

BAR COME BACK FROM THE DEAD TO BECOME CHAMPIONS

Saturday

Potters Bar 225 for 8 in 60 overs

Bishops Stortford 93 all out in 24.1 overs

Potters Bar came back from the dead to beat current 2nd place side Bishops Stortford to become HCPL Division 2 East champions for the second time.

With a 23-point lead going into the game, skipper Len Cooper was unsure of what was actually the best course of action, whether to bat first and put a total on the board, or put the visitors in and attempt to chase down whatever they set them. The toss was won by Stortford, they asked Bar to bat first on a flat looking pitch but after the first 56 minutes Bar were for the first time since the old king was a boy made to look distinctly average.

Steve Gale and Chris Stead opened up against the bowling of Darren Whittingham and Kevin 'Banger' Walls and for long spells these bowlers literally made mincemeat of our illustrious 'free-scoring' top order.

Bar lost Chris Stead for 3 as he wafted meekly at a swinging delivery expertly guiding it straight into the gully for 3 and Bar were 9 for 1. Nine balls later Bar were 2 down as Lanka de Silva went caught at midwicket for an 8-ball duck and when Nick Walker was caught low down again in the gully for 5, Bar were 16 for 3 after 5.5 overs. Worse was to follow as Steve Gale jarred one low down to gully (again) and he went for 11 and Jared Norman went leg before for 4 and Bar were unbelievably 39 for 5 after just 14.2 overs and the visitors all over us like a rash.

However with many people questioning whether the boys were going to choke, you don't win 12 games out of 14 without good reason. Enter skipper Len Cooper who arguably batted the innings of his career, one of the best innings at club cricket level for sheer concentration and effort and a will not to throw it away.

As both Lenny and Adam Norman got in behind it, Bar started to slowly get the innings back on track and the effort and belief of Stortford was starting to slowly drain away. Why this occurred I haven't a clue as we were 5 down, they literally had us by the wotsits yet they took the foot off the accelerator and you cannot do this against good sides.

The pair brought up the Bar's 50 to somewhat muted applause but the batters for the first time in the day looked set. What Stortford didn't do was plug the runs and had they have had a third man then they would have saved during the entirety of the innings some 52 runs which in a lowish scoring game is pretty poor.

Still though the bad ball was going for four and the action of Glenn Querl was certainly providing some healthy debate as it clearly looked more Chucker Khan than Imran Khan. Upon a few checks Mr Querl has been cleared by the ECB and his action is deemed legal. Fair play but do those initials stand for the England & Wales Cricket Board or the English Cheese Board as to be honest it looked extremely iffy?

Bar started to look more and more comfortable and the 6th wicket partnership of Adam Norman and Lenny Cooper brought up their 50 partnership in 96 balls, courtesy of another edge through the slip cordon for four more runs. Sadly Adam went given out leg before, 89 for 6 brought in

Dave Breeze (6) and he and the skipper (21) took the score up to 95 for 6 from 34 overs in an enthralling morning's cricket. Bar still had batting left but needed to bat through the overs and try to get to 180 and then hope to put Stortford under some pressure second time around.

After lunch saw an opportunity for Len Cooper to up his scoring rate and along with Dave Breeze runs came relatively easily. Stortford crawled into a ball waiting for it to happen rather than being pro-active and Bar started to grow in belief. Len Cooper completed his second fifty of the season with a square drive to the boundary. His 50 came in 103 balls in 5 minutes shy of 2 hours. After surviving quite frankly the most embarrassing drop catch I've seen in any form of cricket, going from U9's through to the lowest form of any cricket, Dave Breeze went in a soft fashion caught at extra cover for 26 but had put on a vital 48 leaving Bar 7 for 147 but with 15 overs remaining.

Joining the skipper now was Salim Hussain who refused to give his wicket away by defending resolutely. Every so often Sal would literally throw the kitchen sink at it and on one occasion the ball almost ended in the new flats kitchen sink as he launched the ball miles for a towering pick and mix. As the innings neared the close Bar lost Sal Hussain for a sensible 38-ball 26 but by then the Stortford side were a very quiet team as they'd let us slip from 39 for 5 to 192 for 8 with 26 balls remaining.

The 200 came up in the 59th over with a scrambled leg bye which brought raucous cheers from the masses but the best was saved till last. With three balls remaining Bar were 207 for 8 and Len Cooper 79*. He ended in amazing style clearing the ropes for a straight six, and then depositing Lindop for two more maximums over deep midwicket to end 97* and Bar 225 for 8 from their 60 overs. Len's innings was as good as I've seen in many a year for sheer responsibility and carrying the boys through. 149 balls, 5 sixes and 10 fours in 2 minutes shy of 3 hours at the wicket were the meat on the bones.

So 226 to win and Stortford weren't going to die wondering. As early as the 6th ball of the innings Matt Surry appeared to slash not just edge the ball through to Lanka de Silva which was caught in front of second slip. Not Out said Umpire McMillan, to the utter disbelief of all concerned. In over two David Hughes hit Will van der Maat's one and only over for 13 and it was a good job that Umpire Perkins called a 5-ball over as it could have been worse.

