

BAR SCRAPE A DRAW IN A BIZARRE GAME

Saturday

Potters Bar 225 for 5 off 60 overs

Hemel Hempstead 225 for 5 in 54 overs

Potters Bar still remain top of the HCPL Division 2 East with a nerve jangling draw at The Walk when with just 100 minutes left it looked a case of when rather than how lower mid-table Hemel Hempstead would win.

On a beautiful, scorching hot morning, Lenny Cooper won the toss on a wicket that had about as much interest in it for bowlers as the recent Big Brother series has for the Great British public. The start was positive as Nesan Jeyaratnam and Matt Webb took advantage of some adventurous fields to some distinctly average new ball bowling and it was in quick time that the 50 partnership was reached, 77 balls in truth and the writing was on the wall for Hemel who looked a shadow of the side that turned over West Herts the week before.

However, with the seamers not firing on all cylinders, skipper Giles Berry brought in Nick Hodgins into the attack and his slow left arm quickly halted the increasing run rate as Bar took the opportunity to sit in and evaluate whether the pitch had anything in it for the slower bowlers. In truth it didn't but Hodgins and the seam up from Alex Collman was accurate and gave little away.

Drinks came and went and the first ball after the break prompted the loss of Nesan Jeyaratnam for 28 clean bowled by Collman. 69 for 1 and this brought in Jared Norman to the wicket but this also brought an alarming barren spell of runs as Hemel started to strangle the hosts. Just 18 runs were scored in 12 overs and with the pressure mounting Matt Webb succumbed in soft fashion as he chipped to mid off and he went for 36 and Bar were now 88 for 2 with over half of their overs done and dusted.

Kash Weeraratne joined Jared at the wicket and saw it comfortably up until the lunch break but with the score at 99 for 2 Bar had a platform to push on but worryingly had just 25 overs to try and score 140-odd.

After lunch, still the pace was sedate. With still Kash and Jared looking to try and work the ball but for whatever reason it just wasn't happening. The ball wasn't turning, but at the same time it wasn't flying through either. The fielding was excellent until Bar started to turn the screw and up the tempo.

As the run rate started to increase a touch Bar lost the third wicket of the innings as Jared Norman was easily taken by Nick Hodgins off the now tiring Anderson for a 'patient' 41 off of 100 balls. It was most unlike Jared who was clearly struggling with a split webbing in this hand but this was not the fluent Jared from last week. 153 for 3 soon turned to 177 for 4 as the experiment of sending Sir George up the order to put bat to ball didn't work and with overs running out at an alarming rate it looked like 230 was the best score we could look to set Hemel.

However a frantic last 7 overs saw Hemel's fielding go to pot. There were drop catches, total and utter refusals, which at first eleven level should never happen. Thanks to these charitable efforts Kash brought up his 3rd 50 of the season off of 58 balls, which contained 7 fours.

At the other end skipper Lenny Cooper was rotating the strike and scoring at around a run a ball and this enabled Kashie to free his arms and let fly. The 200 came up in the 56th over but with 6 balls remaining of the innings Kash Weeraratne went for one big shot too many and perished caught at long off for a run a ball 73 in an innings that went onto to contain 10 fours and a trademark pick and mix.

The last over saw 5 runs come from it and Bar had set the mid-table visitors 226 to win in a minimum of 50 overs and with a side containing three slow bowlers, it was always going to be more than that.

The opening slow bowling attack of Paul McGee and Paul Barker were flying through the overs but in truth apart from stem the tide of runs, never really looked like breaking through. Paul McGee's 8 overs for 15 possibly deserved a longer run at things but the attack looked a bit 'samey' and it came as no surprise that the new ball was taken after 16 overs with the score stood on 43 for 0.

The new ball however quickened up the scoring rate as Hemel skipper Giles Barry batted out of his skin as Bar took little notice of lofted cover drives and didn't set the right fields and he sped to his 50 off of 78 balls and Bar were scratching their heads and the last over before tea, bowled by Matt Webb disappeared for 16 and Bar at tea looked a beaten team.

The boys heads were well and truly down, lower than a snakes belly and we were looking at a 3 point haul as Berry 66 and Ilangaratne 23 were well set and at tea with 100 minutes remaining the visitors were 98 for 0 needing just 128.

After tea, skipper Lenny Cooper not before time introduced himself into the attack and gave the batters more to think about and got a vital breakthrough as Berry was hit halfway up his pad, plumb in front and the skipper departed for a 112 ball 70 knowing the hard work had been done.

The fielding was lifted but still the wickets were proving harder to get than a ticket for an Ashes last day decider and Ricardo Mohamed started to look the fine player he is. His front foot strokeplay was effortless but Paul Barker enticed a drive too many and Nesan Jeyaratnam held a scud of a catch at mid-off and Hemel were now 147 for 2 off of 40 overs and there were still over an hour, 61 minutes to be exact, left for play.

Neil Morgan joined the now limpit like Ilangaratne at the wicket and for the first time the one time Bar target freed his arms and brought up his 50. It came off of 112 balls and contained 6 fours.

However as the fielding changes occurred the rate slowed and two successive maiden overs really started to put the pressure on. The hold over the batters cracked as Morgan hit well through the covers only to see a flying Nesan Jeyaratnam dive and hold a wonderful catch. 174 for 3 was soon 188 for 4 as Nick Hodgins picked out Paul McGee at deep point to give the skipper Len Cooper his third wicket.

