

BAR BEATEN BY READING BUT SCRAPE THROUGH IN THE NATIONAL

Saturday

Potters Bar 178 for 8 off 45 overs

Reading 180 for 3 in 37.1 overs

After the aches and pains of the opening week had subsided, it was soon time for Potters Bar to put on the whites and step up their pre-season fixtures in a testing but no doubt worthwhile run out. Saturday saw the impressive Reading come to the Walk and without our overseas men yet to arrive, the boys were always going to find it tough against a near full strength eleven from the HCPL Premier Division.

After winning the toss, Mike Palmer, standing in for Lenny Cooper who was delayed, took the opportunity to bat first on a damp pitch that would expect to turn in the second innings and to be honest, if we as a club are going down the 3-spinners role then this is simply what we have to do more often than not this season.

After a bright start it wasn't long before Bar started to struggle and lost openers Jared Norman (9) and Mike Palmer (13) with the score still on 35 as the Premier League side looked to impose themselves on the Bars batters. Things went from bad to worse as Dean Dass starting his first game of the season played with soft hands, defended the ball only to see it roll agonisingly onto his off stump and just manage to displace the bail. 3 for 40 brought Ollie Coughlan and Nesan Jeyaratnam to the crease and they slowly started to nudge the ball around and swiftly put on an impressive 50-run stand in under an hour after facing 107 deliveries.

This was the second successive week that Ollie Coughlan had made a good start to his season and he followed up his 54 against Letchworth with a well made 42 and in Nesan's first match of the season he struck 6 fours in a nice innings of 38. However both fell in relatively quick fashion and after being 117 for 3, we were back in trouble again at 130 for 5.

After a breezy 13 from skipper Len Cooper and another dogged 20* from Matt Evans Bar had set the visitors 179 for victory on a wicket that was starting to spin and with 3 spinners in their ranks the game was certainly in the balance.

Reading's reply was starting to look ominous as Barnes and Cook (son of ex-Northants and South Africa Jimmy) got hold of the Bar attack but this was quickly checked as the prolific run scorer Barnes was caught behind by Dean Dass off of Lenny Cooper whose opening spell was bang on the button. However Cook powered on and although losing Greyvenstein and the dreadfully slow Kang (9 in 41 balls) he easily notched up his maiden UK century in just 110 balls as he proved just too good for the Bar.

Reading cantered to victory with 7 wickets in hand and 47 balls left but it wasn't all doom and gloom for the Bars battered attack. Paul Barker bowled beautifully and his 9 overs went for just a measly 13 runs whilst picking up 2 scalps into the bargain. Lenny Cooper bowled with some good 'wheels' and until his last three balls of his first spell, his rhythm looked good and he posed problems for Cook especially who looks the sort of player that doesn't like to be tied down. As for the rest, all I will say is that the boys needed the workout and at the end of the day these games are just a build up to the league season and nothing else.

Sunday

Cockfosters 129 for 9 in 45 overs

Potters Bar 130 for 5 off 38.5 overs

So Bar scraped through into Round 2 of the National to face the imposing Winchmore Hill at the Walk on May 14 with an itchy-bitsy performance against their Division 3 opponents who ran them all the way in an enthralling contest.

Cockfosters won the toss and batted first on a damp surface that was used the previous day and after 14 balls I wondered just how long this contest would last as the scoreboard remarkably read Cockfosters 0 for 3. Greg Hodge bowled one of the balls of the season as he left the opener standing with his pad allegedly covering his stumps only to see his off peg flattened. This was backed up by Michael John bowling some fine deliveries, one clipping the top of off stump and soon having a smart slip catch taken by Jared Norman.

However Cockfosters started to take advantage of the attacking fields they soon motored past 50 but as the attacking shots started to slow up so did the rate and Bar stangled the life out of the visitors and allowed Cockfosters to make 129 for 9 off of their 45 over allocation. Of the bowlers, all bowled relatively tightly. Lenny Cooper 1 for 8 off 7 and Paul McGee 3 for 19 off of his 9 overs probably rightly took the plaudits, but Nesan Jeyaratnam bowled far better than the previous day, but still needs to find a rhythm and that will only come with bowling overs and a couple of good net sessions. Michael John showed he is in fine form and will prove a major headache for Dave Pett in the 2nd eleven and Mark Taylor bowled his 9 overs with relatively little problems.

