

“Nothing to Play For”

May: Not a Full Side Again

Whitley Bridge at Whitley Bridge CC, Eggborough

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| Casuals | 168 for 7 off 40 overs (Rob Hunter 49, Sam Wilkinson 77) |
| Whitley Bridge | 169 for 5 off 39 overs and 3 balls |

Mark Windale, the original skipper had a squash injury and Marc Davis was off playing golf, so The Casuals were two down. Adam Frost helped out as an occasional, and Sam Stier came in off the long term sick list. Being below par was becoming an unfortunate Casuals' habit. Its a long trip along the M62, nearly to Goole, to start with a disadvantage.

Sam Wilkinson came in as skipper, chosen by Greg, the chairman, the man it is difficult to say no to. One can only hope Mark had done the spadework getting the side together. Sam won the toss and said we'd bat. Following consultation, Rupert and I agreed to open. As I got ready I realised I'd packed my son's cricket trousers. Taut and compact would be a fair description and I wear red lycra cycling shorts as sports underwear. The result was rather fetching, to the delight of one elderly gentleman sat on the boundary. Thankfully it simply amused my teammates.

As Rupert and I are not members of cricket's sharp-shooting fraternity, The Casuals' campaign got underway slowly and doggedly. The partnership was eventually broken in the 11th over, when I was bowled off my legs. 18 runs had been scored. Rupe followed in the 16th over and the Casuals were 37 for 2.

If the opening exchanges were a siege, the next phase of the campaign was all out attack. During the subsequent 18 overs, Rob Hunter and Sam Wilkinson put on 116 runs at slightly more than 6 and over. For once, Rob played the support role whilst his partner put the bowling to the sword. 56 of his 77 runs were boundaries, four of which were huge hits, straight into the private domestic gardens at deep square leg. This series of maximum scores raised the alarm for the elderly gentleman on boundary, mostly about the cost of lost balls and damaged roof slates. Sam's style changed when he passed 50. The boundaries were replaced by deft touches for ones and twos and in the 70's he visibly tired. Eventually he was bowled for 77, leaving a straight one.

The innings' remaining five overs were an anti-climax, the score moving from 154 to 168 with the loss of a further 4 wickets, including unfortunately, Adam Frost the occasional, caught at short fine leg making his debut.

Following a light tea of sandwiches and cakes I enquired politely whether the wicket keeping position remained vacant, or whether one of the opposition was pencilled in for the task. Sam generously acknowledged the omission and, despite my sarcasm, wondered if I would be available. I walked straight to the wicket ignoring the attentions of the elderly gentleman on the boundary.

The Whitley Bridge innings was similar to The Casuals. Two principle performers prospered, supported by innocent youth who will have their best knocks ahead of them. As Sam had declined a kind offer of help from the opposition, our fielding was understrength and here was the difference between the two sides. The captain's requests for changes in the field came thick and fast and he rotated the bowlers regularly.

'Keep loose, Bill your on next.' 'Adam, this end next over, do some stretching.'

Stier notably was eager with deceptive pace at deep third man and showed enterprise when fielding with his right knee. Rupe was most accomodating when he was invited to regain his original post, having strayed from the breeze blocks. He willingly moved the three inches needed. Harris was inventive as always, often turning his back to the ball as he extended his left arm. His coiffure this week was augmented by the dark shadow of chin stubble. Were he to be auditioned for the role of snooker ball, he could play pink, white and black all at the same time. Throughout these fielding exertions, the captain was fulsome with praise and gentle in reproach.

Two catches were put down, a caught and bowled by Rupe and one to the captain at wide mid-off. Both were waist high and slightly to their left and both seemed to be safely apprehended, yet they escaped. Rupe, as usual, was mortified. Its his eyesight.

Sam bought us all a pint after the game. We'd lost but we'd tried hard and sometimes played well. At the autumn committee meeting, treasurer Marcus asked, 'Why are there never any match subs when Sam Wilkinson is skipper?'

Sam Stier has returned to the sick list. Adam Frost briefly became a full member, but then moved to Cheshire and joined the occasionals. I've not seen him since.

No e-mails this week. No need. On the way to Eggborough, Rupert gave me a tutorial in my car. About the incorrect use of the apostrophe and the scandalous habit of substituting the word fewer by less. It was all a question of standards he said. I thought he was joking. He wasn't.