However the ball was swinging more than a middle aged couple in Suburbia and wickets were soon tumbling. Surry was adjudged leg before for just 1 and then his slower ball accounted for David Hughes who smacked it straight to Nick Walker at extra cover for 24 and Stortford were 38 for 2 in just the 8th over.

Sal Hussain was now well and truly getting the ball to almost jump through hoops as he had Ballard clean bowled for 9 which made it 43 for 3 and the visitors were struggling. Glenn Querl came in and struck Sal for three lovely boundaries but Nick Walker clawed in and had him caught at first slip to make it 64 for 4 with the winning target some 162 more to win and the best batters all back "dans le hutch".

Sal completed his top 4 by having Luke Padgett caught in the gully by skipper Len Cooper to make it 68 for 5 and when import Darren Whittingham was taken in the gully by Sal Hussain for 8 to make it 74 for 6 and next ball it was 74 for 7 as Ruen Premadasa got a pearler from Nick Walker and now Bar could realistically call themselves the champions of the Division. On the cusp of tea Nick Walker took his 4th wicket of the innings as he had Lindop caught behind for 8 and it was now just a matter of how long it would be before Bar were crowned Champs.

After tea it took Bar 18 balls before Sal Hussain clean bowled Tom Bull for 2 and next ball, the start of the next over saw Anthony Brown edge behind off Nick Walker for 7 and Bar were crowned champions with a game to spare. Stortford had literally been swung out for 93 in under 25 overs, 5 balls quicker than the hapless Hertford were last week.

Of the wickets Nick Walker took 5 for 33 in which his last 29 balls saw him take 5 for 4. Sal Hussain who burst through the Stortford top 4 like last night's Madras took 5 for 38 and Bar had done it. The delights of playing the top level of cricket had been attained and rightfully so. To win 12 matches out of 14 completed games is a terrific achievement regardless of what the opposition is or were. For me there were many top moments in the season, but the highlight was the first ball duck of Neal Parlane at West Herts, caught by Dassy off of Nick and that for me was the champagne moment.

As for Stortford, on the day they could certainly say they had their chance. They bowled and fielded beautifully in the first hour but lost the intensity and the control and seemed happy to cruise and take wickets when and if they came. They are a talented young side and they will certainly have their day and if they can add 1 or 2 to what they already have then they will take all the beating next time around.

So Bar can look forward to taking on the likes of Henley, Oxford, Radlett and Welwyn Garden City and it will be an opportunity to play High Wycombe again, now that we are no longer a lower league team and maybe next time around we will have a full side out as we were unable to despite winning the game at a canter.

The good news continued on Saturday as the twos hammered Welwyn Garden City's second string at Digswell. Skipper Greg Hodge won the toss and batted and cor blimey strike a light Bar made 200+ for the second game running. Dean Dass made a fine 63 and there was a 70-run partnership between Matt Evans (38) and Dave Pett (30) who scored more runs in this knock than any of the previous 6 or 7 hits. After a typically belligerent start by ex-1s player Ed Tucker Bar accounted for him and then Mark Taylor put the squeeze on by bowling with a great deal of control.

The side from Welwyn were dismissed for just 91 as Sir George took 5-26, young Luke Owers nipped in with 3-17 and Chris Boyce who bowled bloody well by all accounts nipped in with a 2-for and should have deserved more.

The 3s slipped to defeat but look safe as they lost to promotion chasing Ware. The boys made 155 from 47 and the hosts chased them down for the loss of 6 wickets but 8 points isn't the worst return they could have got. The 4s suffered a heavy defeat at Championship chasing Bushey. The Watford based side made an imposing 238-8 from their allocation. The 4s in the end made 162 before perishing but safe in the knowledge they can't go up or down it's not that important in the greater scheme of things. The 5s slipped to another defeat, their 12th of the season as they lost to North Mymms 4s. Mymms made 216 for 6 from 39 overs and the 5s were dismissed for 142.

Next week sees the final league games of the season where the Champions (that does sound bloody good) travel to Harpenden knowing a win or a good draw will break the points record for the HCPL Division 2 East. Harpenden escaped with a draw at The Walk and Bar will be looking to make it 13 wins from 15 completed matches.

The 2s entertain Hatfield where a win will keep them right in the middle of the table and give them an improvement in number of wins for the second successive year. The 3s and 4s both travel to Old Comedians, sorry Camdenians. The 3s need 6 points to be safe for another season and 4s are already safe from the relegation trap door. As for the 5s only in Division 12 could you only go 16 weeks without a win and still have the slimmest of chances of survival. They travel to Flamstead to play their second string whereas if they can drag a win out of somewhere and Old Owens fail to beat mid-table Botany Bay then dear old Mike Sibley will be taking his laptop down to Division 13 to check on other clubs registration.

Other than that a wonderful, boozy weekend was had by one and all. To Len Cooper and everyone who contributed to the 1s success a very big congratulations and deservedly so.

That's it till next time but remember, the futures bright, the future is and always will be Potters Bar

Fred