

RICK LUNN AND THE ART OF CAPTAINCY

By Paul Rai

Arguably the toughest job cricket has to offer is captaincy. Cricket teams live or die by their captains. Like a lieutenant or colonel at war, it's the captain's job to motivate and lead the troops onto the field of battle.

Armitage Bridge had a tough season in 2006, finishing rock bottom of their division. A change was required to get the 'Bridge' firing on all cylinders again and 25-year-old Rick Lunn was the man for the job. Lunn has all the credentials required of a modern-day captain. Youth is on his side; with youth come fresh, innovative ideas; and Lunn's cricket brain helps him command the respect he deserves. According to Lunn his occupation as a teacher helps him with the captaincy: 'Organisation, delegation and speaking to people in the right way. Treating people as individuals is essential to build a rapport'. A good captain knows how to treat his players in order to get the very best out of them.



Some players make the transition from playing to captaining in straightforward fashion. However, Lunn openly admits that it wasn't that easy for him. 'Having never captained before, it was difficult'. Injury to his back in pre-season prevented him from bowling to full capacity. This would have severely dented the confidence of other individuals; however, Lunn relished the challenge that lay ahead.

Captaincy can be a burden for many players as it tends to divert attention away from the fundamentals and basics of the game, like – for a batsman - playing each delivery on its merits. A captain's mind can stray when he's out in the middle as it is he who has a million and one thoughts running through his head. Lunn describes what it is like batting as a captain. 'In some games we really needed a captain's innings and I bottled it; I was thinking too much out in the middle'.

Lunn also recalled an occasion against Broad Oak. 'I faced four balls and looked like I had never batted, before, fortunately, we went on to win the game'. Despite the negatives of captaincy, there can also be positives. Captaincy offers an individual the chance to lead from the front and inspire his colleagues. When asked whether the captaincy had any positive effects on his personal performances, Lunn laughingly said: 'Yes – my best ever bowling figures of 4-31!'

There is a school of thought that says bowlers do not make good captains. Surprisingly, Lunn agrees: 'I'm a bowler by trade - it was easier captaining without having to bowl. I've always said bowlers shouldn't be captains. Being unable to bowl helped me focus on the captaincy'. The true test for Lunn will be when he is fully fit to bowl and captain at the same time.

Lunn can be extremely proud of his achievements as first-team captain at the 'Bridge'. In his debut season he helped turn the team's fortunes around and ABCC finished a more than respectable 5th in the league. Lunn highlights the entire squad's performance as the main contributory factor to a successful season, 'Nine or ten players scored a fifty and everyone chipped in and contributed. We wouldn't have finished 5th if it weren't for the contributions from everyone'. Some say a captain is only as good as his team; however, a good skipper can make a poor team good or a good team great.

In tight pressure situations when games are close it is the decisions made by a captain that can have a say on the outcome of a match. Lunn echoes this opinion. 'As a captain you can have a big impact on a game with bowling and fielding changes. Against Paddock at home they were going nowhere slowly on 50-4 in 35 overs; we had 200-plus on the board and we

needed all the points, so I crowded the bat and they didn't know what to do'. Another sign of a good captain is that he knows when to go in for the kill and knows when to hold back and contain the flow of runs.

Relationships with players can change once someone becomes captain. It is important for a skipper to recognise the requirements of his team and get the best out of them. A captain must make crucial decisions on and off the field. Selection can be an extremely tough task. Lunn says: 'The hardest thing I had to do was drop Mike Webb. He has been at the club for a long time and is a legend - he is a real club character'.



On the field, leaving a bowler on for too long can also lead to accusations of favouritism. Lunn explains the reason for leaving a bowler on for slightly longer than expected. 'It's the fast bowlers' union. When I'm taken off early as a bowler and I'm down at third man or fine leg, I think I should still be bowling. I like to give the bowler the opportunity and I'm backing him'. Lunn goes on to talk about the effect the captaincy has had on his relationships with players: 'The hardest thing is keeping everyone happy, trying not to favour friends and ignore others. It's also improved some relationships, because you have to speak to more people; you go up to people and say - I think this, what do think about this?'

Lunn has had the assistance of the first ever overseas professional to play for the 'Bridge' last season and Lunn took time to recognise the influence that the Pakistani professional had. 'It's a massive benefit, he lifts everybody. He brings your game along with hints and tips. He'll have ideas other people wouldn't'.

Rick Lunn has also played an integral part in the creation of a 'fining system' that has not only helped in raising nearly £140 but has also created a camaraderie and team spirit at the 'Bridge'. Lunn explains how the system works. 'The fining system has helped. There is a 50p fine for any slight little thing, misfield, dropped catch, duck, being an idiot, or even poor sledging'. This system has had a beneficial effect on the fielding, giving ABCC the edge in close matches.

A true test of his ability as captain will come in his second season, when he is able to bowl at full tilt. Lunn has already set targets for next season: 'It is not allowing it to regress; progression is the key. We will aim to finish 3rd or 4th and, on a personal note, I want to bowl more and bat better. As a team, if we enjoy it, the rest should all fit together'.

ABCC are a young side, filled with talent and a team spirit that will get them through the rough times. The season ahead has the potential to be a good one and Lunn is excited by the prospect. With the experience of a successful season as captain behind him, he will be even more qualified - which can only be a good thing for his club.