

## UNPREPARED PITCH SEES BAR IN A SPIN

### Saturday

**Potters Bar 142 all out in 50.2 overs**

**Stevenage 145 for 3 in 26 overs**

Bar lose for the first time in the league and just the second time this season in 'competitive' cricket suffering a large 7 wicket defeat at the hands of Stevenage in a poor display at Ditchmore Lane.

With little to no work carried out on the pitch during the week, and an uncovered pitch through incessant rain on Friday night, the mornings monsoon only heightened the importance of winning the toss. Win it you win the game, lose it and your up a creek without a certain implement. Bar skipper Len Cooper called tails, heads was the answer and Bar were immediately behind the 9-ball.

So batting first Bar actually started in confident form on a wet pitch which would spin and spit at batters from almost ball one. Openers Steve Gale and Nesan Jeyaratnam confidently got after the new ball attack of Sikandar and the off-breaks of Dattani as they were comfortably scoring at 4 runs per over with little to alarm them.

The bowling change of Azhar Ali came after just 15 minutes as the 3 overs of medium pace from Sikandar was clearly not working and it was spin at both ends. With Bar going nicely, they lost their first wicket as Nesan Jeyaratnam was adjudged leg before for 28. 47 for 1 in the 13<sup>th</sup> over and hopes of setting 180 – 200 were still more than possible. However with Ali and Dattani starting to get more confidence Bar were starting to make the ball talk and runs dried to a crawl.

Still though, Bar were doing okay, but it wasn't to last. Steve Gale top edged an attempted slog sweep off of Ali for 29, Chris Stead gave catching practice to leg slip for 1 and when Lanka de Silva got a ball akin to a spitting cobra, Bar had gone from 70 for 1 to 73 for 4 in literally a blink of an eye. Sadly for the league leaders it got worse as skipper Len Cooper hit a half volley straight to mid-off for 6 and at 85 for 5 things were starting to look grim.

At the wicket now were Adam and Jared Norman who made a welcome return to the fold after his sabbatical of house re-decoration and the two brothers got in behind it and it was clear to see the wicket was clearly not one that should be hosting a league game of this ilk. Balls were turning and bouncing at an alarming rate, most of the time the ball was actually doing too much.

Sadly when Adam Norman was looking arguably as settled as anyone had at the crease, he got a ball which pitched outside leg stump and hit the top of off stump so he'd gone for 21 and the out of luck Dave Breeze didn't last long as Ali-Kazmi got a ball which did as much as Adam Norman's ball which left the hard hitting middle order batsman shaking his head in utter disbelief. There was still 15 minutes before the lunchbreak, Bar were 111 for 7 and the ball was spinning, spitting off of a good length at an alarming rate. You wouldn't get this behaviour from a 5<sup>th</sup> day pitch let alone one that was less than 2 hours old!

Mike Palmer and Jared Norman took the score along to 120 for 7 off of 39 overs at the lunch break. If Bar could eek out another 40 or so we would have the slightest of sniffs, however the pitch was starting to change colour almost by the minute and it was only going to ease as they day progressed.

Bar started after lunch in a positive frame of mind but quickly lost Mike Palmer for 5 and then Luke Owers for a second ball duck as Azhar Ali and Syed Ali-Kazmi bowled beautifully, albeit on a wicket they would want to carry around with them every week.

This brought in Paul McGee and first ball he played an exquisite cover drive and must have wondered to himself what all the drama was over. Alas despite putting on 17, Jared Norman perished as he picked out long on, who didn't have to move and his innings of 22 from 69 balls was over. Bar were dismissed for the first time this season for 142 in a shade over 50 overs. So Stevenage had 59 overs to chase down 143 on a pitch which was still offering assistance wasn't as helpful as an hour or two before hand.

Stevenage set about the weakened Bar attack with gusto and in Tanweer Sikandar have a fine player. He took Luke Owers three overs for 20 as the youngster struggled to bowl one side of the wicket and at the other end was Herts opener Gary Brown who'd made 125 for Essex 2s in the week, hence the reason why the wicket was poor!

Bar did get a breakthrough as Gary Brown was caught bat pad for just 13 and at 35 for 1 Bar had a tiny chance but in truth we were never at the races and we were outplayed in every department by a talented team. Ashley Bayes joined Sikandar at the crease and the chances of re-living his crack on the helmet was nil. He played nicely but it was Sikandar who took all the plaudits as he dispatched the now totally demoralised Bar attack. He raced to a 49-ball 50, and the pairs 50 partnership came up in just 40 balls as Bar looked far from a championship chasing team.

