

Dashing Doug strikes winning runs after Gritty matchwinning performance by Schnifph

Cigarette industry receives timely boost.

(Advertisement: RolfeDog loses Ridge cap – has anyone picked it up?)

Cumnor 3s 131 ao (28 ov + 12 ov stuck in Traffic Jam))
BRCC 2s 133-3 (19.5 ov)

Won by 7 wickets

No Malcolm, no Shakey and no David Maunder but *still* plenty to write about here. This game had *everything*: Fags, Taggart and rain; give Captain McTaggart a ciggy, mix with water and stand well back... and wait for Sniff to arrive with a barrowload of topsoil.

Scot arrived first and had a fag. Malik was lectured on not leaving butt-ends on the square. Taggart, still smarting from an exchange of emails with the League following the rain-affected 8.20pm finish at Bicester and North Oxford took huge drags once he learned Cumnor were stuck in a traffic Jam and due to be 12 overs late, or the equivalent of 12 ciggies at 3.5 minutes a fag. He was soon on fire: a fire that could only be put out by torrential rain... or topsoil.

As a stickler for timekeeping and for the rules, McTaggart pored over the handbook and claimed the toss by default. After lengthy coaching from Doug and Baz on how to say "*We'll bowl, you'll bat*" he avoided a late attack of Tourette's Syndrome and put the opposition in.

The pre-match speech was notable for the slight smirk detectable on Matt Donnelly's face as the Captain announced that Matt would be opening the bowling with his older brother and *Matt* would be bowling the first over, down the hill no doubt wind-assisted and with the power of God.

Umpire Alan Brooks prayed for a game without incident and it started 42 minutes after 1.30pm. Cumnor were a bit stronger this time and with the help of an incompetent fielder at short leg were able to make their way to 70-1 after an early breakthrough, bowled by Donnelly M of the Harmison leap

After Matt's 1-19 off 6 he was replaced by Jake who had the ill fortune to bowl to their equivalent of Malik who took an occasional liking to Lord Bledlow's fields while McTaggart who had got tired of not bowling replaced Henry at the other end and started taking wickets through sheer lack of pace.

Already 12 overs down due to the late start and threatened by rainclouds Cumnor were hitting out. RolfeDog's call to MrsDoug McIndoe (thus described to avoid confusion with any of Doug's other partners: in-joke, please ask) on the boundary advising where drinks could be found, was not gladly received by the opposition who shouted things like "You are eating into our batting time". As if this mixed metaphor was not bad enough, RolfeDog was now being held responsible for the Jam on the M40 *and* the gathering rain.

There is too much mention of McTaggart in this report but he ate into the opposition without the help of drinks or jam by bowling so slowly that it was a wonder the bails fell off when at last he bowled someone.

And with the score at 113-7 off 25.4 overs, including a terrific catch by Dramatic Doug, it rained.

And rained.

Despite their previous lack of interest in orange squash, Cumnor were keen on tea with the exception of certain carefully prepared sandwiches, they having had enough Jam for one day thank you.

Over approximately an hour and a half (that's 26 ciggies-worth) it rained a lot and then a little less hard and then more lightly, then lightly. The opposition produced their chain-smokers. Pitch inspections started to happen at intervals that exactly matched the time it takes for McTaggart to get through a fag. Ominously Cumnor got through theirs rather slower than we did. Luckily Shakey(No E) was not there with his Marlboros.

The wicket two away was wet at the ends. Cumnor did not want to play, even though there was approx. an hour until a final decision needed to be made. Discussions got lengthier and less and less logical until the moment where Umpire Alan pulled out the stumps and said "That's it then: the Captains can't agree". Panic ensued.

A large piece of carpet then appeared to protect one of the ends. When everyone saw RolfeDog and Baz trying to secure it with a combination of wire and unexploded devices they took fright and suggested the groundsman's nightmare: sawdust. The sawdust was not a good idea. On this went, until Baz tried the salesman's "Alternative Close", which roughly went: "Its matting or sawdust, one or the other but you can't keep choosing one and then say you want the other". The spirit of David Maunder in the form of a jolly good argument was with us after all.

Suddenly both of these alternatives seemed less good. Our chances of playing again were receding until Snikfph played his masterstroke.

