

BLEDLow RIDGE CRICKET CLUB

Meadow Styles Sports Ground, Chinnor Road, Bledlow Ridge



Club Captain's Report to the Annual General Meeting 2020

The 2nd XI finished joint fourth in Division 9 and the 1st XI, fifth in Division 5.

Although this does not appear spectacular the season should be considered successful in many respects.

The 2nd XI expressed hopes of promotion before the start of the season, however the Division proved strong, so ten victories was a fine achievement and was the team's best season for a number of years.

This was largely due to an experienced core of senior players which allowed others, particularly some younger players, to flourish and have their moments in the sun. Ian Murdoch's 30 wickets at 11.23 led the way and if feedback from opposing clubs is anything to go by, he has extended his well-deserved reputation for miserliness way beyond the boundaries of Meadow Styles. He was supported by Shaun Dryden and Sufyan Ahmed whose 18 wickets apiece and whose youth gives cause for optimism for the future. Shakey and David Saint took 21 wickets combined without the benefit of youth, and opportunities to bowl were given to players from the Junior U13 team who will inevitably progress year-by-year.

Less easy to explain is the battle for supremacy in the batting averages where The Real Saint pipped the miserly Scotsman in the final over of the final match. To win a division however, a side needs more than two regular players averaging in the mid-20s+ and while nine regulars made individual scores of 35 or more, more consistency would make a difference. The team missed Farhan's runs (through unavailability) and his potential to play 1st XI cricket. On a very positive note, several players who also played regular 1st XI cricket turned out on a number of occasions and performed to a high standard, led by Mlidsy's 118 v Cropedy.

For the second consecutive year, the club did not have to forfeit a match thanks to good availability and the promptings of a few. With even better overall availability through the club the 2nd XI could genuinely compete for promotion.

The 1st XI was not far off the promotion race. The bowling unit was strong and eight players took over 10 wickets of which Mark Dakin was again outstanding with 39 at 13 despite an ankle that became especially painful towards the end of the season. Messrs Brightwell, Gillett, Jai Angell, Cooperman and Junaid either took wickets or bowled economically or both, however the absence of a frontline slow bowler and therefore lack of variation – assuming Jai will be moving to new pastures - is a weakness that is hard to rectify.

In this respect Hamsah's emergence as a slow left-armer with 12 wickets at 12.42 was as revelatory as his departure from the club in June was disappointing. With his departure the team also lost his occasionally devastating opening batting and although the skipper took over this role late in the season it is fair to suggest that had Hamsah stayed with us, promotion would have been a strong possibility.

The batting was strong again with Steve Bird topping the averages with 47.20 and there were three centuries topping many good individual scores. One of these was made by Alex Perry whose arrival at the club as batsman-keeper was a remarkable piece of good fortune given the departure of his noisy predecessor to Spain. Both he and Phil Brooks averaged 35+ and each took 14 catches.

Indeed a feature of the season was the arrival of new players in Alex, Hugo and Waqar, the return of some good former players on a fairly regular basis such as Middsy (who played at the end of 2018), Dave Wells and Geoff Tombs and on an occasional basis, George Grose, Morf and Matt Campbell. Significantly, players such as Cooperman and Carlton were available for much of a season for the first time.

The prospects for the 2nd XI next year will depend very much, on the 1st XI. The 1sts bowling may come under pressure with Cooperman's likely departure up north, probably less cricket from Hollywood (aka Matt Brightwell), and with Dakes' ankle always at risk. Ben Hillary with his ability to get people out, may have a significant role to play next year.

Of greatest importance of all as we look to 2020 will be the existence of an Under 15 team for the first time in recent history (or ever). The future of the club will depend on their development, how we integrate them into senior cricket, the opportunities they are given and how they grasp them. In this respect Jovan as their coach has a very important role in the club.

Robin Baker's work as groundsman has been another slice of good luck and while the character of a square cannot be changed overnight, and our wickets remain predominantly slow, they generally offer the bowlers more bounce than in the past while rewarding batsmen who get their heads down. The rate of change could be increased with further investment in machinery, however the sums needed are not insignificant and compete with the other demands for resources that typify a small club.

We have been very fortunate in having Graham Hillary umpiring most games for the 1s with Mark Neal standing in when Graham is unavailable. The club however needs to uncover more umpires not only as cover for the 1st XI but to make life easier for senior members of the 2nd XI on whose shoulders umpiring, scoring, providing teas and providing transport, fall quite heavily. The 1st XI needs to provide a scorer more often too and not rely on the opposition to do so. In this regard, suggestions and volunteers are always welcome. It is to be hoped that parents of young 2nd XI players can be persuaded to help as junior players make the transition.

Overall the club is in a good position but cannot afford to be complacent as 2020 will bring new challenges. New players, young and older are always needed. Two highly successful Sunday matches were played last year and these are ideal ways of bringing young players through. More fixtures could be found if we could be sure of players to run them.

Indoor nets start on Sunday 16th February and will run for seven weeks until the end of March. They will be from 9am to 10.30am each morning; outdoor nets are likely to commence on Tuesday 7th April.