bowled by Nesan Jeyaratnam for 1 and Craig Sanders was talked out by Jeff Hackett who wanted to see him smack it up in the air. He duly did and although Matt Webb nearly completed a Mexican wave, he held a vital catch to leave West Herts all but down and out at 7 for 147.

Kie Farrell and lost Dan Grahame bowled by skipper Len Cooper for 4 and then at 164 Farrell perished as he offered a catch to Jared Norman at long on off of the bowling of Paul Barker for 31. When Jared Norman clawed in a fine catch off of Kash Weeraratne the game was over, the last 4 place had been secured and the chance of a 'cricketing double' was still on.

For West Herts, they for me threw it away. 72 for 0 in the 10th over was the best platform anyone could have wished for. The hosts were panicking but a poor choice of shot from the professional who is better than that was the beginning of the end. What was nice was like as always is with the West Herts boys they win and lose with good grace. I am sure there are lessons for some in that.

So the boys now play Knebworth at home on August 19 in the Semi Finals. I am sure there will be a massive crowd to come and watch a game which we will start quite rightly so favourites but Knebworth have some very, very good players and we write them off or underestimate them at our peril. Winner takes all and this will be a fine game to witness, even better to play in.

Next week sees the 1s in league action at local rivals North Mymms. Thanks to Herts County Cricket Club having trouble locating their *tergum* from their *cubitum*, they have requested all

county players leave the ground in time to get a 7-20 train from Stevenage to allow them to get to Jesmond. They have asked for early starts but no confirmation, not written to the league to ask them, just left it to the captains. As Lenny has been selected Andy Lewis, Herts County Captain has even had the ghouls to request that Lenny leaves the game an hour early. Rubbish Sir! This is league cricket not a Bank Holiday Monday game against Old Turd on the Wicket. Now gentlemen of Herts County administration I think the players themselves deserve a little better and the clubs who supply the players deserve a little better don't you?

Anyway the 1s travel to Mymms hoping to keep the pressure on West Herts who travel to Hemel and Welwyn although 15 points behind us are far from out of it entertain Sawbo in a no love lost encounter.

Greg Hodge's boys who sit in 5th now have to do without the services of Adjitka Mehta, entertain second place Berkhamstead in a game that will really test the boys as Berko came down last year and are making a really good fist of returning back to Division One at the first attempt.

The 3s now start their hideous run of fixtures against the sides from the top of the league as they take on Southgate Compton who sit nicely in 5th. The 4s have a top of the table battle as they travel to runaway leaders Ickleford 2s and the 5s entertain 3rd place Hatfield where a win will guarantee them promotion.

Finally, as my fingers are starting to bleed, hats off to Paul Barker's U-11 side, who've gone through the games this season like last night's pizza and won them all and have a game in the final allegedly at Teddington where they will play the legends from Ealing or East Sheen. Hopefully the boys will do themselves proud although due to County Call-ups and tours we may be a little short on the ground but my best wishes goes to Paul and his team and I am sure whoever walks out onto the field, they will do him and the whole club proud.

So until next time, have a good week, the future is bright, the futures Potters Bar

Regards
Fred