Time was running out for Hemel and with the fall of the 4th wicket they still needed 38 from 13 minutes. The excitement grew but Hemel were not going hell for leather. Ilangaratne batted no differently as he did for the entirety of his innings and left it all to his partner Matt Potton. The Bar bowling and fielding had improved 10-fold since the tea break and they made the visitors scrap for every run.

With the clock on 7pm, Ilangeratne blocked the last 2 deliveries of the 53rd over and that should have been it. In truth it looked like Hemish had been told that the last over had been taken and he was batting for a red-inker. The time on yours truly's lap top was 7pm, meaning the match time was 2 minutes past 7pm. There should have been no more cricket. However the umps looked down the back of the sofa and found another over from somewhere.

So 18 runs were required from Paul Barker's 21st and final over.

First ball – a chip to deep point – 2 runs – 16 to win

Second ball – and towering six over mid on by Matt Potton – 10 to win

Third ball – a scampered single – 9 to win

Fourth ball – another six this time over cow corner just clearing Dave Breeze – 3 to win

Fifth ball – a scampered single – 2 to win

The time now 7-07pm (7.09pm match time) and the last ball. 2 to win. The ball was fired in at leg stump Potton clipped it out to the injured Gavin Baker at backward square leg where he for the first time in a good few overs thanks to a re-occurrence of his finger injury from last week, picked up and hurled it to keeper Guy Thatcher who ran Potton out by around a yard to ensure the scores remained level. That run out kept Bar top and gave them 4 points which in truth they deserved for their efforts after tea. Hemish Ilangeratne ended up 89* but in truth as good as his innings looks, I believe cost his team a win. i.e To bat 151 balls and end up 89* and not win the game.

So Bar are still top, the lead cut to just a point but Welwyn have to play both West Herts and Stevenage. It has to be remembered after the debacle at Bishops Stortford in late April, we would have bitten off peoples hands to be in this position with just 4 games remaining. For my two bob the boys have to stick together and keep trying to play positive cricket. We do that we play at Henley, Radlett, Slough and High Wycombe next season. If we don't, then it's hello to Langleybury. It really is as simple as that.

The 2s travelled to Northwood with a poor looking side and despite the efforts of skipper Greg Hodge to get the hosts to insert the boys and bowl us out cheaply they didn't and after being 65 for 5 the mid-table side managed to rack up 247 for 8 from their 53 overs. This was in the main to some questionable umpiring decisions and some pretty poor fielding by the boys. Only the skipper Greg Hodge came out with any credit taking 4 for 60-odd. The batting didn't go to play 6 for 38 at one stage but credit to Haydn Rogers for 45 and enabling the boys to leave some dignity in tact, being dismissed for 140.

The 3s manage to go from bad to worse as firstly they travelled to Preston with just 10 players. That should never happen in this day and age. They are staring relegation full in the face, the least they should be able to have is a full compliment of players. The 4s and 5s did and for my money it should always be the case that the 1s, come first, then the 2s, 3s and so on. The old layer cake scenario should always occur in club sports.

The boys managed to make 163 for 8 from the 53 overs. This was in the main thanks to Ben Scarisbrick's 33 although there were twenties from a few batters. However the Preston boys tapped them off for the loss of just 1 wicket and even then the Preston umpire took it upon himself to cuss the boys efforts. What happened to impartiality Sir?

The 4s managed a big win against Knebworth although it was squeaky bum time for the majority of the second innings. After dismissing the visitors for 130-odd, details are sketchy as the poker night had started, the boys crept home with just 3 wickets remaining. Well done to John Scutt, who made 45.

The 5s arguably have now missed out on the league as they succumbed to a 13 run loss to now top of the table Hitchin. The new leaders were dismissed for 141 with Graham Taylor 5-43 rolling back the years. The kick in the wickets was that the boys conceded a massive 48 extras which was the difference from being champions and runners-up. 142 was too many to chase and Bertie Anderson's 31 was not enough and we have to say well done to Hitchin as they took the final wicket with 128 on the board.

Next week sees the 1s travel to mid-table Millhillians and a nice local one for yours truly. The wicket is a road, the outfield large, well grassed and flat and looks a batsman's paradise and bowler's graveyard. We simply now have to go for broke and wins are the only result we have to go for. Draws now are not enough.

Sunday sees the Semi-Final of the Herts County Cup and a home draw against Knebworth Park who currently sit 3rd in Herts Division One.

The 2s have a home game against Ampthill who are just a place above and availability should be a little stronger than that of last week. Davie Pett would have returned back from his annual holiday to Tenerife and the two restaurants he frequents will be sad to see him leave and the sales of racks of lamb and tomato soup will drop dramatically.

The 3s take on the might of St Margaretsbury 2s who are the runaway leaders of Division 6. They have won 10 matches in 12 attempts. The 3s haven't won since the old king was a boy but cricket is a funny game.....or that's what Jeff Hackett was yelling at great regularity on Saturday whilst the boys were staring down the barrel in the Hemel game.

The 4s travel to play Abbots Langley 3s where a win will cement their place in the top 3 and put real pressure on Old Elizabethans who are hanging on in there in 4th place and finally 10 points will secure second place for Robert Anderson's 5th eleven and a chance to play Division 12 cricket next year and a possible game against Old Owens 3rd string.

So until next week here's hoping every one of the 55 players on show Saturday and the 11 on Sunday, whoever they may be give their all and we may see the 1s through to the County Final, still top of the tree, the 5s up, the 4s nearly there, the 2s back in the top 5 and the 3s crawling away from the trap door.

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

Regards
Fred