So 130 to win in 45 overs should have proved a cakewalk but Cockfosters came out in a positive mindset and in Mark Stead they have a real talent and at just 16 years of age, he will play the game at a far better standard than he is currently plying his trade. He did Jared Norman for a touch of pace second ball up and bowled a pearler of a delivery to Ian Henderson who had no answer to the pace and exaggerated movement and after just 1 over of our reply we were 2 for 2 and it was certainly game on.

Worse was to follow as Nesan Jeyaratnam was fending off a ball that flew off a length which he did well to glove, alas went straight to the keeper and the Bar were 3 for 20 and the 130 target seemed a million miles away. The best thing was the 9 over restriction and the proof of the pudding for the unfancied visitors was going to be just how good their back-up bowling was.

With John Erroll batting for the first time since August and the ever reliable Mike Palmer at the wicket it needed some major occupation of the crease and they certainly did that. They slowly started to nudge and nurdle their way to the target and the 50 partnership came up in 96 balls and 56 minutes but with the score on 77, bar lost Erroll for a patient 26 off of 82 balls and Palmer went for 29 with the target still 48 runs away.

This brought Mark Taylor to the crease to join skipper Lenny Cooper and despite surviving a massive caught behind on just 4 which in all truth appeared 'out' Sir George survived and clubbed his way to a match winning 38 not out in 38 balls. This was without doubt, the best innings I've seen Mark play for a good long year and he will hopefully be the first to admit he didn't do the business with the bat last year and he must know he is the best all-round player Dave Pett has at his disposal and with a bit of belief, this will be the catalyst for Mark to step up to the plate, batting wise and dominate games like he did on Sunday.

Talking of the 2s they took on fellow League 2 side Leverstock Green in a friendly and they were not surprisingly on the wrong end of a beating. With just 5 or 6 2nd eleven regulars, Leverstock Green plundered 232 for 5 off of their 45 overs and only John Pett's 67 made the scores respectable with the boys losing out by some 68 runs.

A couple of things before I wrap up for another ramble: -

Firstly we welcome Kashuayla Weeraratne and Scott Fraser who arrive on the country on Thursday. There is a planned get together to welcome the boys in the club on Thursday night and although we have gone into the merits of 'Kash' both on here and in the Bar over copious amounts of your chosen poison but not a lot is known of Scott.

He was a member of Sparta cricket club in Holland last year and averaged 75 from some 16 matches and this can only be commended – how good the standard of cricket is in the Dutch league little is known, but an average of 75 over a season is no mean achievement but it will be just how quickly both Kash and Scott nestle into the club ways at PBCC and I'm sure I can speak for everyone by saying the sooner the better.

Next week sees the start of the league seasons for the 2nd XI through to the 5th XI and may I be the first to wish them all the best for their league starts.

Dave Pett takes a strong side over to Abbots Langley, which for me is a very tough start and this Division all depends on just how many have decent overseas players there are in the league and a good start is essential. The 3s with Vincent Lombardi (sorry Dave Rock – sorry that report was hideous matey) travel to Totteridge, who beat them last year in a tight affair. The 4s entertain Met Police Bushey 2 and the 5's start of their campaign with a long trip to Reed.

As for the 1's we see a debut for both Weeraratne and Fraser as we entertain Wembley in a friendly on Saturday before making the trip to Winchmore Hill in the first of a double header, only this time in the first round of the Evening Standard Trophy. This is going to be a really hard task for the boys but as the Minor Counties have fixtures along with the no overseas players allowed we may not be as far behind the 9-ball as the draw suggests. But lets make no bones, this will be one hell of a hard test but one we really have to give the full gun to.

If we perform to our optimum and fall short but we run the illustrious hosts close then we have nothing to fear from the likes of Stevenage, Radlett, Hertford, Hoddesdon and even our friends up the road at Welwyn. If we bow out of the cup with a whimper, don't compete and don't make the good players struggle and work for everything then its going to be a long season and this is the best draw for a bit of self belief and testing our talents against some of the best in the county.

Finally and yes, finally, for anyone who was not aware, we came a resounding top in the facilities and ground reports for the HCPL Division 2 last year, with the clubs hospitality coming out head and shoulders above everyone in our division. In fact out of the whole league structure we came 6th out of 30 and considering some of the pristine grounds in the competition that's an amazing achievement and hats must be tipped at a jaunty angle to the Dave Lawrence who does a simply amazing job on the wicket and the outfield, Mrs Ready and everyone that helps in whatever way to make both the opposition players, officials, scorers and umpires enjoy their day whilst at Potters Bar CC.

Until next time have a good week and remember the futures bright, the futures Potters Bar

Regards
Fred