

Speech given at Almondbury Wesleyan CC Annual Dinner & Prizegiving, November 11th 2004

Mr Kilcline [Guest Speaker], Mr Chairman, Mrs Chairman, Ladies & Gentlemen, Boys & Girls, Fellow Cricketers and...Chris Jones -

I have a few words to say to you all & only 1 word for Chris: WAIT.

For the rest of you I will be simple (I know you well enough by now...)

Let me explain. Bretton CC is the only other batting wicket in Section A.

For the last game, after a good season with the bat I went there anticipating a few runs - I needed only 17 to exceed my 2003 total: personal goals can be helpful. 17 would be good, but secretly you want 50, so you dream of getting 50 and then why not dream of more...

Chris hit the first ball to midwicket: end of total, and end of my dreams. My first duck in 3 years, a big fat duck I can still taste. So the reason I say "Wait" to Chris - as the 52 regulars who played in the 1st XI this season will know - at Bretton in the last game I was run out for nought - zero - nothing - nil - nix - *niente* - *nada* - *rien* - for fuck-all...without facing a ball.

It was a good lesson: don't bat with Chris Jones.

No: once you move from hope to expectation, life has a way of hitting you in the box, when you haven't got a box.

But am I bitter?

Is the *Pope* French?

Yes! And, then - *eventually* - no. Because after I got out of the way in that innings, and after I had stomped, slouched and finally strolled round the boundary and could watch Tom Binns, Sam Scott and then Gurman Randhawa, who are 16, 14 and 12 respectively, play 1st Team cricket - and better than me at 12 or now - and I could watch Dave Pickett be absolutely determined not to lose, even in the dark.

...

Let's go back a little. *Picture the scene...*

11-12 on a May morning. It's rained. Now cloudlets high in a blue sky. Way down over there wisps of smoke are rising from the ruins of a Deighton Friday night. You go down to the Wes where the happy groundsman (Raymond to his friend) is there, hammering in "Keep off the grass" signs or on his roller singing. He waves you over excitedly: Come and talk to me, John. And probably Mark Binns is there, Club Chairman, who hardly plays now & not from choice - but he's making sure others can, and probably Andrew Crawshaw is there, to-ing and fro-ing with boxes of penny sweets (he can't get enough) or alcohol (he's getting help), or the paraphernalia of fundraising, or he's going to Hoover the place because there was a do the night before; or possibly Jonathan Harding is there in his own time to fix or check the system is up and running for hot water and heat later. Alan Stanger is racing across the verandah with a mobile at his ear. And all yours truly is doing is making sure he can play cricket that afternoon.

Picture the scene...

4.30 or 5 on match day. 22 men & boys are enjoying themselves ("enjoy" is perhaps too strong) on the field. Inside the pavilion, Julie Stanger or Helen or Sue & Mark Binns in a pinny, or Sarah Jones and Irving - who's seventy and like his son-in-law (Chris Jones) has never played cricket - or Julia Netherwood or Jane Shaw, or even Ted and Molly, who are only just able to stand up - or it could be two people I don't even know - are putting together a tea that's better than what you'll get at home, and the pavilion is immaculate and there are children buzzing about and Julie's sister, who does not play or get paid is serving drinks and young Mark, who can't play, is selling raffle tickets, and elderly Vice-president and former player, Ernest, is smiling kindly on the continuity of it all, and Alan Stanger is running around some other field with a mobile...

...while yours truly is on the field thinking only about cricket, or more likely, waiting for his tea.

Picture the scene...

It is 6.15 on a Thursday evening: the Wes car park is full; the field isn't green - it's the colour of small children. There are hundreds scuttling about, and in the middle, like a bug overtaken by hungry ants, there's John Cowan, Ian Hales or Neil Shaw, or Alan Fletcher, Tim Wadsworth, Paul Wagstaff, Ollie Bowers, Tom Binns - or sundry other people I can't name. They are all bringing on the next generation with the patience of saints.

Inside, Ted or Molly or someone else is serving sweets, squash and cups of tea, and around the edge, Steve, a non-cricketer, is cutting grass because he likes to be busy, and James Crawshaw, who doesn't play or understand cricket, (so he's scorer) is cutting grass or burning hedges (because he doesn't have a girlfriend). And Alan Stanger is jogging round the field with a mobile at his ear...

..... and yours truly is getting his kit out so that he can practise - little kiddies like roadkill hedgehogs as he plants his size 11s towards the nets. (Mind you, one Thursday a parent did ask indignantly "What are you doing here?" It was a good question.)

Picture the scene...

Towards 8pm on a rainy Wednesday night in January, when cricket is an imaginary game played in an imaginary summer, a dozen men and probably a woman or two (a Hales or a Stanger almost certainly) are sitting in chapel-like rows clutching agendas and the Club Secretary, Keith (who doesn't play because, let's face it, he's too damn lazy) - is holding forth, or the Chairman is almost certainly holding fifth, and several others who no longer play are here to make sure the water runs, the electricity is paid, the cupboard is stocked, the sceptic tank is emptied (not personally I hope), the field is improved, a fence is put up, an advance is made. And Alan Stanger has run out into the car park to take a call...

...and yours truly is eating chips and almost listening and wondering if he'll get home in time to see the second half of the Champions League.

Picture the scene...

9 on a cold, dark November night and 80-odd people are gathered together, far from a May morning: players, wives, significant others, the Chairman and others who make it happen - who decided the good things we should eat and Andrew who dragged this guy [Brian Kilcline] off the street with the promise of penny sweets (Brian, didn't your mum warn you of funny men like him?) -

and all you others whom I probably don't even know, who have come out to lend their support, goodwill and friendship to a club -

- and all yours truly is doing is standing up here to get his attention

- and everybody is united by a love of cricket (and drink)

- and going *against the times*, with the sport in decline - but NOT at the Wes.

- Because Almondbury Wesleyan C.C. has not a few but a considerable number of remarkable people. All clubs have and need some, but this one has more than anywhere I've played.

I can play cricket, but there are people in this room who can do a hundred things that I can't do - and they keep on doing them, whereas I put on my whites and feel very fine and think about batting (or even bowling, Jonathan...) and I can't do that without these people working away behind.

"Nomads" like me are not responsible. We're always looking for greener grass. But it doesn't come any greener than that May morning as you drive into the Wes.

Since, in May 2005 I probably won't be there, I'm saying THANK YOU to all of you...

...But I'm also saying BE CAREFUL. Look after it: make sure the 1st and the 2nd team are one and the same; that Juniors and Seniors are one and the same; that the Committee and the players, and those who freely give time, energy & cash are *one and the same* and appreciated.

Lastly, to the Committee: remember it IS just a GAME - played for fun and (to wives and girlfriends) actually one of the *better* things men do with their time and energy.

So, to conclude:

Chris ran me out, but what Chris does is in the long run more valuable than what yours truly does. If someone asked me to go from long-leg to long-leg or bat at no.1 this week and no.10 next, I'd probably tell them to go and have sex somewhere else - Chris didn't - he even agreed with it, and I salute him for that. And if he drops the next catch (he may or may not) he will not give up trying, and will still go home and produce the next newsletter in his own time.

This is a remarkable club, and long may it reign: until the new pavilion starts to crumble in its turn, and more remarkable people plan its replacement and if cricket is still being played then, then the world won't yet have gone entirely to hell.

So, ladies and gentlemen, a toast:

We are special. We are different. We are unique. We are The Wes.

John Taylor, Club Captain, Almondbury Wesleyan CC 2004