With the home side careering to a comfortable win they farcically lost 2 late wickets as Sikandar went for a blow too many and he was bowled and Ahmed played an uncharacteristic slog which was well taken by Dave Breeze, both wickets taken by Nesan Jeyaratnam.

So Bar suffered a 7-wicket defeat, their first league loss of the season and the lead thanks to Bishops Stortford hammering North Mymms has been whittled down from 48 to 27 points in the space of 4 hours. We still have a commanding lead at the top of the tree but we still have an awful lot to do before we can start to prepare for promotion and if we bowl and field like we did at the weekend then we will have an extremely long wait.

One other interesting thing that came out of the game that there are now sadly 5 umpires in our section who are refusing to stand in any game that includes Sawbridgeworth, for one reason or another. We were due to have an umpire but then switched as one umpire was down to be doing Sawbo only to pull out and do another team, i.e. Stevenage v Potters Bar. This for my money is ridiculous on three scores.

- 1) The Umpires in question if they have a bad game and the criticism / report is done in the **correct manner** then they ought to be brave enough to face it.
- 2) Secondly, if they don't do a club who mark them down, this 'over inflates' their umpiring mark to what could be perceived as a false level.
- 3) If an Umpire has a problem with the way the report / complaint has been handled then he is well within his right to report the said individual (s). If that then isn't done then the problem will never be sorted out and the hassle increases.

This is by no means a one-way problem. If any club are out of order by the way Umpires are treated then they must also be taken to task but to bury your head in the sand and pass it off as 'one of those things' I believe is not right.

The 2s also had a bad, bad day at the office as they succumbed pretty weakly in truth to Cockfosters at The Walk. Bar restricted the Festers to 201 for 8 from 52 and-a-bit overs. Skipper Greg Hodge took 3 for 49 but they will again be ruing a drop catch when skipper O'Leary was 30 and ended up getting 85. Alas the boys must have been confident batting second time around on a good pitch. Alas they were shot out for 114 with Tommy Pett making 38 but there were a few who all got starts and couldn't last the pace as Addy Sheth, Tom Coughlan and Dan Brown all made double figures before they were dismissed.

Greater news however came from Stansted Abbots as the 3s completed their 4<sup>th</sup> win of the season with a 58 run win over St Margaretsbury 2s, a team who gave them a bit of a hard time this time last year. The 3s made 207 for 9 from their 53 over lot with a few guys chipping in with 30's. Michael John 36, Tommy Rowlands 34, Rob Daley 32 and a last wicket partnership of 30-odd between Rupert Pyrah and young Alex Whitehouse put a challenging total on the board. The young seamer then ripped out the 2 openers to leave the hosts 2 for 16 and then it was time for Rupert Pyrah to roll back the years with 5 for 50 and give the boys a much needed boost going into the last 2 months of the season.

Due to some quite frankly ridiculous weather at 9-30am which lasted a good half an hour, saw a monsoon put pay to the 4s and 5s getting any play as the ground was flooded and left both sides picking up 10 much needed points.

Next week sees a hopefully rejuvenated 1s side bolstered by as many as 3 players as they have a massive weekend of cricket ahead of them. The 1s entertain West Herts, a team who will be looking for retribution after we taught them a cricketing lesson earlier on in the season. Worryingly their star man Neale Parlane made 175 against Hemel Hempstead last weekend and has taken his tally to a run shy of 700 league runs. Considering our own Lanka de Silva is 120 behind him shows just how good this player is. As he was also out first ball in our first encounter he will be looking for a biggie so we will need to be at our best to stop him and the side from Watford.

Sunday sees the postponed Evening Standard last 16 tie against HCPL Premier League side High Wycombe at the Walk. All support would be greatly appreciated as we as a club have never been this far in the competition and to be honest until this season we'd never actually won a game in it. We are now just 3 wins away from a day out at the Oval. The winners of the tie travel on Sunday August 3 to Sunbury.

The 2s will be looking for a far more positive result as they travel to play Abbots Langley who currently sit stone cold bottom of Division 2 and with Hodgey's boys needing 30 points they wont have a better chance. Abbots have lost 8 out of 11 matches and have yet to register a win. The 3s fresh from their much needed tonic of a win travel again to pavilion-less Hatch End who other than having their pride and joy burned to the ground by a load of yobs (allegedly) are having a good run of results at the moment.

The 4s hopefully boosted by a better availability entertain mid-table North Mymms 3's in a local derby encounter and finally the 5s will be looking to get their first win since the days of The Sweeney and Crackerjack as they take on fellow whipping boys North Enfield 3s and hopefully, he says with fingers crossed, this be the start of a more fruitful final few games of the season.

Hopefully this time next week will see a more positive report so until next time have a good week and remember the futures bright, the futures Potters Bar

Regards  
Fred