

Bledlow Ridge CC v Abingdon Vale II (Away)

14^h May 2016

Ridge forced to concede defeat in farce at Abingdon

Spirit of Cricket exposed as meaningless

Colin Cowdrey turns in his grave

BRCC 1s 211-9 53 ov
Abingdon II 212-8 42 ov

Result: BRCC won the battle but lost the war

In an era when the number of teams playing amateur cricket is diminishing it might seem surprising that league rules enable one team to force their visitors to forfeit a match at half time due to a minor and inconsequential technical error.

With some enthusiasm Abingdon (AVCC) and their captain in particular, insisted on applying the rule that any team whose bowler exceeds their maximum quota of overs (in this case 17) should forfeit the match.

AVCC showed no interest in any sort of compromise. Their captain seized the opportunity to claim victory with relish and later when we scored the winning runs, with contempt. So much for "The Spirit of Cricket", a wonderfully principled but ultimately meaningless concept.

All it needed at half-time was a statement to the effect that 'Abingdon are happy to overlook the minor of breach of rules and to continue the match to its

conclusion whatever that may be', but winning a match proved more important to AVCC than playing it.

I have been visiting Abingdon Vale CC's fine club and ground for 40 years but this was a very low point. There are people at AVCC I have played against who would never have allowed this to happen. There were experienced players in this match too who should have known better.

The League ruled twelve days later that Playing Rule 5.15 stands and we accept this decision with good grace as we have accepted a few decisions that have gone against us over the last twelve months. Some of these decisions have also involved AVCC. It is a shame that after a forfeited match elsewhere last year attracted disapproval, no action had been taken to change the rule.

The facts: BRCC reduced AVCC to 80-6 but Abingdon recovered to post 211-9 after 53 overs. A few overs into his second spell Ian Murdoch asked the (AVCC) umpire whether he was bowling the third or fourth over of his second spell. On being told it was his third he calculated he could bowl his 17 overs out.

It transpired that the 52nd over was in fact Ian's 18th not his 17th. The Abingdon scorer (for the first time ever we had no scorer) filled in the 18th over alongside Ian's name, and said nothing; well not for 10 minutes when on his arrival at tea he immediately informed the Abingdon umpire that Ian had exceeded his permitted quota.

What seemed a minor transgression brought about by incorrect information as described above, soon escalated. The League later regretted that an amicable solution was not sought. Well it was, but it takes two to tango. This was too good an opportunity for Abingdon to gain twenty-five easy points. They would claim a forfeit and if we played on it would not affect the result, they said.

The League's retrospective suggestion that Ian's last over - the penultimate over of the innings - could have been rebowled, while positive in principle, would have been unrealistic in practice. Supposing we had all trooped out again and Ian's replacement had taken the final wicket first ball, we would then have been chasing 204 not 212. Given Abingdon's reluctance to accept the erroneous over, I cannot imagine they would have accepted *that* possibility; and how are teams to guess what alternative solution would be acceptable to the League?

We held a team meeting, decided we would play anyway "in the spirit of cricket" - this is what we look forward to all week and why we were there - and then contest the forfeit.

After a shaky start we knocked off the runs, with five overs to spare. Five! We won easily. The captain had the poor grace to call out 'no points' as we hit the winning runs.

Our players had agreed we would behave in an exemplary manner and I am pleased to say we did. No adverse comments were made and we stayed for a few drinks.

By the time Ian arrived home AVCC had posted the result as a forfeit. An email dialogue followed with the League in which Ian, among other things, pointed out that as he had taken no wickets and conceded 5 runs in the over in question (the average run rate was 4 per over) it would have made no difference if his Granny had been bowling.

This is the only point on which he and I differ. Had his Granny been available we would have bowled Abingdon out much earlier in the afternoon and none of this would have happened.

So, after a delay the League has stuck to the rules. Some have said they had no choice.

Personally, I think they have missed a massive opportunity to rule in favour of The Spirit of Cricket and to give The Spirit of Cricket real teeth. A ruling in favour of cricket would have made it clear to all clubs that they need to think very carefully before taking any actions that go against the spirit of the game. In future a captain would have to consider the potential implications of relying on a rule that was badly conceived for matches in Division 5 without panel umpires

There would be a bigger picture too. For example it might improve behaviour if teams knew that football-type mass protests would not be tolerated, and at the other end of the scale it might encourage umpires to have a quiet word with fielders delivering non-stop drivel at batsmen all afternoon. I have no doubt there would be other situations requiring captains to think before acting.

As it is, the message which has been delivered is that The Spirit of Cricket is something we mention in passing but something which has no value. Why should Abingdon Vale care about The Spirit of Cricket? Their gentle censure, shared equally with ourselves, was well worth 25 points to them. Teams and their captains now know they can ignore The Spirit of Cricket and umpires know they cannot rely on it.

Abingdon Vale owe us one. After a poor ruling on a boundary on the penultimate ball cost us the match last year, we got home to find we had also been docked two points for over-rate despite after-match conversations in which this had not been raised.

As for this match. Dakes ate a large sandwich and started the match with an 11-ball over. Umpire Dickers Bird flapped his arms so much he all but took off. Dakes ended his spell with the worst bouncer in the history of cricket to which the batsman played an overarm smash for four. Dakes did bat well though for his 79 to win the game. A shame.

A shame also that the following week the AVCC 3s captain (who had presumably played against us) told Mike Gillett 'we would have played it differently'.

Well I was on the field for the last 15 overs substituting for their injured umpire. Mitchell, Hartley and Butcher all bowled lengthy spells. Believe me, Abingdon gave it everything.