How long had he been lurking with intent? Or with lack of intent? Listening to argument and counterargument but keeping counsel. Suddenly as all seemed lost he produced a tractorful of topsoil and without a word carefully raked this over the wet areas at the two ends of the adjacent wicket but one, and solved all the problems. He also extinguished that fag Malik had tried to put out on the square a few hours earlier and any hopes the oppo might have had of not playing.

Smoke, water, mud, fags, topsoil, McTaggart and Schnnifhp: what a combination! All that remained was the equation. How many ciggies would the League require to be completed in the time available?

Dom prepared to go out as Umpire Alan's assistant resplendently dressed in blue tracksuit top and hoodie and great minds were set to work. Slide rules and logarithm tables appeared. The outcome was that no one really knew. By any method of calculation however there could not be less than 21 overs to be bowled at us by 7.30 after Cumnor had faced their last 2.2 overs; complicated? Rumour had it there should be more but what became slowly apparent to RolfeDog and Baz when they later

batted was that Cumnor were not interested in playing after 7.30, whatever the over-rate.

We took their last three wickets in 10 balls including a runout for Sniff and one for Baz as 'keeper, who in effect ran out one batsman at both ends. Worst of all McTaggart ended up with 6-16 off 5 overs although pleasingly Henry with 1-41 had the satisfaction of bowling the only maiden of their innings and this he achieved without smoking at all as far as we know.

That we got into a winning position at all was due to batting ranging from solid to dramatic, as in the end the run rate turned out to be over 6.5 That's nearly two fags an over. After a solid start Baz extinguished his innings in the cause of getting Malik in. In short Cumnor were "Maliked". This is a new verb that has entered the Bledlow lexicon this year ("Lexicon"? ask me Birdy?). Cumnor (twice), Bicester, Great Tew, Hetairoi and others have all been Maliked in 2012.

He made 41 in the time it takes the average RidgeBear to prepare a roll-up. Those Ridgebears not inhaling were placed on the boundary edge ready to retrieve lost balls from Lord Bledlow's estate. One was never found.

Malik was eventually bowled and then RolfeDog's dismissal meant Doug joined Scott at the wicket. Another of Doug's partners. We suddenly realised that we were unlikely to receive all the overs we thought we were due as their captain made it clear they would walk off at 7.30 regardless. Suddenly with a boundary from Scott we needed 10 off the last over. Then four off two balls.

By this time McTaggart was scoring with one hand, reading the handbook with the other (his eyes are useless anyway) which meant that holding a cigarette was a real problem. He managed it somehow.

The prospect of a walk-off with us needing a run or two to win increased tension to diplomatically unmanageable levels. Was that smoke emanating from the pocket of the now-forgotten Dom at square-leg evoking the spirit of Pete Walker who often appeared to be on fire while umpiring? Even Jake was moved to ask "Is this the last over?" more than once. So many times in fact that Baz, now smoking for the first time ever, suggested he pay more attention.

And then it happened. Dashing Doug played the most important shot of the season. The shot that avoided a riot, that prevented letters of protest to the league, most importantly that saved a lot of smokers from inhaling inhumane quantities of ciggies. At 7.30 he hit the fifth ball of the 20th over to the long-on boundary for four and for victory. Nothing mattered any more.

We had scored at over 6.5 runs an over to win and as an indication of how this was done you may be interested in the batsmen's scoring rates:

Doug's 6 runs from 3 balls at a strike rate of 200 just shows what can be done with statistics. With 11 not out from 10 balls Scott's was 110. Malik and RolfeDog were both up there too. Malik with 41 from 24 had a rate of 170.8 and RolfeDog at 35 from 47 had 74.5. But we could not have done without Baz who with 26 in 35 balls came in with a measly but valuable strike rate of 74.3, some way behind RolfeDog admittedly but useful in a supporting role.

McTaggart came in at a net fag rate of one ciggie every 2.4 minutes. We suddenly realised Dom had been umpiring all innings and called him in. On a beach in a distant land somewhere, Shakey was getting through the Marlboro just in case support was needed; he was with us after all.

And so we kept in the race for second place promotion. Quietly unseen, the hero of the hour (or was it hour and a half?) Mr Schniff, nipped around the back of the shed for a quick drag. To top it all, after the game Malik was seen celebrating in the bar; that proved the game really *did* have everything.

Except Malcolm.